

August 21, 2016 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Old Testament Reading: Jeremiah 1: 4-10

Psalm Reading: Psalm 103: 1-8

Epistle Reading: Hebrews 12: 18-29

Gospel Reading: Luke 13: 10-17

Sermon Title: OFFER TO GOD AN ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP

By Rev. James A Gardner

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you. I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy [a youth].” But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you.”

About 90 years ago my grandmother was a lawyer in Batavia. She was dynamic and active in her community. When she heard that a teenager had come to live at the Blind school from a great distance away she introduced herself to him and offered him the companionship and friendship of her teenage children.

Marvin was progressively losing his sight and the State Blind School at Batavia was his last chance to save him from going totally blind.

Marvin became like a member of my father's family spending nearly every weekend on the farm with the six Gardner kids.

Then came the day when Marvin got the news that they were not going to be able to save his eyesight.

Marvin said later that he was devastated. He had seen too many sunsets, too many flowers, too many paintings and too many smiling faces. Even though it was getting harder to see them he could not live without them.

Marvin prepared himself a rat poison cocktail and prepared to end his life.

As God had preordained my grandmother heard of the medical diagnosis and chose this time to call Marvin on the phone. As Marvin reached for his "Hemlock" the phone rang and he picked up the phone instead of the poison.

Grandma told Marvin that she did not know what to say. She said she did not know how she could face it if it was happening to her. She said that she felt so helpless because she was used to being able to fix things but all she could do was sit by helplessly and tell him that she cared and that she loved him soooo much.

Marvin never took that potion and grew up to be a role model for all of my grandmother's grandchildren.

"You shall go to all whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you."

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul and do not forget all his benefits.

Jeremiah heard God tell him that before he was conceived God had consecrated him and appointed him to be a prophet.

Jeremiah heard God but Jeremiah was not the only one that God says this to. God says this to each and every one of us.

God told Grandma to call Marvin and God told her what to say.

How many times have you heard of someone in distress and thought that you should call them but you do not know what to say, someone else can say it better, maybe you will just say a prayer. Well a prayer is good, but is that what God is asking you to do?

How many people in distress really want to hear from someone who has all the answers? Sheryl, and Don, and I can quote some beautiful scripture but is that what people really want to hear? Sometimes, but usually they want to hear that someone cares and loves them and is thinking of them.

“You shall go to whom I send you, and you shall say what I command you to say.”

The title of this message is *Offer To God An Acceptable Worship*.

It is my belief that you do not come to church to worship God but rather you come to church to be refueled, refreshed and energized to go out into God’s world and offer an acceptable worship where it counts. An acceptable worship is not words but actions. It is not what you hear but what you say, but you cannot say it if you do not first hear it. So come to church; besides I need what you put in the offertory plate.

Oh, that is so bad on so many levels! I hope no one reads this that does not know that I am kidding. ANYWHO.

If we are expected to offer an acceptable worship why should we? Well if you answer because we have a covenant with God then I must ask, which covenant ?

The Old Testament Covenant was a scary thing. If you did not obey the laws of God you could be hit with a plague or a famine or the earth might open up and swallow you or a bunch of Levites might run around with swords slaying all those who choose to worship the Golden calf, or an army from Babylon might conquer you and send you into exile. Not a pretty sight but it was what you could expect from a God with an iron

In our Epistle lesson Paul says, “relax, this is not who God is or what he is like.”

You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them. (For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even an animal touches the mountain it shall be stoned to death.” Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”) But you have come to Mt. Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

In our gospel lesson Jesus heals a woman on the Sabbath who has not been able to straighten up for eighteen years and the leader of the Synagogue goes ballistic . He thinks God is more worried about working (and healing) on the Sabbath than he is about the condition of his people and his creation. Jesus lets that guy know where the bear does what it does in the woods. This mean God is not what we come to when we come to church.

In short we come to a God who is for us. If God be for us, who can be against us?

We come to a God who loves us, a God that not will only send us where we must go but he will put the words in our mouths and will be with us, and will protect us even to the end of the age. We come to a God who is willing to die for us and will not strike us down for falling short but will forgive us and love us and give us the strength to try again even if we do not deserve a second chance. We come to a God of second chances.

Why do we give God an acceptable worship? We give God an acceptable worship because we cannot help doing so in good conscience. God is so wonderful to us how can we help wanting to worship him in a manner that reflects his majesty and love.

Words cannot do it so I guess we will just have to role play our worship in everything that we do and say.

God is always there for us. Can we do any less than to always be there for God.

Dear God please accept my sermon as I live it and oh yes please accept what I say from the pulpit also.

Hallelujah and Amen.