

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

October 13, 2024

Old Testament Reading; Amos 5: 6-7, 12-16

Responsive Reading: Psalm 90: 12-17

Epistle Reading; Hebrews 4: 12-16

Gospel Reading: Mark 10: 17-31

Sermon: A High Priest with Dirt Under His Fingernails

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: Because He lived as one of us, we can live as one with Him.

Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, Jesus loved him, and said to him, “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.” But the young man was sad at this word.

“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and

spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

This man, probably young, came to Jesus and was honestly seeking what he could do to better himself in the eyes of the Lord. He truly wanted to do whatever he could do to become a better man within his limitations. Unfortunately, the word which cut like a two-edged sword revealed a staggering limitation. This rich young man was a slave to his status, and that status depended upon his wealth. All those “good” commandments which he had kept since his youth were done within the comfort zone of his wealth.

If you don't have anything, you have nothing to lose by giving “all that you have”, but if you are rich that is a totally different kettle of fish. The whole religious culture of the time was that if God blessed you, He blessed you with wealth, property and status. How could you be expected to give up blessings to obtain a blessing?

How are we to address this dilemma?

Our Psalm lesson gets back to the basics. Let's get real. “Teach us to number our days” (we ain't going to get out of this life alive) so we should “return to the Lord” now. Call on God to show us the way, that is, “Let Your work appear to Your servants, and Your glory to their children. And let the beauty of

the Lord our God be upon us and establish the work of our hands for us; Yes, establish the work of our hands.”

Why should we “return to the Lord” now?

Well Amos says that the reason for alarm is the state of the world we (each and every generation) live in demands some immediate attention. Lack of respect for others permeates all economic and social classes. It too often seems that so many of the strategies of every social class is to thrive, one has to step on someone who is less well off than they are. Amos thinks that God is not going to put up with it too much longer. “Seek the Lord and live, Lest He break out like fire in the house of Joseph. And devour it.” Amos says that the norm is to “hate the one who rebukes in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks uprightly...tread down the poor”, they make their fortunes by “Diverting the poor from justice at the gate and the prudent keep silent at that time, for it is an evil time.”

Amos then goes on to say that this is the time to do something about it as much as you can. He says, “Seek good and not evil, that you may live; So, the Lord God of hosts will be with you...It may be that the Lord God of hosts Will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.” It is time to be the people that God created us to be. It is time to follow the example of a hero that is not afraid to get His hands dirty.

Paul, or Philo, or whoever wrote Hebrews comes up with the perfect role model. “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

In other words we have a High Priest with dirt under His fingernails. Jesus was never afraid to get His hands dirty. Jesus touched lepers, mixed mud and rubbed it in the eyes of a blind man thereby giving him his sight. Jesus washed the feet of His disciples and loved little kids. Yes, He loved those dirty little tikes that wanted to sit on His lap. Can you just picture a little four-year-old going with his mother to see Jesus and playing in a mud puddle on the way, as all four year olds will do. Then seeing Jesus breaks into a full run toward this beautiful man as the mother is screaming, “Dooon’t” and as the kid leaps into the lap of Jesus and the mother is frantically apologizing, Jesus smiles and says, “Hey, mother, it is OK, my Dad made that dirt, it is all good with me.” Then Jesus hugs the child and cradles him in His arms as He goes on with His message to His audience. Anyone who grew up as a carpenter is used to getting dirty and getting dirt under His fingernails.

Jesus tells us to take His yoke upon us because He wants to work with us as two oxen work with each other. He knows

where we have been so He can identify with us and love us to boot. Jesus loves the rich young man and it breaks His heart that we, that young man and even His disciples don't get it.

When Peter says to Jesus that they had given up everything to follow Him, Jesus quickly assures Peter that anyone who gives up houses and brothers and mothers etc. in this world will receive IN THIS LIFETIME A HUNDRED-FOLD what they gave up. They will inherit all of the family of the believers; they will be welcomed into many homes and there to be fed and loved and be provided for. If we but take all these benefits and put them in our slow cooker and let them simmer I think that we will be surprised at just how rich we really are.

It is unbelievable that with Jesus we have all the ROYAL of a High Priest, and at the same time, all the REAL of a common man.

Jesus tells the rich young man to take up his cross and follow, but I believe that to this "more mature congregation" Jesus may well be asking us to, "Take up your cane and follow Me."

We "cane" do it. I know we cane!

Hallelujah and Amen!