

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

October 30, 2022

Old Testament Reading; Isaiah 1: 10-18

Responsive Reading; Psalm 32: 1-7

Epistle Reading; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4,11-12

Gospel Reading; Luke 19: 1-10

Sermon for October 30, 2022

Sermon Title:

Surround Me with Songs of Deliverance

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary; Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are like red crimson, they shall be as wool.

Just recently there was a local criminal case where a man confessed to raping and murdering a young lady sixteen years ago. The judge did not, and will not, say to that man, "Sir, this is an atrocious crime for which there is no punishment severe enough for you to adequately pay for what you did. The crime was that bad but I will not send you to prison or even put you on probation. No, because you confessed, what I will do is give

you a mansion on a hill and ten thousand dollars a week for life. Now go with the blessing of the court!”

No! No! No! This did not happen and we would be horrified if it did. No, it did not happen in the case in Rochester but that is for all practical purposes that is what happened in what we just read in our scripture lessons. Pertaining to the guilt of mankind and the sentence, or lack thereof, this is what our Judge, Creator, Law Giver and Father handed down to us.

Let us revisit our reading from Isaiah. God is comparing mankind to, “The rulers of Sodom and the people of Gomorrah.”

Sodom and Gomorrah are used as the extreme perversion of what mankind is at its worst. This is what Isaiah is accusing the people of his time with. Then he says man has compounded the disgrace by acting holy. All the sacrifices and ceremonies and all those other things that God had gratefully received from His followers now became a ludicrous abomination when given by a people that lived a life of selfish disregard of all people and for all the directives of God.

God threatens to write them off saying, “Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.”

Then, then God does that God thing that He so often does. God gives man a way out of prison. Not by doing things to bribe

God, but by changing themselves to be more like the image of God that they were created to be. God says, “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow. COME NOW, and let us reason together.”

In our Psalm reading David contemplates a similar scenario when he says, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.”

David states that by turning to God you will not just hide in safety but you will be in a glorious good place. He says that God will surround him with songs of deliverance.

My contention is that this was not only true for David and Isaiah but it is true here and now for each and every one of us.

We do not have to do glorious acts of grandeur to make a difference. In our Epistle, Paul is telling the church of Thessalonica that because of their faith and love for each other and their ability to stick it out through tough times that they are an example for all the new churches forming around the Roman Empire. Because they are doing such a good job of keeping the faith Paul will pray for God to help them keep up the good work so that the name of Jesus Christ may be glorified

in them. Glorifying the name of Jesus Christ may not seem like a big deal, but to them and some of us that is the main focus of our lives.

This main focus of our lives does not have to be something we have been seeking since birth. It is not who we were that Jesus is concerned with, it is who we are willing to become.

In our Gospel, Zacchaeus was the most highly hated man in the community. He was not only a tax collector, a Jew working for the Romans, he was the “chief” tax collector. He was the bad guy boss, and, he was rich!

By the sound of it, Zacchaeus was not looking for a savior. He was just curious to see who this “Jesus guy” was. He certainly did not think Jesus would speak to him, I mean, the only way a Jew would speak to him was in curse words. Not only was he the hated tax collector, he had to put up with all the short guy jokes. “OK, the heck with you guys. I’ll just climb a tree and no one will see me and I can see this guy who is getting all the press. Take that suckers! Oops, what is going on here? He what? He wants me to come down and He wants me to have Him come to my house for dinner. I mean wow! OK, let’s do it.”

The next thing that Zacchaeus says to Jesus, a lot of people think is a “tongue in cheek” statement, but I don’t think so. God is not going to be conned by some charlatan. Samuel in the Old Testament said that people look at the flesh but God i.e. Jesus

sees the heart. To review, Zac says that he will give half of all he has to the poor and if he cheated anyone (do you think?) he will repay them four times over. Apparently, this was totally voluntary on the part of Zacchaeus.

The answer that Zacchaeus got was the beautiful song of deliverance. Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Zacchaeus was lost and he knew it. Zacchaeus had made his bed and he knew he was doomed to lie in it. He was doomed until some Jesus guy called him down from a tree made it possible for this short little, hated tax collector to be completely surrounded by the sweet song of deliverance.

We have all been up that tree without hope or a future. We have all climbed up a tree to hide from the things and the people who could hurt us. Thankfully, most of us have heard that still small voice calling us down to the ground. We all have been or will be called into the arms of our savior where we all can be surrounded by His loving arms and His beautiful song of deliverance.

Being in the arms of Jesus is not only a safe place to be but is the only place to be immersed in His song of deliverance and cradled in His arms of love. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are like red crimson,

they shall be as wool. As the world screams you will be surrounded by the beautiful song of deliverance. Hallelujah and Amen