

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

March 12, 2023

Old Testament Reading; Exodus 17: 1-7

Responsive Reading; Psalm 95

Epistle Reading; Romans 5: 1-11

Gospel Reading; John 4: 5-42

Sermon Title: **The Tables Have Turned**

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary; The people said to Moses, "Give us water that we may drink." Jesus said to the woman, "Give me a drink." God only asks what we all can give, and offers what only He can give.

The people contended with Moses, and said, "Give us water that we may drink." So, Moses said, "Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the Lord?"

Jesus said to the woman, "Give Me a drink." And later in the conversation she said, "Are you greater than our father Jacob,

who gave us the well. And drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?”

In the Old Testament reading the people talk to a man and blame him for what only God can do.

In the Gospel, the woman talks to God and ascribes to Him the limitations of a mere man.

This misappropriation is still going on today. We often give our human heroes more credit than they deserve and we fail to trust God’s ability to do the “impossible”. One of the sources of this confusion seems to our misconception of some metaphors. We confuse the idea of life-giving water with living water.

When it comes to preserving life, water is second only to oxygen for survival. We can only live minutes without air. We can only last a week or two without food but we can only make it about three days without water.

Next, are we talking about physical life or spiritual life? The water for physical life we can get out of a vending machine but it only works until the body quits for other reasons. The living water that Jesus offers will last through all eternity. The understanding for the need of life-giving water makes it easier for us to appreciate the absolute necessity of living water for our eternal survival.

Jesus said to the woman, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” The contrast is this, all the earth can provide is not enough to fill the human heart, but the blessings that Christ will provide will not only fill the heart for all eternity but they will fill it to overflowing. These blessings are too great for any heart to contain.

This messes up the old saying, “Waste not, want not.” This concept is saying, “If you ain’t wasting it, you ain’t feeling it!” God wants you to overflow with His blessings.

Our Epistle reading adds some reality to this that is sometimes hard to accept.

Romans 5 says, “having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

This is where it gets tricky.

“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by

the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.”

Can you imagine a life without hope? When I was just a child a Sunday school teacher asked me what I thought Jesus was. I answered that I believed that Jesus was hope, and that hope was the hope of the world. I do not think that I have changed my perception of what Jesus means to my life.

When Paul says that we also glory in tribulations, he not saying that we glory at the time of tribulations, but rather in knowing their eventual results of those tribulations. It is a joy of Christian faith that joy can coexist with affliction. The opposite of joy is sin, not suffering. The by-products of tribulations are perseverance, then character, then hope, and hope in the Lord does not disappoint!

Hope is a blessing only God can give us, but what God asks of us we can all give freely without hardly trying. The hope that God gives us is so great and exhilarating that it can not be comprehended while we are bound by our earthly bodies, but we will see it plainly in that new home we are headed for. Our blessings and our hope are so boundless that we cannot contain it....so let's not try.

Let your light so shine before mankind that they will see your good works [and love] and glorify your Father who is in Heaven!  
Hallelujah and Amen!