Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

June 30, 2019

Old Testament Reading; 2 Kings 2: 1-2, 6-14

Responsive Reading; Psalm 16

Epistle Reading; Galatians 5: 1, 13-25

Gospel Reading; Luke 9: 51-62

Sermon Title: WHO WILL PICK UP THE MANTLE?

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: The mantle has fallen. Who will pick it up? The Lord said, “Who shall I send?” Will you say, “Send me?”

The background of the Old Testament reading is that several years prior to this, Elijah was sent by God to anoint a couple individuals to be Kings of their respective territories and to anoint Elisha to be Elijah’s successor as prophet of the Lord. From that time to the time of our reading, Elisha has been a disciple of his teacher Elijah.

Before Christ only two people ever went straight to heaven without going through the formality of dying. Enoch and Elijah. In the case of Elijah, it was somehow predicted that Elijah would be “taken up” in a whirlwind. If you want to have some fun, read 2Kings 2: 1-18. Several times people ask Elisha if he knows that Elijah will be taken up to which he basically says, “Shut up! I don’t want to hear about it.”

When Elisha asks Elijah to grant him, “A double portion of your spirit”, he is asking Elijah to give him the first born’s right of inheritance. In this case Elisha wants to inherit two thirds of Elijah’s spirit just like the first-born son inheriting two thirds of his father’s wealth.

The mantle is like a coat. When Elijah strikes the Jordon, the waters divide and when Elisha does the same with the mantle of Elijah the same result happens, thus indicating that Elisha has truly inherited the gift of miracles that Elijah had.

Note, when Elisha discovers that he has inherited the gift he does something with it immediately. Elisha crosses over the Jordon on dry land. That sounds like a small detail but I believe that it is significant.

I believe that we all have a “mantle”. We were all created in God’s image and God has given each one of us something good. God has provided it to be passed down to us and God intends that we do our best to use that gift to the glory of God and then pass it down to someone else or to the next generation.

My wife Wanda had a mother who had a cool wisdom that enabled her to pass on the ability to listen to people and to influence them to do the right thing without telling them to and coming across as bossy. Wanda also had an aunt that knew just how to do little things that would make her nieces feel special and loved and important. Wanda picked up those two mantles and wove them together and used them to be the most positive influence as a role model that I have ever had the privilege of knowing. I might have been the “preacher” but she was defiantly the “pastor” of the family.

When I first told the retired DA of Genesee County that I had become an ordained minister he said, “Finally! Finally! The Gardner family has finally produced a minister.” Everyone that knew my parents thought that they had laid down the mantle and they were just waiting for someone to pick it up.

Our congregation has had Winton, Bob, Kenny, Ruth, and many others that have set a high standard for us to follow.

Lynn used to tell of the advice his grandmother had given him and then he became a mentor to his grandchildren and nephews. Could Lynn passing the mantle be part of the reason for the Caravan street ministry and its many spin-off ministries?

In our Epistle Paul says we are to stand fast in liberty by which Christ has made us free. Paul says this “mantle” is a wonderful thing but we must use it responsibly. We must use it to enhance God and not to profit ourselves. We must use it in the spirit of the Spirit and not in the spirit of the flesh. Paul says that if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law.

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”

If you are led by the Spirit you don’t have to worry about breaking the law because the Spirit is what the law tries to model itself after.

In our gospel lesson Jesus points out our human inclination to decide to do something good so we use that as a reason for one last fling at doing something bad. When Jesus says let the dead bury their own dead, he is not being unreasonable he is just being aware. There is no better reason to go on a drinking binge then a “Marrying or a Burying”. The other kind of spirits flow freely at weddings and at wakes. Also, what better time to have a party before going out on a mission than when all the family and friends are right there waiting for the party to start.

Elisha crossed over the Jordon on dry ground as soon as the waters parted. If you are going to follow Christ do it now.

I am not a fan of bachelor parties, Dingus Day or Mardi Gras. If you are going to be faithful to one woman for the rest of your life you don’t start it off with strippers and hookers. If you are going to show your love for Jesus and God you don’t start it off or finish it up by dancing with the devil.

Boy, am I a stick in the mud or what!?

There is a country song by Luke Bryan entitled “I believe most people are good.” I believe this is true but I believe we sometimes get lazy and/or weak.

God is good all the time and God has given us not only a wonderful creation but also wonderful role models so we do not have to learn everything by trial and error.

I believe that, “God’s got this!”

God has created us in his own image and even though we all fall short of the glory; the glory is always right there in front of us. We see people doing it right and we see people doing it wrong. God gives us the intelligence to see which is the better path and all we have to do is follow it. Find someone with a mantle and be ready to pick it up. Those people are all around you and they stick out like a sore thumb. Grab them and grab their mantles.

And God said, “Who shall I send?”

I do not know what others may choose but as for me I say, “Send Me!”

Are you with me? If so then:

Hallelujah and Amen.