

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

February 1, 2026

Old Testament Reading: Micah 6: 1-8

Responsive Reading: Psalm 15

Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 1: 18-31

Gospel Reading Matthew 5: 1-12

### **Sermon: I AM Has a Dream**

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: What does the Lord require? Do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your Lord!

If you look closely at the back of your bulletin, you will see a picture that says, "Dream God's Dream."

Because I did not speak to the fact two weeks ago that it was the day before Martin Luther King's holiday, I will be referencing it today. But first let me set it up with this Scripture; Exodus 3: 13-14. Then Moses said to God, "Indeed when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His

name?’ what shall I say to them?” And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

Thus says the dream of MLK from a different source:

I AM has a dream that one day little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I AM has a dream today... This will be the day when all of My children will be able to sing with new meaning. “My country, ‘tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim’s pride, from every mountain side, let freedom ring.” And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true. So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania. Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado. Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California. Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee. Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi, from every mountain side. Let freedom ring... When they allow freedom to ring — when they let it ring from every city and every hamlet, from every state and every city, they will be able to speed up that day when all of My children, black men and white men, Jews

and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, “Free at last, Free at last, Great God a-mighty, We are free at last.” Thus, sayeth the Lord!

I tend to deviate a little from the great theologians and those who can’t wait for the end times to come and the glory and the hellfire judgment that rights all wrongs.

I believe that God created humankind with freewill for a reason. I believe that along with a plan, God had a dream. I believe that God’s dream was that the masses would voluntarily choose His “Upside down order” over the worldly interpretation of order.

I think an early indication of God’s dream is hinted at in our reading from Psalm 15. The Psalmist asks, Lord who may abide in Your tabernacle? He who walks uprightly, works righteousness, speaks truth in his heart, does not backbite or do evil to his neighbor, etc.

In our reading from Micah, the prophet sarcastically approaches the legalistic concept of righteousness saying, “With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression?” People seem to be impressed with wealth and power, so shouldn’t God? Ummm. I don’t think so.

In 1 Corinthians 1: 18-31, Paul recognizes the propensity of economists and theologians to think this way but points out the existential fallibility of this concept.

Christ turned everything upside down. Christ was crucified. Crucified! Crucifixion was reserved for the most scornful, disgusting, despicable wretches of society. People who were crucified did not even deserve to be numbered with human beings. Christ was crucified, and according to John 10:17+18, Jesus was not only crucified, Christ chose it. I quote, "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself, I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

Paul says in our reading, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God... For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." And who does Paul say don't believe? "For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom... but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." Paul then concludes this passage with, "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, Who became for us wisdom from God-and righteousness

and sanctification and redemption-that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.”

If it is true that Jesus presented an upside-down formula for real success, where do we find it?

I believe that the best description of this is found in our Gospel lesson. The first twelve verses of chapter 5 in Matthew are what has come to be known as “The Beatitudes,” an absolute abomination to rulers and entrepreneurs. I mean, verse 3 starts with the word “Blessed.” I mean blessed means privileged or endowed, that is to say, better off than those around you, so how can the next eight verses make any sense at all? How can you be better off than your neighbor if you are poor in spirit, if you mourn, or hunger and thirst for righteousness? I mean, how is that going to sell more stocks for you? The same goes for being merciful, pure in heart, or as a peacemaker? Yeah, right! That is not going to help you rip off your neighboring country’s natural resources.

OK, so I am being a little extreme, but you get my gist. It all seems to go against what the world tells us we have to be and do in a “dog eat dog” world. Hey! Maybe that is the point. We were created in the image of God, not in the image of a K-9. Maybe God created us to be Holy as He is Holy, that is, set apart to do the good works that He has put before us. Maybe

Micah 6:8 has it right, “What does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”

The end of the world has not come yet, and maybe 2 Peter 3:9 is why. “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”

Maybe I AM has a dream to go along with His plan. Maybe His upside-down plan will really work. We all know that if we lean into the wind, it won't knock us off our feet. Maybe if we lean into the Beatitudes they won't knock us off our feet either.

Take it slow. Try it at home. Try it at work. Try it at the grocery store. And when you do, may the Beatitudes become our Attitudes.

Hallelujah and Amen!