

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

August 18, 2024

Old Testament Reading; Proverbs 9: 1-6

Responsive Reading: Psalm 34: 9-14

Epistle Reading; Ephesians 5: 15-20

Gospel Reading: John 6: 51-58

Sermon: Live Like You Want to Live Forever

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: You take care of your NOW and God will take care of your FOREVER.

“Redeem the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is...

Whoever is simple, let him turn in here! As for him who lacks understanding, she says to him, (or should I say Jesus says to him) ‘I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.... This is the bread which came down from heaven-not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live

forever’.”

There. Simple enough. If you want to live forever eat this bread. No bread can be so bad that the pain is not worth that much gain. Right? Well, if your concept of life is limited to the body (a temporary thing) and not to the soul (an infinite thing) then maybe the cost of immortality is too high.

What the Jews did not realize, and what many of us struggle with is the fact that Jesus used physical things to explain spiritual truths. The Jews of the time of Jesus could not possibly see how sinful sinners could be granted eternal life because they did not know that Jesus Himself was about to pay the debts of all the sinners in the world that were willing to accept the forgiveness by accepting Him.

Jesus knew that humanity could not realize the love and compassion, and forgiveness, of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost if they only knew God as a character in a book, what we call the Bible. For people to know God they had to make God an integral part of their total being. God had to be like food and drink that pulsed through their veins, so to speak, with every pulse of their hearts.

At the last supper Jesus used the bread and wine metaphor before He was crucified. This means that, the bread and wine were strictly spiritual in nature at that time and place. That was exactly what Jesus was doing in our Gospel reading today. Jesus

was portraying Himself as what was needed to be pulsing through our veins for us to have eternal life.

I feel sorry for people who spend their entire lives waiting for the rapture or to die so they could go to heaven and start to enjoy themselves. I believe that God created this world for us to enjoy. The trouble is that we get too serious. Jesus showed us how to approach Him and put our troubles on the back burner. "Unless one comes to me as a little child, they will not be able to enter the kingdom of heaven."

Have you ever noticed that no matter what goes wrong in a little child's life mommy can always make it better? It does not matter if IT is a scraped knee, a tummy ache, or bruised feelings, IT could always be made better by sitting on mommy's lap and having her arms around them. As adults, if we go through life holding hands with Jesus, nothing can destroy us. Oh, we can have bumps and bruises and some serious heart aches but Jesus, like Mommy, will always love us through the hard times and rejoice with us through the good times. I firmly believe that as long as we live with Jesus here on Earth, knowing His love and protection, we are in Heaven Stage One.

The rest of our scripture readings today tell us how we can live in Heaven Stage One. The way to live in Heaven Stage One is to live in harmony with Jesus.

In our Proverbs lesson the author has not yet met Jesus so refers to Him as a her named Wisdom. Wisdom i.e. Jesus has prepared a place and a feast for us and invited us in to eat and drink and to “forsake foolishness and to live and to go in the way of understanding”.

Our Psalm tells us to fear the Lord i.e. be in awe of the Lord, and He will cover for us. “Young lions will lack and suffer hunger; but those who fear the Lord shall not lack any good thing.” It goes on to say that we should come to God and listen and learn the will of God. He says that if we desire life and want to do good, we should, “Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it”. Sounds to me like a good formula for harmony with both God and man.

The Epistle tells us to “walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise...because the days are evil”. All days are evil whether it is because of Nebuchadnezzar, Nero, Hitler or whoever you want to name now. The world is what it is so we need to be what we need to be. Paul says that we are not to be unwise, we should seek to know and do the will of the Lord. Paul also says that we should not be drunks but sober communicators with people around us, “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the

name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” i.e. love your neighbor and praise God. Wow, I heard that somewhere before. Who da thunk it?

If we take care of our NOW and live in Heaven Stage one, then God who forgives our bloopers will take care of our FOREVER! Hallelujah and Amen!