

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

August 20, 2023

Old Testament Reading; Isaiah 56: 1-8

Responsive Reading; Psalm 133

Epistle Reading; Romans 11: 1-2, 29-32

Gospel Reading; Mathew 15: 21-28

Sermon Title: **The Lord Commanded the Blessing**

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary; If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise from another place. Maybe you have come into the Kingdom for such a time as this.

Are you ready to receive a precious gem? Or, should I say were you able to recognize the precious gem you just received.

Psalm 133 is so short that it is kind of like the Gettysburg Address. When Lincoln gave that speech on the Gettysburg field the camera men were not even set up yet and it was over.

Quality beats quantity every time.

This psalm is only three verses long but makes four beautiful points of God's wish for we His people. The four revelations are: First, the beauty of people living in unity. Second, this unity fills the air with a heavenly fragrance. Third, this fragrance is refreshing and last but not least this is a sure guarantee of God's blessing.

Listen to it again.

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in UNITY!*

Can you imagine how wonderful it would be if all this nation and this world could dwell together in peace and love, i.e. unity?

*It is like precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments.*

This beautiful smell not only filling the nostrils of the recipient but gracing the senses of everyone in the room.

What is it like?

*It is like the dew of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion.*

What is more refreshing than dew? It is gentle and soft. It does not get you soaking wet but cools your whole body. And, what

if that happened in the beauty of God's mountains? What a rush!

*For there the Lord commanded the blessing—Life forevermore.*

This is not just a pipe dream. This is a command of God.

How can God command something that we have not been able to accomplish in thousands of years? Maybe we need to look at the rest of the scripture verses to see if there is a hint as to how we could go about this seemingly impossible dream.

I think the first thing we need to consider is how can we get this thing moving. A forest fire can be started by a tiny match. Maybe the first thing we must admit to ourselves is that nothing is insignificant in God's eyes.

Isaiah said that we must start by not excluding anyone from God's plan. We can not think of ourselves as a "chosen people" that is better than everyone else no matter what we do. We can not let the foreigner believe, "The Lord has separated me from His people" or, the person who has altered his or her body or bodily identity i.e. eunuch in our lesson, say, "I am a dry tree." "For thus says the Lord: "To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and Hold fast My covenant, Even to them I will give in My house And within My walls a place and a name...I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off." Just a side note, for the eunuchs to

“choose what pleases God” they must show the same respect for the non-eunuchs as they expect in return. This passage ends with, “The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says, “Yet I will gather to him Others besides those who are gathered to Him.” We must be humble and kind enough to realize that we are not the only ones that God loves more than the life of His Son.

The lesson from Romans says that the gifts and the callings of God are irrevocable. Because we have all screwed up in life, we are obligated to allow God to also accept those who are screwing up now. What is good for the goose is good for the gander and God loves us both. Because God has loved us God will also love those members of His creation who are living in a manner not conducive to what we picture as God’s kingdom. If God loves them, who are we to do less.

Finally, our Gospel sounds like Jesus is being cruel to the Canaanite woman. Actually, Jesus is testing her humility. Is she willing to admit that she, like all of us, is not deserving of special treatment, but like all of us is welcome to ask for anything from her loving Father and friend? Is she willing to not ask because she is part of the chosen people but as a creature asking of her creator? Jesus answers, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.”

In the book of Ester, Ester is queen in spite of how she was chosen. We are part of God's creation, His kingdom, by no way of our deserving but by His grace and love. As Ester was asked to do something to save her people so are we all asked to light a match which will start a forest fire of acceptance of God and His plan for the world.

If you do not lend an ear or a smile or a hug to someone that needs it, help will arise from another place. BUT maybe you have come into the Kingdom for such a time as this.

It is up to you. You can step up or you can sit this one out. It is up to you, but for me and my family we will serve the Lord. How about you? It is your choice and it is your God calling you.

Hallelujah and Amen!

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