Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

December 22, 2019

Old Testament Reading; Isaiah 7:10-16

Responsive Reading; Psalm 80: 1-7, 17-19

Epistle Reading; Romans 1: 1-7

Gospel Reading; Matthew 1: 18-25

Sermon Title: **CALLED TO BE SAINTS**

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: Christianity is not a spectator sport. We are called. Let us get our heads, hearts, bodies, and souls into the game.

Some people like to rescue animals but Wanda and I had a habit of rescuing teenagers. We found young people who needed a new direction or circumstance and we took them into our home as foster children. One of these was a young lady who was very headstrong and fluent in expressing her feelings. Some might say stubborn and defiant. At one point she told us emphatically that she was not placed on this earth to be anyone’s servant. Within the next year she became pregnant and had a baby and was suddenly a servant, 24/7, 365, to a tiny infant. She is now married and a wonderful mother of three children, two of which are special needs children with one being autistic and another having childhood diabetes.

Unlike our foster daughter, Paul not only did not claim to *not* be a servant, but he embraced *being* a servant.

Paul said that he was a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, and separated to the gospel of God. Paul was saying that he was purchased by the blood of Jesus, called to a specific duty, and separated to the gospel of God rather than the rule of the flesh.

Being separated to the gospel it was Paul’s duty to educate the world of their standing in relationship to God. Paul pointed to the scriptures to validate his claims. These things God had promised before hand in the Holy Scriptures. God had connected Jesus to humanity through the line of David and proved him to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead. This did not only refer to the resurrection of Jesus but to those that were raised by Jesus and to all of us who are raised through Jesus.

When we come upon a nativity scene it is not the same as going to a wax museum and seeing a scene from Alice In Wonderland. It is not an attractive fairy tail but is the real thing. The images represent our place in God’s family. We are not like the animals that are a totally different species. We are not like the shepherds who came to see what all the fuss was about but we are actually more like Mary and Joseph. We are family with this baby. We are totally invested. We will treasure his love and love him back. We will marvel at his teachings and healing and love for all of creation. When He dies on the cross, we will die with him, just as we do when we lose a loved one, and most importantly we will rise with him when we witness the empty grave.

When the new world was colonized Georgia used a system of indentured servants. These were people who could not afford to go to the new world so they offered themselves as servants to a wealthy entrepreneur. They agreed to be that man’s servant doing whatever work he needed done until he could set them up with a home and means to make a living. The time of their servitude was dependent on how long it would take for them to earn their freedom. The bondservant was a similar arrangement when a person in financial need attached himself to a master until his debts were eradicated.

When the cost was the life of Jesus you can figure that that would be a lifelong commitment.

Paul said he was a bondservant of Jesus Christ. Jesus came into this world to save the world and accomplishing that would have to be aided by his bondservants, like Paul.

As a bondservant of Jesus, Paul was assigned the job of informing the whole world that we are all bondservants of Christ. Paul was to inform us so that we in turn could inform others that: Through God we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for God’s name, among whom we also are the called of Jesus Christ; To all of us who are in the known world, beloved of God, we are called to be saints.

This gets really heavy. Disciples of Christ are students of Christ but apostles of Christ are held to a higher standard because they were taught in the direct presence of Jesus Christ.

Paul says, “Not so fast. If God gave his son for you and Christ gave his life for you then you do not get immunity. You are bought and paid for so you are totally vested in servitude to Jesus Christ. You are in it for the long haul. No time off, no early retirement, you are in it for life [which, by the way beats the heck out of, being OUT of it for death].”

There is a line in the song “Mary Did You Know” that says, “Mary did you know that the baby you delivered will soon deliver you?”

That baby in the manger has delivered eternal life to you. Wouldn’t it be anti-climactic not to be part of that baby’s life?

You are called to be a saint, a brother or sister of Jesus. You are called to be a participant in that life. You are called to get your head, heart, body and soul into the game. Hallelujah and amen!