

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

March 17, 2024

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 31: 31-34

Responsive Reading: Psalm 119: 9-16

Epistle Reading: Hebrews 5: 5-10

Gospel Reading: John 12: 20-33

### **Sermon: I Am Lifted Up for Your Sake**

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: He will forgive our iniquity, and our sin He will remember no more.

The Bible is not an accident or a record of God's trial and error approach to creating a world that would stand up to His standards. No, the Bible is a record of how God carefully planned and groomed His creation to demonstrate why Jesus would be the only answer.

Some people mistakenly believe that God tried with Adam and Eve and when they screwed up, He kicked them out of the garden and started over only to scrap the world with a flood when mankind got way out of line. Later He tries the whole Egypt and Moses thing and the Ten Commandments. Then

comes Judges with success and reward followed by discarding God and punishment again and again, then David and Solomon and more rejections of the precepts of God until finally He sends His Son as a last resort.

Wrong. Jesus was the plan all along. God showed the world how nothing else would work, and then, and only then He showed them the only way to true richness of life was a Christocentric world.

John 1: 1-14 tells us that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God...All things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that was made.” Jesus did not start in a manger, Jesus the Son, under the direction of the Father, created the universe and all that was in it.

In today’s gospel Jesus explains God’s rationale to the scholarly Greeks. The Greeks revered philosophers and they did everything they could to protect and encourage the continued contributions of the thinkers that they respected. It is very possible that their intent was to sweep Jesus away to Greece and make Him part of their culture. The answer that Jesus gives is a beautifully crafted explanation of how that was directly opposite of wisdom of the plan of God. Jesus explained that a true proponent of a better world did not save himself at the

cost of His countrymen but sacrificed His life for the good of all of the God-created people of the world.

A seed had to be put into the ground to die for there to be a field of grain. Jesus also demonstrated that the physical body is a temporary thing, but the soul lasts forever. True wealth is to be in union with God for all eternity.

Jesus is honest. Jesus is not looking forward to a gruesome death, but Jesus knows that the alternative is a gruesome death for all mankind. Jesus explains that the voice of God was not for His benefit, but rather for the benefit of all who would hear it, or of it, to show the connection between Jesus and God. Later He says that He must be “lifted up” to get the attention of the world. A public execution during the time of the Passover would provide more exposure than any other death at any other time. This too was for the benefit of those who would become His devout believers.

The Jews were very history conscious. The genius of Gods word is how He ties history into the present at the time of the crucifixion.

The Jews look for a sign and the Greeks seek wisdom. Both are satisfied with the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

In our Old Testament lesson Jeremiah predicts a new covenant, not a new law. In the new covenant man will not have to earn

salvation, but rather it will be a gift of grace as man would never be able to live up to the required perfection of the law. This grace would not only assure eternal life but would offer an improved life of worth, while still alive.

Psalm 119: 9-16 tells us that purity is a choice, and that holiness is the merging of human desire and divine empowerment. God is good and if we try to be like Him, we will have “deep delights” that are more satisfying than wealth. Later, following Jesus would be a choice that would be wiser and more fulfilling than the concepts of the Greeks. God’s commandments are no longer a burden, but rather are just common sense means for joy.

Our Epistle message from Hebrews points out that Jesus is the ideal picture of a Messiah. When Abraham started the quest for God to be the father of many nations he was blessed by Melchizedek. Melchizedek was a King and a High Priest. Jesus is likewise a High Priest i.e. The Son of God and Jesus is the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the sole King of the Kingdom of Heaven and of Earth. As Melchizedek blessed the beginning of Abraham so Jesus blesses the beginning of the New Covenant between God and all of His children.

It could not have happened any other way. God wrote the script and directed the production. The ending of this play depends on the audience, that would be us. We must choose to

be doers of the Word and not just Greek scholars or readers of the word. We need to be what God created us to be. God did not create us to be perfect. God created us to try and to do the good works that He has put before us to the best of our ability and not to be perfect. Jesus got the perfect part down for us.

Jesus was lifted up on the cross. Jesus was lifted out of the grave. Jesus was lifted up to Heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father. We were LENT our bodies, hands, minds, and hearts to serve our Lord and Savior. In this season of Lent let us look up to our savior who was lifted up for us. "And we shall live in the house of the Lord forever."

Hallelujah and Amen!