

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

August 4, 2024

Old Testament Reading; Exodus 16: 2-4, 9-15

Responsive Reading: Psalm 78: 23-29

Epistle Reading; Ephesians 4: 1-16

Gospel Reading: John 6: 24-35

Sermon:

One Is the Holiest Number

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: Three Dog Night had it wrong. One is only the loneliest number for those who don't know Jesus.

Three Dog Night got it wrong. Our song today got it right.

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord.

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord.

And we pray that all unity may one day be restored.

And they will know we are Christians by our love, by our love.

Yes, they will know we are Christians by our love.

In our Epistle reading Paul takes this holy emphasis on the number one even further when he says, “There is ONE body and ONE Spirit, just as you were called in ONE hope of your calling; ONE Lord, ONE faith, ONE baptism; ONE God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But to each ONE of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.

This message is about the number one. God is, or at least should be, number one to each and every one of us. It is God that created the universe and everything in it. It is God that created us and made us in His image. It is God that provides everything we have, to live on, and, each other to live with. God is the only creator, provider, Lord and Savior. God is the only Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the only three in ONE and ONE in three. It is Jesus that as the ONE in three of which Paul says, “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.” Jesus is the ONE who as God is the ONE that values each one of us. Jesus has something for each one of us. As Paul puts it, “to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s will.”

Let me dumb this down a little bit because I am getting confused by my own rhetoric. Jesus said that a good shepherd would leave the ninety-nine sheep to save the one that was lost. Jesus is not just concerned about the whole flock but

about each and every one of His sheep. We are His sheep. To Jesus you are just as important as the President of the United States or the Queen of England. (well I guess that would be King now but anywho). Paul says that “He (Jesus) is the ONE who ascended far above all the heavens that He might fulfill all things.” Jesus gave some to be special, like apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers and he should have also said, representatives of the ministry of the believers. (Um, that last one would be each and every one of the rest of us.) Paul says that Jesus is equipping each one of us to be able to fulfill the role that He has in mind for us. Jesus is making it possible for us to be ONE with Him, through the Holy Spirit, as He is ONE with the Father.

Our Old Testament, Psalm and Gospel readings today join together to show the ONEness of this Sunday’s message.

In the Exodus story, Moses called on the ONE God to provide Manna and Quail for the grumbling Hebrews. The Psalm extols the magnificent way that God provided for those people of Moses’s entourage. Finally the Gospel also refers to the Manna from Heaven incident but in this Jesus points out a major flaw in the religious scholars interpretation.

First off, Jesus sees the unholy self-indulgent attitude of this crowd. They did not see the feeding of the five thousand as a sign of a new order but as a way to get free food and maybe

satisfy some power cravings they had for Israel to become a super power. They compounded their stupidity by asking for “some work” that would make them believe. They brought up Moses and said that Moses gave their ancestors manna from heaven. Jesus quickly pointed out that Moses could do nothing on his own. Moses was not the ONE, God was and is the ONE. Now came the part that really had them stumped. They were entrenched in the teachings that the Kingdom of God would be a human superpower that could dominate other countries as other countries had dominated them in the past. Wrong!

They were looking for bread to fill the body which is a temporary thing and disregarding bread for the soul, a permanent thing.

People seeking a ticket to heaven have always looked for a difficult task that would earn them a boarding pass for that heaven-bound train. These people came right out and asked Jesus, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” The answer that Christ gave seems to us to be straight forward and easy to understand. Jesus said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”

When Jesus challenged them to seek the bread from God they asked Him to give them this bread. The answer that they received is the same answer we will receive at the end of this service. “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never

hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst,” We get to dine with the ONE who is our savior and friend. He is our ONE and only and to Him each one of us is His ONE and only.

One is the loneliest number you will ever know only if you do not know Jesus the living Christ and our friend and dining partner. Eat up. The bread of life is on Him

Hallelujah and Amen!