

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

August 21, 2022

Old Testament Reading; Isaiah 5: 1-7

Responsive Reading; Psalm 80: 8-19

Epistle Reading; Hebrews 11:29-12:2

Gospel Reading; Luke 12: 49-56

Sermon Title: Restore Us

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary; Not because we are worthy, but because of your unmeasurable grace.

Once upon a time a veteran proposed to a nurse that he fell in love with. George told Lucy that he loved her and if she wanted children, he would gladly adopt children and devote his life to raising them to the best of his ability. He would adopt children but he would never bring a new child into the worst world in the history of the world. George was a veteran of WW1. Hitler was not yet on the scene and the Atom Bomb had not been invented but to George this was the worst world in the history of the world.

Hitler was not yet here and Nero was long gone. Nero, as Emperor of Rome, ruled the entire known world and he butchered Christians worldwide. Not only were Christians fed to the lions in the colosseum but he used to wrap them in burlap, soak in oil, hang them on the walls of his banquet rooms and set them on fire to light up the hall for his parties. Hence the line from, Once to Every Man and Nation, “by the light of burning martyrs, Jesus bleeding feet I track”.

OK, that is pretty gruesome but the point is that my Uncle George did not live in the worst world ever. He lived in a world where he had seen terrible things but this world has been worse before and after the time of his proposal to my mother's sister.

Things are not exactly rosy right now and a lot of people claim that, “the whole world has gone to Hell”.

In today's scriptures the Bible recognizes that things are tough and have been so at many times in the ages of our civilization.

The scriptures relate that our ancestors cried to God for strength and reconciliation and the answer had come in previous occasions as a result of faith and perseverance.

The script has not changed. We still live in a broken world. We still live in a world that does not live up to God's design. The

world that God designed for us is like a beautiful and productive vineyard.

The problem is that God gave us free will. God created us with the freedom to choose how we live and where we set our priorities.

Metaphorically we can practice good farming practices or mess up and cause another Dust Bowl.

We can either learn from God about how we should live and treat one another, how we can cultivate good relationships and harmony in our lives, our families and in our world community or we can produce “wild grapes” of selfishness and hostility.

Throughout history when mankind faced serious trouble God worked through regular people and circumstances to get us out of the mess we have found ourselves in.

OK. We are the regular people that God is depending on right now. What should we do?

First as in Isaiah and our Psalm we need to recognize that there seems to be an abundance of “wild grapes” and we need to do something. The first thing we need to do is admit that we need help. Like in the final verse of our Psalm we need to say, “Restore us, oh Lord God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved!”

Next, we have to believe it can happen. In the Epistle, the author points out situations and a necessary element of the solution. “By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, by faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she received the spies in peace [when she turned to help the people of God].”

Faith. Faith is the first prerequisite. We can not do any good by moping about saying, “Oh ain’t it awful!” Yes, it is bad, but it is not that bad. We are not generally being beaten, killed, imprisoned, and sawed in half for our faith.

We need to stand firm if we want the devil to flee from us. We need to live up to the blue print that Christ laid out for us to follow. James the brother of Jesus said that faith without works is hollow. Jesus said, “Go forth and make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of Jesus Christ.”

In today’s gospel Jesus admits that this will probably cause some friction. Some members of your family or circle of friends may want you to lie low and keep your mouth shut. They may not want you to make waves by stating your beliefs. I understand where they are coming from and I am not saying that you need to stand on a soap box and loudly proclaim your beliefs. Don’t stand on a soap box but stand firm. Let your actions show your commitment as a Christian. Don’t do things

that Jesus would not do and don't be afraid to admit that your life actions are meant to be a reflection of your role model, Jesus Christ. Do little things like being a friend, going to church and in this wonderful country, exercise your right and responsibility to vote for a more God reflective government.

My sister was a Christian Missionary in Egypt. Egypt was a police state and if you proclaimed any religion other than the Muslim faith you could go to jail. The only thing that the missionaries could do was admit that they were Christian and try to live a life in such a manor that the locals would be impressed by it and turn to Christianity for the joy and peace it exhibited. See, it is possible for you to carry out the "Great Commission" of Christ.

For Christ to restore us and our land we have to be part of the cure. Being part of the cure, we can boldly and confidently say with the Psalmist, "Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, and we shall be saved."

Free will may be part of our problem but it also our opportunity for redemption.

Restore us, O Lord God and we will praise you forever.

Hallelujah and Amen!