

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

April 26, 2020 3rd Sunday of Easter

First Reading; Acts 2: 14a, 36-41

Responsive Reading; Psalm 116: 12-19

Epistle Reading; 1 Peter 1: 17-23

Gospel Reading; Luke 24: 13-35

Sermon Title: Let Not Your Eyes Be Restrained

By Rev Jim Gardner

Summary: Don't be afraid to see what is right in front of you.

A long time ago when I was a teenager in high school and my sister was off to college, some 300 miles away, we decided to surprise my father for his birthday by flying Sandy home from Wooster Ohio. Mom, Sandy and I went to the milk house where Dad was washing the milking machines. Mom asked him something about would he be able to have supper with some relatives or something like that trying to be casual and seeing what his reaction would be to his daughter's presence. Dad greeted us saying hi to Sandy and then considered Mom's question. All of the sudden he stopped mid-word and turned to

Sandy and said, " Hey, you're not supposed to be here!" A perfect reaction to a perfect surprise.

My father's eyes had been restrained. He saw his daughter but it did not register because he was distracted by the conversation with my mother.

This is the same thing that happened on the road to Emmaus when two of the followers of Jesus encountered Jesus but it did not register. Their conversation was much more serious and consuming than the casual question of my mother and the result was that they were so immersed in the grief-filled conversation that it was not until Christ broke bread with them that they realized who had been with them the whole time.

Even as their hearts burned at His reviewing the prophecies throughout the scriptures about Himself, they could not register his presence in the present because they were obsessing about the past.

When it finally did register at the breaking of the bread it was a total wakeup call. They could not wait to rush back to Jerusalem and tell the eleven what had just happened to them.

Wake up calls were happening all over at this time. The women at the tomb, the disciples in the upper room, and some other five hundred appearances to the followers by the appearance of the person of Jesus. It was not only the believers that were

being shocked to their senses, it was the non-believers too. At the cross a soldier said, “Truly this is the son of God.” The guards at the tomb passed out with fear at what they had witnessed, and the religious authorities scrambled to cover up the miracle.

In Acts 2:36 on, Peter addresses the crowd that had called for the crucifixion and said, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

These people who had condemned Christ now were so aware of their undeniable sin against God and mankind that they did not wait for Peter to advise them of what they should do, they implored him to tell them how they could get a chance to redeem themselves. Their eyes were no longer restrained.

Almost everyone hearing or reading this message is a firm believer in God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Like the pair on the road to Emmaus we believe but when troubles come, we can sometimes be blinded to the truth we hold so dear. When a child dies, or a weather or nature calamity occurs, or a pandemic puts us all in lockdown, our eyes become restrained and we can not see the glory of God that is right there in front of us.

We can not see the God who raised Lazarus from the dead, we can not see the God that split the Red Sea, we cannot see the God who stopped the gale on the Lake of Galilee by just saying, "Be still." We can not see the God that gave each one of us life as we were wondrously made in our mothers' wombs. We can not see the God that gave up His own Son to the cross that we might spend eternity in Heaven. Our eyes are often restrained. At this time, I must admit that I too am afflicted with this impairment. I often see dimly what God has meant for me to see clearly, face to face,

The Psalm reading for this lesson, Psalm 116: 12-19, is one that I have always liked but did not see it clearly until I did the research for this message. When I compared the New King James Version to The Message, I realized that this passage is my personal confession of faith that God wrote just for me. This is the reason that I am a minister.

Hear my confession of faith:

"What can I give back to God for the blessings he's poured out on me? I'll lift high the cup of salvation- a toast to God! I'll pray in the name of God; I'll complete what I promised God I'd do, and I'll do it together with his people. When they arrive at the gates of death, God welcomes those who love him. Oh, God, Here I am, your servant, your faithful servant: set me free for your service! I'm ready to offer the thanksgiving sacrifice and

pray in the name of God. I'll complete what I promised God I'd do, and I'll do it in company with his people, In the place of worship, in God's house, in Jerusalem, God's city. Hallelujah!"

I know that by professional mental standards I very well may be deemed insane for my steadfast belief in something that is invisible to those deemed to be sane. But I firmly believe that it is this very insanity that keeps me sane when those with "restrained eyes", are going crazy.

If the only proof that Jesus had actually raised from the dead was the testimony of two people who said that He vanished immediately after they recognized him, non-believers would have a good argument but that is not even close. Everything in our physical and mental and spiritual life screams, He's alive, He's alive, Hallelujah sweet Jesus, He's alive. Sixty-six books attest to the truth.

It is as clear as your nose in front of your heart. Do not let your eyes be restrained and don't be afraid to believe what is right in front of you.

Hallelujah and Amen!