

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

April 11, 2021

1st Reading; Acts 4: 32-35

Responsive Reading; Psalm 139: 1-12

Epistle Reading; 1 John 1: 1-2:2

Gospel Reading; John 20: 19-31

Sermon Title: **Be of One Heart, Be of One Soul**

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: Jesus did many other signs, but the ones written here are enough so that we may believe. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, I also send you."

Welcome to the message for the second Sunday of Easter. Every now and then the scripture readings blend together so seamlessly and continue each point so amazingly that I am terrified that I will somehow screw it up. Well here goes.

We start out with our Call to Worship which is Psalm 133 that is the recommended Psalm for today. The Psalmist describes the beauty of unity between brethren. Sort of like how great it is to have a happy family as opposed to a bickering bunch.

Next, we slide right into the lesson from Acts, from which I took my sermon title, that encourages us to be of one heart and of one soul. This scripture scares people because often they read it and think it is advocating Christian Communism. This is not at all the case. These Christians are joined in love and not by an official decree. People are not mandated to give up their possessions but do so to whatever extent they choose to help their fellow Christians. It is like churches asking for pledges but leaving the amount up to the individual. Those who can, may give more but no one is asked to put their family in stress and the church will even help families that are hurting. The joy of this kind of relationship is like fragrant oil or refreshing morning dew surrounding and enveloping the Christian family.

We then slide right into Psalm 139: 1-12. This one I chose to tie some things together. This lesson emphasizes how awesome the Father of the house is. God knows everything about us and is so available to us that we could not hide from Him if we tried. The passage then introduces us to the fact that God is the light and when people seek darkness they are trying to hide from God. Oops, that won't work.

Our Epistle lesson from 1st John has a dual purpose. First, it validates the teachings of the Bible. The teachings of the Bible are not based on Philosophy or Theology but on actual hands-on experience. The disciples knew Jesus up close and personal.

They ate with Him, they physically touched Him, they personally heard His teaching and saw Him perform His miracles. They did all these things both before and after His crucifixion and being raised from the dead. They are not telling us what they think is true, they are telling us what they KNOW to be true. They are telling us this stuff so that we can share in their joy. They know that they have a future with Jesus and that we do too. They wanted us to know that.

They also wanted us to know that we have a duty as well as a guarantee.

It is our duty to be honest advocates of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. It is our duty to try to be as much like Christ as we can because perfection is required but it is impossible for us to achieve.

This is where the guarantee comes into play. "And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." An advocate is kind of like a heavenly lawyer. Not many lawyers would pay their client's fine but that is exactly what Jesus has done for us. When the prosecutor, the devil, points out our sins, Jesus says, "Put that on my tab."

We do have a responsibility here though. We have to be honest with God. God can not forgive a sin that we refuse to admit. "If we say that we have not sinned we make God a liar, and His

word is not in us.” It is not good to fool with mother nature and it is worse to call God a liar.

In our Gospel, Thomas did not call God or the disciples liars but he was so distraught by the death of his beloved friend that he refused to get up any false hopes. “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.”

Spoiler alert, Thomas is just asking to see what Jesus showed the other disciples on His earlier visit.

The first time Jesus appeared to the disciples He said to them, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” Jesus is sending us even if we sometimes doubt His power and presence as Thomas did on that famous evening.

Jesus believes in us!

The disciples spent the rest of their mortal lives making sure that we would know that we are one in Christ and one in each other. We are one with Christ even when we screw up sometimes. Jesus was not sent into the world to condemn the world, Jesus was sent to save the world and to share with us His inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Hallelujah and Amen!