

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ  
September 20, 2020

Old Testament Reading; Jonah 3:10-4:11

Responsive Reading; Psalm 145:1-8

Epistle Reading; Philippians 1:21-30

Gospel Reading; Matthew 20:1-16

Sermon Title:

### **His Greatness Is Unsearchable**

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: Should the punishment fit the crime, and reward reflect the accomplishment? Or, should punishment and reward be the product of God's love?

Today we have two scriptures that go directly against the theory of Karma. i.e. You get what you deserve, and, what goes around comes around.

In the passage from Jonah, Nineveh deserved to be destroyed and in Matthew the workers that only worked one hour certainly did not deserve to be paid a full day's wages. So, what gives? The teaching value of both of these passages is immeasurable.

Jonah is directed by the Lord to go to Nineveh to “cry out against that great city”. Jonah disobeys. Why? Was Jonah afraid that those “evil” people would kill him? Did Jonah think it would be a waste of time because people who were that bad could not change? “A Leopard never changes its spots.”

No!

Jonah did not go because he wanted Nineveh to get what it deserved. Nineveh was a pagan city, and not only a pagan city but a “really bad” pagan city. Jonah was afraid that if he went to Nineveh and told them where the bear put it in the Buckwheat, they just might repent. So, Jonah tried to run away from God. That don’t work and I know because I tried to do that very thing. When Jonah found himself in the belly of the fish, he realized how wrong he had been to try to defy God and he prayed the exact prayer that I prayed some thirty-five years ago.

Hear the prayer that Jonah and I share.

“I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, and He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried. And You heard my voice. For you cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the floods surrounded me; All Your billows and Your waves passed over me. Then I said, ‘I have been cast out of Your sight; Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.’ The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; The deep closed

around me; Weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the moorings of the mountains; The earth with its bars closed behind me forever; Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God. ‘When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; And my prayer went up you You, Into Your holy temple.’”

Jonah went to Nineveh and I went on to become a minister.

The passage we read was after God told Jonah that He was not going to destroy Nineveh and Jonah threw a hissy fit. Because he thought that God should still destroy Nineveh he went and got a ring side seat to watch the fireworks. God set him up with a shade bush and then destroyed it. God pointed out to Jonah that he had more sympathy for a stupid bush than he had for a city of a hundred and twenty thousand child like citizens that did not know any better.

God gave Nineveh the forgiveness it needed not the punishment it deserved.

In our gospel lesson the landowner goes out to the local unemployment line and makes a deal with the people there to work for the going rate of a denarius a day. About three hours later he goes out again and hires more workers and just tells them that he will give them a “fair” wage. This happens again in another three hours and again when there was only one hour left to work. Finally, at pay up time he pays them all one

denarius for their work. The ones that worked all day were P.O.ed because they did not think it was fair.

There are two lessons to learn here. First, if you strike a deal with God you will never get as much as if you just offer to take whatever God is willing to give you. Second, God will give you what you need. He is not going to make you rich but He will give you what you need. In the Lord's prayer we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

The landowner is really special to care that much for the people who were unfortunate enough not to have found work after waiting in line all day. Those who worked all day should thank their lucky stars that the landowner is that benevolent and be glad to do whatever they could do to help him to be able to continue that kind of generosity.

How many times do we want the criminal or pedophile to really get hit with a heavy punishment sentence? How often do we look down our noses at someone that gets welfare without even caring if it is not their fault?

We are created in God's image. We should be more like him. We need to be good to people. The Bible tells us to take care of the widow and the orphan, that is people that can not pay us back or too young to understand the concept. The other thing is that we should never want people to get what they deserve. We all deserved to die on a cross but because our landowner

sent his son to take our place none of us who believe will ever get what we deserve. Let us be better. Hallelujah and Amen.