

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

September 3, 2017 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Old Testament Reading; Jeremiah 15: 15-21

Responsive Reading; Psalm 26: 1-8

Epistle Reading; Romans 12: 9-21

Gospel Reading; Matthew 16: 21-28

Sermon Title: YOU DON'T DOUSE A FIRE WITH GASOLINE

Summary: An explosion burns everyone but a guilty conscience only burns the guilty.

The last time I preached my sermon title was, "It's That Easy".

Confess with your lips and believe with your heart and you will be saved. It is that easy. There is no difficult route to salvation.

Today's scripture readings are the ones the pessimists look to and say, "There, I told you it is not as easy as you make it out to be."

The Old Testament reading says, "Why do I keep suffering? Why are my wounds incurable? Why won't they heal? Do you intend to disappoint me like a stream that goes dry in the summer?"

Then God says that you have to come back to me, stop talking nonsense, proclaim me, and I will make you into a wall that gets

the heck beat out of it but won't fall. Oh goody, goody. That sounds like fun.

The Epistle reading spells out a whole bunch of things to do that do not seem all that easy.

Love everyone warmly even if they are jerks. Show them all respect [even if you don't think they deserve it].

Be patient in your troubles.

Work hard and don't be lazy.

Share your belongings [you know those belongings that you worked hard for and they are yours!] Yeah, share them.

Ask God to bless those that persecute you and do not curse, i.e. when you are really mad at someone say God bless you and not God [bleep} you, and so on.

Then the Gospel adds insult to injury saying that if you want to follow me deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow me, be willing to die for me in a heartbeat or you will lose your soul no matter how good you tried to be.

Oh yeah that sounds easy. Yeah, right!

It is enough to make you doubt the saying written on the side of ice cream hauling tractor trailers that say, "Life is just a bowl of Perry's".

It is enough to make you want to look again at our Psalm reading for today.

Declare me innocent, O Lord, because I do what is right and trust you completely.

Examine me and test me, Lord; judge my desires and thoughts.

Your constant love is my guide; your faithfulness always leads me.

I do not keep company with worthless people; I have nothing to do with hypocrites.

I hate the company of the evil and avoid the wicked.

Lord, I wash my hands to show that I am innocent and march in worship around your altar.

I sing a hymn of thanksgiving and tell of all your wonderful deeds.

I love the house where you live O Lord, the place where your glory dwells.

Notice that this Psalm does not say that I do not have any troubles in my life. This Psalm says that I love and trust the Lord and do not do things that would make my life less desirable than it is.

I do not absorb negativity by hanging with negative people,

worthless people, hypocrites, evil or wicked people. God will help me through my troubles if I do not make it worse by making poor choices in the company I keep. All of Lot's troubles came because he pitched his tents too close to Sodom and Gomorrah.

A few years ago I gave a children's sermon where I told of my dog Sampson coming to me when he felt a seizure coming on. While his senses were still functioning I took him in my lap and petted him and spoke gently to him. After the seizure he could not lick me enough. I was not able to stop the seizure but I was able to love him through it. That is just what God does for us when we are going through hard times. The Psalmist recognizes this and praises God for it. Hard times can be good times when you are in the loving arms of God your father and comforter. Several of us in this church know this all too well.

Back in medieval times if a knight wanted to start a fight he threw down his glove or what was called his gauntlet. If another knight picked it up the fight was on but if it was left on the ground it was all over before it began.

They say that the problem with arguing with a fool is that anyone witnessing it will not be able to tell which one is the fool.

Paul speaks to this when he says, "Try to do what everyone considers good. Do everything possible on your part to live in

peace with everybody.

Notice he only says everything possible and he recognizes that sometimes it is not possible.

Anywho," Never take revenge my friends, but instead let God's anger do it. For the scripture says "vengeance is mine says the Lord. Instead if your enemy is hungry feed him and if he is thirsty give him something to drink, for by doing so you will heap burning coals on their heads,[or as our version says] this will make them burn with shame."

Hence the title of my message, you don't douse a fire by throwing gasoline on it.

If someone insults you or says something that makes you angry reacting in a negative manner is like trying to put out a fire by throwing gas on it. If you want to have an impact react with love and gentleness. This is not hard. This is just that easy and to boot it is fun. Love wins, God wins and when God is in your actions you win. It is that easy and it is fun too.

Hallelujah and amen.