

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

April 23, 2023

1st Reading; Acts 2: 14a,36-41

Responsive Reading; Psalm 116: 1-4, 12-19

Epistle Reading; 1 Peter 1: 17-23

Gospel Reading; Luke 24: 13-35

Sermon Title: **What Shall We Render to the Lord**

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary; Open your eyes and see God, then let your heart be the heart of God.

What shall we render to the Lord?

This has been the burning question ever since mankind first started to believe that there must be a God, or Gods, or at least some creative force that could affect their fortune or misfortune as they struggled to survive on this planet that we call Earth.

If there was really a God, and it seemed that all ancient cultures believed that there was, how could humankind prevent His wrath and promote His favor?

Today's scriptures are addressing that very question from a Judeo/Christian perspective.

Right after our Psalm said, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits toward me?" the Psalm comes up with an oft missed and/or misinterpreted directive. It says, "I will take up the cup of salvation." This seems to mean that I will accept the hand I have been dealt and not play the, ain't-it-awful game. I'm not going to waste my time and God's time saying, if only I were rich, or famous, or born in a different time or place, or any other excuse. I am me; I am here, I am now and I'm going to deal with it. That is my vow, and I am going to pay that vow to the Lord.

OK, now that we have the ground rules what else is required of us?

The next major rule in the Psalm is knowing our place in the scheme. "O Lord, truly I am Your servant; I am your servant, the son of Your maidservant." Said another way is to say, "God is God and I am not!"

In the lesson from Acts, when the people ask Peter what they should do in the light of their involvement in the crucifixion of Jesus, Peter tells them, and us, Repent and receive.

Repent, as in turn your lives around in the name of Jesus Christ, and by doing this, you may now Receive the Holy Spirit. Repent and receive.

By doing these two things you may be “Saved from this perverse generation.” Oh, by the way, every generation has been “perverse” from Adam to Noah to Moses to Nero to Hitler to whoever is the bad guy right now. But, while every generation has been perverse, God has been God through each one.

Now this map should get us where we are going but some of us need a more specific GPS. Peter comes along and says that we should CALL on the Father that does not show favoritism (i.e. Daddy always liked you best does not compute when God is the Daddy) and we should conduct ourselves in fear. Here fear does not mean scared of, fear means in awe of. The reason we are in awe of God is because unlike satisfying a kidnapper, God does not redeem us with money, God redeems us with the blood of His Son and our savior Jesus Christ. Paying that steep a price for us shows that God is “all in” when it comes to saving our sorry butts.

In our Gospel from Luke two people are walking along, that just might be you and I, and they (we) are talking about how bad the world is and how we have been hurt and how we have lost all hope. We are so busy feeling sorry for ourselves that we can't even see Jesus walking right beside us. Now when THEY finally opened their eyes and saw Jesus, they were no longer afraid of the dark. After convincing Jesus to stay with them because of the danger of traveling at night they now jumped up and went seven miles in the dark to "tell it on the mountain" and in the upper room that Jesus was and is alive. Can THEY now become WE? Can we throw away our fear and as Peter said, can we BELIEVE in the God that raised Jesus Christ and now be incorruptible through the Word of God?

In the Old Testament Micah says in chapter 6: 6-8;

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give My firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and walk humbly with your God."

We all live in a perverse generation but we are walking in lock step with our Lord and savior Jesus Christ and Jesus says to us, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?”

Open your eyes and see Jesus, then let your heart be the heart of God. You may not be God but you can love and proclaim and forgive as God has required of you. Hallelujah and Amen!