

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

October 15, 2023

Old Testament Reading; Isaiah: 1-9

Responsive Reading; Psalm 23

Epistle Reading; Philippians 4: 1-9

Gospel Reading; Mathew 22: 1-14

Sermon Title;

Again, I Will Say, Rejoice

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary; We are not worthy of the gift, so if we are not grateful for the gift it will be given to someone else.

Philippians chapter four, verse four says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice!"

Hold it. Wait a second. Recent floods in Libya killed thousands of people, and a catastrophic earthquake in Turkey and Syria killed thousands more. Russia attacked Ukraine two years ago and that war still rages on. The Hamas sneak attack on Israel killed over a thousand people and the counter attacks are

doubling or tripling that number in the Gaza Strip. Fentanyl deaths and suicides are up in the US and the crime rate is through the roof and scripture tells us to Rejoice in the Lord always.

Really? Rejoice always?

Yup. Right in the middle of the Christian fundamentalists screaming End Times, our scripture says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say, rejoice."

Before I tell you where I am going, let me tell where I am not going. I am not going the end times route. I personally reject this line of thinking because of Matthew 24: 6 & 7. "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, BUT THE END IS NOT YET. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows." BUT THE END IS NOT YET!

Drop it!

Let it go!

Do not be troubled. Do not fear because of the human prophets of doom but be full of hope in the gifts and grace of God and of our savior, Jesus Christ.

If that is where I am not going, where exactly am I going? I am going with today's scripture lessons.

Isaiah tells us that God has got this and he rejoices with praise as he recognizes that God will level the playing field. God will defund the evil and the song of the terrible ones will be diminished. God will give us our daily bread, so to speak, and destroy on the mountain the veil of dread that is spread over all the nations. "Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

Our Psalm for today is so familiar that we do not really pay attention to exactly how reassuring it is. Look at it line by line.

The Lord is my shepherd; equals, we are protected and cared for.

Lie down in green pastures; He supplies food.

Beside still waters; He refreshes us.

He leads in paths of righteousness for His namesake; He reduces our anxiety because He loves us.

Valley of the shadow of death fearing no evil; He eliminates the reason to fear death.

Your rod and your staff; He protects us and defends us.

Prepares a table in the presence of our enemies; our blessings

are spread out before us in the security of Him at the table with us.

Anoint my head with oil; He shows us honor like we are kings or priests even though we have done nothing to deserve it.

Goodness and mercy; He ain't gonna leave us as long as we live and will even bring us to Him when our physical bodies die.

If that ain't reason to rejoice both Jesus and I are wasting our time.

Our gospel lesson is the parable of the son of a king is being married and those "chosen" people are invited but they show total disrespect for their king by not only ignoring his invitation but actually abusing his messengers. In a very "unJesus"-like act. The king kills them and instead offers the invites to the commoners. All the guests are given "wedding garments" but one does not show enough respect to put it on drawing the ire of the king. As to "Many are called but few are chosen", all are called to the feast but many will not trust God to give them a robe that fits their commoner bodies.

Basically, this parable is saying that we are not worthy of the gift, so if we are not grateful for it, it will be given to someone else that is willing to show his gratitude.

The Epistle lesson is the perfect ending for this message. Hear a shortened version of it.

Therefore, my beloved and longed—for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved...Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God: and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy- meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, (Paul) these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

Hallelujah and Amen!