Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

July 28, 2019

Old Testament Reading; Genesis 18: 20-32

Responsive Reading; Psalm 85

Epistle Reading; Colossians 2: 6-15

Gospel Reading; Luke 11: 1-13

Sermon Title: FACE TIME WITH GOD

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: Are you ready to talk with God? No, I mean REALLY talk with God?

The Old Testament Reading is a familiar one. Abraham is sitting in front of his tent one evening and he just happens to see the Lord and three men near the terebinth trees. He offers them dinner and the Lord decides to tell Abraham that they are headed to Sodom and Gomorrah to see if He should destroy those cities because of their wicked ways.

Abraham gets up in God’s face and attempts to persuade God to reconsider his plan of action. Abe shows humility but still presses the issue. What if you find 50, 45, 40, 30, 20 or even 10 righteous, will you destroy them with all the sinners? “Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You!”

WOW! This is gutsy, but God does not rebuke Abraham, instead he agrees that if he finds ten righteous people in Sodom, He will spare the city.

This seems to go directly against the interchange with Job later in the Bible. In that Job demands that God explain himself as to why Job is going through terrible suffering. God rebukes Job and is quite upset with him but makes a deal that if Job prays for his three friends, the three that thought they were as wise as God and basically lied about God, He will forgive Job’s friends. God did not say He would reward Job but when Job complies God restored the fortunes of Job two-fold.

The difference in these two situations is that Abraham did not call out God for himself, but when God presents Himself and his plan to Abraham, Abraham tries to intercede for other people that he did not even know.

This is an Aha moment. This is what God wants from the humans that he created to have dominion over the rest of his creation. This is what Jesus will advocate; Love your family, love your friends, love your enemies, and pray for those that persecute you. Pray for Sodom.

I believe, with my limited perception of God, that God set up this meeting as a test of Abraham’s character. I also believe, again, with my limited perception of God, that God walked away from that discussion proud as punch with how well Abraham came through the test.

Prayer is a very important topic of the bible. Prayer is discussion with God.

In our Gospel lesson Luke gives his rendition of the Lord’s Prayer. This is slightly different from how Matthew states it. Luke’s version is the one that the Roman Catholic Church uses and we Protestants tend to use Matthew’s version. The main difference seems to me to be that Luke says that Jesus said, ”When you pray, say.” And Matthew says, “In this manner, therefore pray.”

Where Luke gives us a prayer, Matthew gives a blue print for a prayer.

We have a dear friend in this church who also gives his advice on how to pray. Lynn says that as he has been going through his ordeal with cancer that he has turned from the age-old prayers to spending what he calls “Father/son” discussions with God.

I believe this is what Matthew is getting at with his version of the Lord’s prayer. First address God as Our Father. God is family first, and family that loves us and will take the time to listen to us as we talk to him from the heart.

Second, “Who art in heaven” and “Hallowed be thy name”.

God, our father, is in a holy place and his name is holy, meaning that He deserves a special kind of respect from us. The prayer then goes on to show how to talk to God with love and respect as we petition his blessing and search for his guidance.

The reason that our lectionary uses the Luke version is that it goes on to show how great and approachable God is. “If man who is evil can give good gifts to his children how much more will God give good to us.”

My sermon title is Face Time with God. Face time on the computer is more personal than just getting a phone call and going about your business as you listen on speaker. They can see you and you can see them so you both need to give it your undivided attention.

I know we can’t bring up God’s face on the screen but I think we can see God with our heart as we talk to him. I think if we incorporate what we have read and heard about God and our own experiences with experiencing God’s love and involvement in our lives we can pretty much hear his voice in our discussion, but as Lynn says, we have to shut up and listen. We have to be ready for God to say something that we would rather not hear.

Our Epistle lesson says, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built upon Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”

That is, when the world comes up with some “new” truth, have some face time with God. Paul says that you have God’s number. You got it with all your teaching. Use that number and give God a call. Go to him face to face with humility and a hunger to hear and experience his word.

Are you ready to talk with God? No, I mean are you really ready to talk to and with God?

He is there and waiting for your call. Give him a ring and find out what Lynn is talking about when he refers to the “pearls” he receives several times a day. Lynn is spending FACE TIME with God and you can too.

Hallelujah and Amen!