

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

December 4, 2016

Old Testament Reading; Isaiah 11: 1-10

Responsive Reading; Psalm 72: 1-7, 18-19

Epistle Reading; Romans 15: 4-13

Gospel Reading; Matthew 3: 1-12

Sermon Title: DO YOU HEAR A VOICE?

Summary: What does that voice say?

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness."

I need to stop here and explain how I go about writing a sermon. About 1 to 2 weeks before it is due I read the lectionary scriptures and try to come up with a catchy title that fits one or all of the lessons. I then jot down a summary and set it aside for a while and think about what I can say to this theme.

This time the title and summary just did not work for me at all. Two days before the sermon was due, Friday, I was visiting

Wanda and I said to her that I had absolutely no idea of what my sermon would be.

She asked if I had fed the birds, I have a deal with God, I feed his birds and he writes my sermon.

I said that I had done that part of the sermon and she asked where my bible was. I said in the car and she told me to go get it. When I came back with it she told me to read the scriptures. I did. Then she told me to read them again last one first. I started to and came up with the title. She then asked for a summary and I gave it to her. She then said, "Perfect! Now put the Bible away and hold my hand like you are supposed to."

I heard a voice and the voice of God came out through my wife's lips. That is going to play out somewhere in this message but I am not sure where.

Our Psalm reading asks God to speak through action and bring about a king and a son of a king that will judge with righteousness. "Give the king your justice, O God and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice."

The Old Testament lesson speaks to a society that puts a lot of stock in history and says that that King will come from a "good" place in their past so they have reason to trust it. "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,"



If you hear a voice you are not going to give it a chance if you do not trust the source and/or the basis of that message.

Our Romans reading tells us not to disregard the voices of ancient wise individuals like we find in the Bible. Of course I put God and Jesus at the top of the list but we get some good things from the prophets and disciples also.

“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.”

Notice that this voice does not tell us that the ancient instructions are there to beat us up or to give us a club with which to beat others, it gives us a source of hope.

This voice also encourages us to welcome and love one another where ever the other is coming from.

“Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you. As it is written, ‘Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name’”.

At that time Gentiles were the scum of the earth to the Jews. If God could expect the Jews to accept the Gentiles God can expect us to accept anyone on the face of this planet.

Now we come to the Gospel, the source of the title for this message. John was a voice crying in the wilderness.

Not a voice crying on the street corner, but a voice crying in the wilderness. We do not need a voice when we have street signs to show us where we are. We need a voice when we are lost and afraid.

The two people I most identify with in the Bible are Peter and John the Baptist. Like Peter I often engage mouth before starting brain and like John the Baptist I am not the light but I am here to testify to the light and I want to clear a path for Jesus.

I also like the fact that John the Baptist is crude. He wore clothing made of camel hair and a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. Like me he is no pretty boy and his language can be a little on the direct side. "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor; for I tell you God is able to raise descendants of Abraham from these stones.'"

Jesus was a voice. John the Baptist was a voice. Paul was a voice. The Psalmist was a voice. Wanda was a voice. Sometimes your friends are voices, or your grandchildren are a voice, and sometimes, not very often but sometimes even your pastors can be a voice.



Listen carefully. What is that voice saying? Is it saying, "Bear fruit worthy of repentance, Welcome others as Christ has welcomed you, wait for the King, the son of the King, the savior? Or is it saying something even more basic like, "Put down that Bible and hold my hand."

Listen for the voice. Hear the voice. Obey the voice and soon the voice will be saying, "Join me at my communion table."

Hallelujah and Amen.