

RIGHT WORSHIP

By Rev. Jim A. Gardner

Old Testament Reading Jeremiah 14: 7-10,19-22

Responsive Reading Psalm 84: 1-7

Epistle Reading 2nd Timothy 4: 6=8, 16-18

Gospel Reading Luke18: 9-14

Summery; Trick Question. Do you come to God as a miserable, worthless sinner or as an example of what God intended his best to be?

The UCC puts out a calendar every year for pastors with the suggested Bible readings and their idea of a topic for those readings that week.

Their topic for this week is “Right Worship” so this time I chose to use it. Let us look at the scriptures and see how they might steer us toward right worship.

In Jeremiah the writer acknowledges that the people have been out of tune with God and that they deserve his wrath.

Although our iniquities testify against us, act, O Lord, for your name's sake; our apostasies indeed are many, and we have

sinned against you. By the way Google says apostasy is a renunciation of a religion or religious beliefs.

Our Psalm praises God and his kingdom. It tells how blessed the birds are that they get to build their nests in the temple.

Even the sparrow finds a home and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Happy are those who live in your house ever singing your praise. Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose hearts are highways to Zion.

In the Epistle, Paul acknowledges that even when things are bad God is to be praised and his glory will show through even in our tragedy.

As for me the hour has come for me to be sacrificed; the time is here for me to leave this life. I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance and I have kept the faith. But the Lord stayed with me and gave me strength, so I was able to proclaim the full message for all the Gentiles to hear. And the Lord will rescue me from all evil and take me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever, Amen.

Ohhh kaydy then. Happy happy joy joy. This is where I die. Sounds like a reason for a party to me. How bout you?

Wow, I don't know if I will ever be in Paul's league.

Finally our Gospel lesson is a familiar one. It is about the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the temple. The Pharisee can't say enough good about himself and the tax collector can't say enough bad.

The Pharisee, standing by himself was praying thus. "God, I thank you that I am not like other people, thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give a tenth of all my income. But the tax collector standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying 'God be merciful to me, a sinner!'"

Remember the context of the parable. Jesus was speaking to people that were patting themselves on the back for being righteous. If he had been speaking to an audience of a humbler nature I doubt he would have fully endorsed either one.

The tax collector needs to remember that he was created in the image of God and God does not make mistakes and God does not make junk.

The Pharisee needs to remember that God is God and the Pharisee is not. He also needs to consider that it is not nice to call God's creation junk.

We all have a problem with this from time to time. I would like to ask you honestly, and I do not want an answer or a show of hands on this, just answer to yourselves. How many of you can honestly say that you are not a better human being than either

of the two primary candidates for President of the United States?

Personally I am taking the 5th, or is that drinking a 5th.

On the other side of the coin, have you ever messed up so bad in your life that you thought that even God could not love you? I guess that my hand would have to go up on that one.

Today we are talking about Right Worship. Worship and Prayer are not the same thing. Oh, they have similarities but they are not the same. All prayer should have some worship in it and worship should have some prayer in it but worship is praising God, glorifying God and joyfully spreading the good news of God. Prayer is talking to God and showing respect for God as we petition for others and ourselves. Take all things to God in prayer, there is nothing too trivial for God to consider important if it is important to you.

Right Worship requires praising and glorifying God, acknowledging our faults to God, sharing the good news of God, and approaching God in a proper combination of humility and confidence. We are not worthy in comparison to God but we are created in the image of God and we are special to God.

That puts us in the middle of a strange and wonderful relationship with God our creator, our savior and our friend.

I am intrigued with how God's relationship with man plays out in the book of Job.

As a kid the book of Job made me mad. I thought it was totally unfair of God to torture Job in a game with the devil. I said that if God ever "Jobbed" me I would drop God like a hot potato. That was before I realized that when things go bad is when we need God the most.

Now I look at Job a whole lot differently. Early in the book God says to the devil, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on Earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil."

I would give my life to have God say that about me. Unfortunately I am afraid I fall way short of those accolades.

Anywho, you know the story. All kinds of bad things happen to Job and he is wearing sackcloth as he sits in ashes, scraping his open sores with a piece of bark.

Two of his friends come to be with him in his distress. Unlike most people think, these two are very devoted and well-meaning men of faith. They take time out of their lives to come and sit in the ashes with Job and show some tough love to save his soul and put him on the road back to recovery. I am not sure that Job would not have done the same for them if the roles had been reversed.

It was the absolute teaching of the land that God rewards good and punishes bad. If Job was in distress it must have been something that he had done to sin against God to bring forth this wrath. Also denying that one had sinned and brought it upon themselves would be like pouring gasoline on a flame. Job knew that he was innocent but his friends kept beating him up in their effort to save him.

Well this goes on and on and all the time Job is entreating God to give him a hearing. Job wanted to plead his case and have God decide it.

Finally God gives in to Job and confronts Job. This is when the preverbal stuff hits the fan. God lets Job know in no uncertain terms that it takes a lot of gall to call out God. God lays the tongue lashing on Job about, "Where were you when I created the earth and told the sea how far it could come and no farther?" "Can you play with the Leviathan and lead it around by the jaw?" By the way scholars have a lot of ideas of what a leviathan is but the description sounds to me like a sea dragon, blowing fire from its mouth and exhaling smoke through its nostrils.

Then God tells Job something that I was not expecting. God tells Job that God is upset with Job but is fuming mad at Job's friends. Job did not accuse God of doing something he had not done, i.e. punish Job, and Job had not put God in a box and insisted that God was something that he wasn't. God said, "OK, they hurt you so it is up to you. If you pray for your friends I will

forgive them but if not I've had it with them and they are going to Hell."

And when Job prayed for his two friends God restored the fortunes of Job two fold.

And this is the essence of Right worship.

Praise God. Glorify God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. If you are beating people up with the Bible you are using it the wrong way. If you see someone who needs God show them Gods love in your actions. Invite everyone you see to come to our church and when they come pass the peace before, during and after church.

It is like Don said last week to worship God with right worship you have to worship inside out. You need Christ in your heart to worship the Father.

Let's make this church a fountain of living water by engaging in RIGHT WORSHIP.

Hallelujah and amen