

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

March 6, 2022

Old Testament Reading; Deuteronomy 26: 1-11

Responsive Reading; Psalm 91: 9-16

Epistle Reading; Romans 10: 8-13

Gospel Reading; Luke 4: 1-13

Sermon Title:

PROVE IT!

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary; Will you give 1st fruits, standing firm under pressure and make your wilderness a field of victory?

And it shall be, that when you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it, that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground, which you shall bring to the priest and go through the ceremony of offering those first fruits to the Lord via that priest. In essence, you shall do this willingly and

without holding back. You will trust the Lord to make sure that those first fruits will not be the only fruits. You will trust the Lord to provide future fruits so you and your family will not starve. AND, you shall rejoice in every good thing which the Lord your God has given to you and your house, you and the Levite and the stranger who is among you.

You have worked hard all season long, tilling and planting and cultivating, and now when the first days of harvest hit you are to be totally secure in believing that there will not be a flood or drought, or an infestation of bugs or plant disease to wreck the rest of your crop. You are to give the Lord and the Levite and the stranger sponging off you before you set anything aside for your winter store.

Ouch! This sounds scary and certainly not what those spam callers are suggesting as they tell you that your car warranty is about to expire and you got to think of yourself first or face financial ruin.

Belief in God is not for the weak or the geeks. You have to have guts to trust in God and those who deny His existence would say that you would also have to kiss your brain bye, bye.

Contrary to the skepticism of the non-believers our Old testament lesson gives reason to believe by the ceremony of dedicating the first fruits. God's record of achievement is

recited by both the priest and the person presenting the basket. Remember this is before Jesus arrived on the scene.

Even at this time God had proved His love and ability to provide for those that He called His own. God had led His people out of Egypt and provided for them in the wilderness. God had given them a land to call their own that was “flowing with milk and honey”. This was more than just a figure of speech but was a scientific fact. The land they inherited, unlike Egypt, had ample rain in the spring and fall creating lush fields for livestock and bees to produce a steady flow of “milk and honey”. In Egypt slaves had to work 24/7 pumping water out of the Nile into irrigation ditches to grow crops or foliage.

Our Old Testament lesson tells us to honor God with our first fruits and our Psalm tells of the rewards we reap by honoring God. The Psalm says, “no evil shall befall you, nor any plague come near you, and He will give Angels to have charge over you lest you dash your foot on a rock [OK I think this is referring to something bigger than stubbing your toe], anywho, it says God will answer us, deliver us and honor us”.

Sounds pretty good to me. I would definitely take that over Car Shield.

The Epistle lesson in Romans expands this “good deal” to everyone that believes and not just followers of Moses. The book of Romans also uses Deuteronomy to show how available

this promise is. “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”. It goes on to say that, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is RICH to all who call upon Him.” The question making its appearance on the scene here is, do you believe deep within your heart that God is, and was, and will always be there for you, loving you, protecting you, and inviting you to share in His beautiful kingdom?

Our Gospel lesson is very familiar to all of us. The temptations of Christ in the wilderness after His baptism by John the Baptist. When it says that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit, it is nothing new, Jesus was always full of the Holy Spirit but here it is mentioned to show the importance of this being a state of existence where the individual is totally committed to the will of that spirit. If a person is full of the Holy Spirit it is going against the grain to intentionally do anything that is contrary to what they believe to be the will of God.

When it says that after the 40 days without food Jesus was hungry, it is proving that Jesus had assumed human form and felt human pain. This shows that temptations are usually a legitimate problem and, in this case, it was a physical problem. It would not have been wrong for Jesus to eat but it would be wrong for Him to obey the devil by doing it. Jesus tells the devil that it is more important to obey God than to satisfy one's

discomfort. The second temptation was to take a short cut and avoid the cross by obliging Satan. Ever since Adam ate the apple sin ruled the world so the devil did have an all too real claim on the world before Christ. Christ could only do God's will by doing it God's way.

Lastly, Satan asked Jesus to throw Himself down off the temple and Satan quoted the Bible in his argument but that too failed to get Jesus to fail God. In the final verse Jesus won the battle with the devil and the devil "Departed from Him until an opportune time."

To sum up this fractured message the crux of the whole thing is that we are saved by grace but with great privilege comes great responsibility. If we are given salvation without deserving it, shouldn't we be anxious to honor our new family name by proclaiming it?

My sermon title is PROVE IT. Can we prove our love and appreciation by offering our first fruits to our God? Can we stand firm in the knowledge that He is always with us and keeping us in His protective arms, and can we turn our wildernesses into God's field of victory?

God believes in us so much He sent His Son to give us the blue print of life and promise of salvation and life eternal. We are His children and He is our everything.

Hallelujah and Amen.