

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

September 4, 2022

Old Testament Reading; Deuteronomy 30: 15-20

Responsive Reading; Psalm 1

Epistle Reading; Philemon 1-21

Gospel Reading; Luke 14: 25-33

Sermon Title:

Wake Up

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary; It is the job of the alarm clock to wake you up, NOT to make you happy.

Back when I was a teenager, I took an Agriculture course in high school. The teacher told us a story of a case when one farmer bought a mule from another farmer. The one selling the mule said that all the buyer had to do to get the mule to work was to whisper the instructions in the mule's ear and the mule would do whatever it was told to do. The first day that the farmer had his new mule he tried this out. He whispered in the mule's ear and the mule just stood there. Upset, he called the seller and

the seller came right over. The first thing the seller did was to take a big 2x4 and smack the mule right in the head. He then proceeded to whisper the instructions in the mule's ear and the mule did exactly what it was told to do. The buyer proceeded to complain that all he was told to do was whisper in the mule's ear, to which the seller said, "Well sure, but first you have to get its attention."

I think that most of the time God has the same problem with us. Time and time again He whispers in our ears what we should do and it just goes in one ear and out the other.

In our Old Testament reading God lays out a simple guide line for how we may have a good life. To get the full beauty of this message we really need to also read the verses just preceding this. Verses 11 through 14 say, "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, 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."

I often say that I believe the most powerful verse in the Bible is, "Jesus Wept". I also believe that Deuteronomy 30: 11-19 may

be the most beautiful guide for a God filled life anywhere in this great book.

God is whispering in our ears that to have a beautiful life is to walk with Him and He will get us through anything we face. He also says that if we don't then all bets are off.

Psalm 1, tells us what our mothers and fathers have been telling us all our lives. Psalm 1 tells us to be careful who we choose as friends. The wrong choices will lead to temptations and guilt by association.

Now the last of the "people whispers" in today's readings is Paul. In the book of Philemon, we find a one-chapter book that shows the importance of forgiveness in our everyday lives. Paul is writing to one of Paul's converts. Philemon has become a great ambassador for Christ. Philemon also had a slave that ran away from him and probably absconded with money or other valuables that belonged to Philemon. Onesimus happened to meet Paul in Rome and became a serious convert that served as a wonderful and helpful friend of Paul as Paul was in custody in Rome. Paul could have instructed Philemon to forgive Onesimus and kept Onesimus around to help him but Paul did not want people to do God's will under orders but voluntarily forgive and accept. Paul told Philemon that even if this slave had wronged him Onesimus was now not just a slave but a brother in Christ and therefore extremely valuable to the work

that Philemon was doing for Christ. Paul even told Philemon that if Onesimus owed him anything Philemon was to put that on Paul's account. Paul ended up saying that he knew that Philemon would do better than Paul had asked him to do.

I know this can work because Wanda and I have taken in teenagers out of jail, out of prison and off the street and we have been blessed beyond measure.

Now we come to the 2x4.

And Jesus said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple".

SMACK! You just got hit in the head with a 2x4. Are you awake now?

OK, now that you are awake let's set the record straight. Jesus would never want anyone to have a bitter hatred in their hearts against their mother, father, brothers, or sisters, so there is obviously something else going on here.

Three possibilities come to mind right off.

Number one; the word hate had a different meaning in biblical times. In the Old Testament story on Isaac and his sons, Esau and Jacob. It is said, "Isaac loved Esau but hated Jacob."

Isaac did not “hate” Jacob as we think of it. It is just that Isaac had more in common with Esau than he did with Jacob. Esau was an outdoors man, while Jacob was more of a business man [albeit a scoundrel]. Some scholars define the word hate in the bible to mean, “to love to a lesser extent”.

The second explanation is that Jesus was trying to emphasize the difference between love between people and the love between man and God is so different that it is as far apart as hate is from love.

The third explanation is that sometimes Jesus would hit you in the head with a 2x4 to get your attention. He would shock you so much that you would feel compelled to stop and rethink what you just heard. Another example of this is the whole, “You have to be born again” thing. Once we rethink it, it makes perfect sense.

In our Bible study group Don often presents several different interpretations of scripture and then expresses which one he favors but leaves the other options open for individual interpretation. In this case I ascribe to the first one, “Hate is to love to a lesser extent”. It just seems to fit with other scriptures better for me.

On the other hand, you might want to think about the title and summary of this message.

Title; Wake Up. Summary; It is the job of an alarm clock to wake you up, not, to make you happy. Now that you are awake, take up your cross and follow Jesus. Hallelujah and Amen