

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

June 28, 2020

Old Testament Reading; Genesis 22: 1-14

Responsive Reading; Psalm 13

Epistle Reading; Romans 6: 12-23

Gospel Reading; Matthew 10: 40-42

Sermon Title:

A Cup of Cold Water

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: Being “dead to sin” is rewarded by becoming a “slave to righteousness” and simple acts of righteousness are highly rewarded by God.

I became a believer at a very young age. My mother told me that the first time I went to Sunday School as a toddler she came to get me and I said, “Mommy, mommy, they know about the baby Jesus in Sunday School too!”

As I grew in my understanding of the Bible, I realized that there were things that I just could not understand. I decided to trust God. If I did not understand something, I would just slide past

it, believing that God would reveal its meaning to me when He saw fit.

In our Old Testament lesson today, I was troubled as a child. My father explained his belief that at the time Abraham lived, pagan religions practiced human sacrifice so how could the real God require anything less. This sort of relieved my doubts, but not quite. This is one of those things that I just let slide. Just let slide until I did the preparation for this message.

The Bible says that Abraham was considered righteous due to his faith, whereas since then righteousness was gained by the death of Jesus on the cross.

Abraham was told by God to pack up and leave his family and go unto a land that God would show him and Abraham went. This was a big deal because unless you took an army with you, you were fair game for robbers and territorial peoples. Abraham had to have faith that God would protect him.

That was the same faith that convinced him that God kept his promises and one of those promises was that through Isaac Abraham's descendants would be more numerous than the stars in the sky. OK, he did slide a little when he had Ishmael by Hagar because Sarah did not believe she would ever be able to conceive. Anywho.

The theological scholar, William MacDonald, proposed that Abraham so trusted God to keep his promise that he believed with all his heart that a miracle would bring Isaac back to him either by resurrection or some other earth-shattering event.

MacDonald points to the line that Abraham told the young men with him that he and Isaac would “go and worship and then WE will return”. MacDonald believes that this was not a slip of the tongue, but a display of Abraham’s confidence that God would make it happen. To me this finally makes perfect sense. God proved to Abraham that He could be trusted and also proved to Abraham that God believed that He could trust Abraham.

MacDonald also believes that this was a precursor to God sacrificing His only son on the cross, but not requiring Abraham to do the same.

Another thing about my faith journey is the belief that God has a plan and we are all a part of it. In Ephesians 2: 10, it says,

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” For some of us, like Dr Martin Luther King Jr or Billy Graham, these works command worldwide attention but for the rest of us they are quiet things not readily seen by man but treasured by God.

Our gospel lesson speaks to this when it says, “He who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in

the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward."

A pastor once said to me that he did not know what the reward of a prophet would be and I told him that I believed it would be like when a soldier dives on a hand grenade the people around him, and families of those saved would shed tears of gratitude. But when someone died for God the tears of gratitude would be from the eyes of Jesus himself. While that would be considered a great act of "good works" God is pleased by the simplest act of love we do for one of our neighbors.

Our Epistle lesson says, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts...For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace... Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?"

If God is willing to cause us to be dead to sin and immersed in His righteousness, shouldn't we be happy to give ourselves to trying to do His will in everything we do?

If being under the protective, loving wing of God is Slavery then please let me be a slave.

Hallelujah and Amen.