

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

October 1, 2023

Old Testament Reading; Ezekiel 18: 1-4,25-32

Responsive Reading; Psalm 25: 1-9

Epistle Reading; Philippians 2: 1-13

Gospel Reading; Mathew 21: 23-32

Sermon Title:

Your Last Game (Page Two)

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary; You are only as good as your last game. What have you done for me lately?

Back in the day, there was a radio news man named Paul Harvey. When he was about to expound upon a thought he would say, "Page Two" and when he finished the piece he would say, "Now, the rest of the story".

Six years ago today, I preached a sermon entitled, "You Are Only as Good as Your Last Game". Today's message is, "Your Last Game (page 2)".

Back when I was in the Commissioned Lay Pastor training for the Presbyterian Church one of my assignments was to read one of the three Major Prophets and write a paper on it. I chose Ezekiel and have loved the prophet ever since.

If the disciples had read this prophet, they would never have asked Jesus regarding the man who had been blind since birth, “Master, who sinned that this man is blind? Was it him or his father?”

The Old Testament has some things that bother me and Ezekiel was also bothered by some of them. One of these was the idea that if a father sinned his children and grandchildren would be punished for it.

From today’s Old Testament reading, I quote, “The parents have eaten sour grapes and their children and children’s teeth are set on edge.” “As I live this proverb shall no more be used in Israel, it is only the person who sins that shall die.”

Zeek then goes on to say that you are only as good as your last game, i.e. if you have been bad your whole life and then change and become good you will be saved. He then goes on to say that if you have been good your whole life you cannot rest on your laurels, and think you have earned salvation so now you can be a scoundrel and not get into trouble for it. Blaa! Wrong answer.

The Epistle says that you have a job to, “this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”. A few weeks ago, we were instructed that it is our Christian responsibility to forgive. God gave Jesus the right to forgive and Jesus passed that on to us. Not only the right to forgive but the responsibility to forgive. If we withhold forgiveness, we block blessing from God that no one should be deprived of.

In today’s lesson we are given a duty to go along with the responsibility. We are to, in the NSRV, “Be of the same mind with Christ, having the same love, being of full accord and of one mind.” We are not to be selfish but regard others as better than we are. We are not to put our interests first but rather put the good of others above our own.

Our Psalm gives us a hint of what the mind of Christ is like. Psalms 25:6-9 say, “Remember, O Lord, Your tender mercies and your lovingkindness, for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; According to Your mercy remember me, For Your goodness’ sake, O Lord. Good and upright is the Lord; Therefore, He teaches sinners the way. The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way.”

This is “the mind of Christ”; tender mercies, lovingkindness, forget sins of youth and transgressions, goodness sake, be good

and upright, be humble and teach the way of the Lord. This is the stuff we must try to do to be of the mind of Christ.

This sounds like we are getting into good works, and I guess we are. But we not getting into good works to achieve salvation, we already have that, we are getting into good works because as the body of Christ THIS IS OUR JOB!

In a Charlie Brown cartoon Lucy and Linus see Snoopy shivering in the snow and go out to cheer him up. They pat Snoopy on the head and say, "Be warm and of good cheer Snoopy." Then they walk away feeling all good about themselves as Snoopy sits there shivering in the cold. Oops!

Jesus says, "Let your light so shine before men that they see your good works and glorify your father who is in Heaven." In another place Jesus tells us to do the good works that God has prepared in advance for us to do. In our gospel lesson Jesus says that the son that did the will of the father after saying he would not is to be commended over the one that said he would but then did not do as he had promised.

Are you seeing a trend here? God is saying that actions speak louder than words. This seem to be the main problem that Jesus has with the Pharisees. The Pharisees are all talk and no action. Jesus says, "They put heavy burdens on the people but will not lift a finger to help them."

This is where the “last game” analogy comes into play. God says, “What have you done for me lately?” this said, God knows our limitations. God does not ask us to grab a shovel and fly to Libya. God is pleased when we do what we can do. God is pleased when we pray, God is pleased when we listen to someone in pain or that needs to vent. God is pleased when we call a friend to just say “Hi”. Heck, God is even pleased when we pat Snoopy on the head and say, “Be of good cheer Snoopy.” Oh yes, God is pleased when you encourage the people that He has given to encourage you.

First God says, “What have you done for me lately?” Then God says, “Well done my good and faithful servant.”

And to you, my good and noble friends I say, Congratulations you have honored your responsibility of forgiveness and have done your job by doing the good deeds that He has prepared in advance for you.

Hallelujah and Amen!

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