

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

May 17, 2020 6th Sunday of Easter

First Reading; Acts 17: 22-31

Responsive Reading; Psalm 66: 8-20

Epistle Reading; 1 Peter 3: 13-22

Gospel Reading; John: 15-21

Sermon Title: **Tag, You're It**

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: You have been tagged by Jesus. Now it is your turn to keep the game going.

Do you remember as a child playing tag with your friends? Someone would be it and they would run after another and tag them and say, "Tag, you're it." Then that person would catch someone else and tag them and so on and so on. It was fun and it was not devastating to be tagged. It was just part of the game.

This is something like spreading the gospel. Jesus tagged the disciples and told them, "As the Father has sent me so I send you." "Go into Jerusalem and Judea and all the world and make

disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

They did and so it started. Kind of like a game, but much more serious. The destiny of the world and all of the people to ever live in the world stood in the balance.

OK, more serious but just for kicks lets stay with the game analogy for a while.

Have you ever been to a Bills game and seen all the players warming up before the start? That is to get their bodies ready for the rigor of the game and limit the chance of cramps or injury. As we see in Psalm 66: 8-14 God does the same thing for us.

The Message puts it this way: “Bless our God, O peoples! Give him a thunderous welcome! Didn’t He set us on the road to life? Didn’t He keep us out of the ditch? He trained us first, passed us like silver through refining fires, brought us into hardscrabble country, pushed us to our very limit, road-tested us inside and out, took us to hell and back; Finally He brought us to this well-watered place.”

OK! Now we are ready to play ball.

Staying with the football theme, when Jesus says that He will pray the Father and He will give you a helper, that He may abide with you forever, it is kind of like saying that He will give

you a fullback that will block for you forever. “The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”

Wow! Wouldn't Darrell Singletary love to have an invisible blocker that he and his team only could see?

OK. I think that is about as far as I should go with the game theme.

Jesus goes on to say in essence, He will not leave us as orphans, but He will come to us. He says that for a little while longer and the world will not see Him but we will see Him because we have accepted Him and believe in Him.

Jesus says, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.” And what does Jesus command? “This is a new commandment that I give unto you: Love me as I have loved you.” “And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”

In the Epistle lesson for this Sunday Peter encourages us to hang in there by saying, “And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to

everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”

This is where you get to tag the next guy. If someone asks you how can you be so uplifted and positive about life or why do you believe in God, don't miss your chance to keep His commandments and spread the gospel. Do not be afraid to be a little like Paul.

Paul was in Greece and in Athens when he saw all the shrines to all the Gods that they worshiped. Paul had been trained by the pharisees and had strong opinions about the monotheistic belief that there was only one God and those that did not agree with this were pagans deserving of hell and damnation.

Paul could have lost his cool but he did as Peter suggested and responded with meekness [some translations say courtesy] as he said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you.”

Paul went on to explain that this is the God who created everything and everyone. This said, the God that created everyone did not need people to create him in gold, silver or stone, or make a shrine for him to live in.

Paul did not make the people of Greece mad, he made them curious. Curious people listen, mad people walk away.

We as Christians need to follow the examples set by Paul, Peter, and most especially Jesus. We are entrusted to be the hands and feet and the voice of Jesus as we accept the responsibility of being His followers and His disciples. Jesus has tagged us and with the help of His Holy Spirit it is our Holy responsibility to keep His Holy game going.

PLAY BALL! Hallelujah and Amen!