

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

June 19, 2022

Old Testament Reading; Isaiah 65: 1-9

Responsive Reading; Psalm 2:19-28

Epistle Reading; Galatians 3:23-29

Gospel Reading; Luke 8:26-39

Sermon Title: **If Not Now, When?**

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary; And Elijah said, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him, but if Baal, follow him.”

There comes a time to make a decision. Way back in the Old Testament the prophet Elijah was facing a population that could not decide if it would follow the false God, Baal, or the true Lord their God who had rescued them from Egypt many generations before. With the Jewish faith there came a lot of rules that were designed to guide them into being better people as God had created them to be. With the religion of Baal, it was a kind of “if it feels good, do it” teaching. Then, as

now, it seemed that the bad guys had all the fun and did not seem to suffer any consequences for their inappropriate actions. Elijah called down fire and 450 prophets of Baal were slain in the ensuing coup. Temporarily it seemed that the Lord was the preferred place for the people to put their faith and trust.

In our Old Testament lesson Isaiah reveals that the people of God were back to their old tricks of turning their backs on God for the pleasures of unclean living. These people even got into the “secret” pagan rituals so they thought they were outsmarting God, and God’s people. Isaiah said that God would not take it anymore but would save a small remnant of the Jews that honored Him and for them there would a tangible reward, i.e. a cluster of grapes that would represent a blessing of the Lord.

Are you detecting a pattern here? God had given the people the law to help guide them until He would provide them with the next step in their maturation process.

To help the people recognize the benefit of aligning with God, He sent His Son to reveal the true magnificence of God.

At Gadarene a demon-possessed man confronts Jesus. Note that the demons immediately recognize Jesus as the “Son of the most high God”. These demons were so plentiful and/or powerful that the man would break his chains when the

authorities tried to restrain him. These demons also knew that with all their power they were no match for Jesus the Christ. They begged Jesus to let them go into the swine and permission was granted. Now we can nit-pick as to whether this was a “God-like” action, but in any case, it drew a lot of attention. The people who raised swine feared Jesus and asked Him to leave, and the man from whom the demons were driven out begged to go with Jesus. Jesus left but instructed the cured man to be His evangelist for Him in that pagan land.

Have you ever noticed that when Jesus preformed a miracle for a Jew, He asked that person not to tell anyone but when the benefactor was a Gentile Jesus told that person to tell everyone? Who'da thunk it!

OK, now we get to the point where Jesus has come and revealed the Father as a loving God that was willing to allow His own Son to die for the sins of this ungracious humanity. God has raised Jesus from the dead and promised us eternal life. At Pentecost God sends His Holy Spirit to give the power and responsibility of prophecy to all humanity that would identify with His Son and our savior Jesus Christ. God passed the baton to us, His children.

If it seems difficult to decipher what this means maybe we need to reread our Epistle Lesson for today.

*Here goes; But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore, the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ. For as many of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus, and if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.*

This “putting on of Christ” makes us all seeds of Abraham and the whole Bible, Old and New Testaments, relevant to our position as heirs of God, and, with Jesus, for eternal life. We too are the “Chosen People of God”. We are no longer under a tutor that tells us what to do to get ready for Christ. No, we are members of the family of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We are no longer under orders to go to church. Or tithe 10 percent, or to take Sunday off to rest, though we should do all of those things if we can. We are now under orders to live up to our family name. We are under orders to receive the Holy Ghost and be ambassadors for God.

Jesus said, “If you love me you will keep my commandments. I give you a new commandment, Love others as I have loved you, and there is no greater love than a man would lay down his life

for his fellow man. Go therefore into all the world making disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy ghost.”

When Jesus sent out the seventy to teach and heal, they all came back to Jesus. As Jesus sends us out, we all need to come back to Jesus. We need to come to church to re-energize ourselves so we can better carry out the mission that we were given by Christ. Re-energized we must then go back out into the world and reflect the light of Jesus Christ. We must portray Jesus as someone that everyone would want to know. We need to show compassion, patience and gentleness. We need to evangelize for our Lord and brother 24/7 and in extreme emergencies use words.

We were given this directive two thousand years ago. Isn't it time we actually do it? If not now, then when?

We can do it! Let's do it! Hallelujah and Amen.