

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

September 1, 2024

Old Testament Reading; Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

Responsive Reading: Psalm 15

Epistle Reading; James 1: 17-27

Gospel Reading: Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Sermon: Where Did That Come From?

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: Listen to what God said, not what man manipulated.
i.e. Play Nice.

In our Old Testament reading Deuteronomy says, “For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?” “And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?” Later in this same book Deuteronomy 30:11-14, it says, “For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you

should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' "Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?'" "But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it."

What is this "law" or "commandment" that is able to make a nation great, I mean really great, like knock your socks off great?

It ain't that hard! It is ten simple common-sense rules that anyone can understand and do, and you can believe it because it comes straight from the horse's mouth. Let's see if I can present them.

First, Love the Lord your God. Hey, He is the one. He is the guy that created it and us. If we are getting these straight from the horse's mouth, then He is the horse.

Second, don't fool around and make or worship fake gods because you might tick off the real thing.

Third, while we are trying not to tick off the real thing, we probably should not dishonor Him by cursing or by using Him to validate our own, maybe less than true, statements.

Fourth, remember the sabbath day and keep it holy, that is take a break to be thankful. It should be a gift not a torture.

Fifth, Honor you father and mother. This means learn from history and respect people that might know more than you do. Yeah, like if your parents were great then that is what you want to be, and if they weren't so great, well learn from that too.

Number six, don't murder, Dah! Don't kill innocent people.

Number seven, Adultery, don't do it. It hurts so many people that it is never worth it.

Eight, you shall not steal. Hey, play nice and you won't get in wrong with the other kids or the "Teacher". Share!

Nine, don't bear false witness, i.e. if you don't lie people will trust you and like you. Trust is a good thing!

Finally number ten, Don't covet. This does not even mean do not try to keep up with the Joneses, this means don't try to get ahead of the Joneses and then rub it in their faces. Be nice!

That is it. Not so tough. With little children we sum up this whole "commandment" with, "Play nice and listen to your teacher." Too bad so many adults can't comprehend this.

If our nation, be it Israel in the text or America today, could only follow these precepts we could be a nation that would really stand out in the world picture.

This is what Jesus was dealing with in our Gospel lesson today. The religious leaders of the day were so obsessed with

following the man-made amendments to God's law that they were totally missing the point of the law in the first place.

God gave us His laws so that we could live in harmony with each other, not to burden us and make us feel unworthy.

In our Gospel the disciples were not being criticized for having dirty hands but rather that they did not wash them in the ceremonial way the leaders professed. This was not a new problem. Jesus quoted Isaiah when He said "This people honors Me with their lips. But their heart is far from Me. In vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

Did you catch that? "Teaching as doctrines the commandments of MEN."

Jesus then said that nothing that goes into the body defiles the body, oh some things will make you sick, but the body is only defiled by what comes out. I think that was covered by 1 through 10. Jesus spoke of hurtful things that can come out of the body and in our Epistle James takes it one step further by pointing out how things that come out from someone can also glorify the body. "Be doers of the word and not just hearers of the word." This in no way goes against the teachings of Jesus. In Mathew 5:16 Jesus says, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father in Heaven,"

Our Psalm reading preemptory echoes this when it says, “Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your Holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart, He who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil and so forth.

The reaction of the religious leaders to the corrections of Jesus might well have been, “Where did that come from!?” AND my reaction to them would be, “That came from God. That came from the horse’s mouth, and I am a lot more interested in what comes from the horse’s mouth than what comes from the other end!”

If we want this nation to be a role model for other nations, then we need to learn to listen to the Teacher and play nice and then later, we can all share milk and cookies in heaven with Jesus. Hallelujah and Amen!