Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

December 1, 2019

Old Testament Reading; Isaiah 2: 1-5

Responsive Reading; Psalm 122

Epistle Reading; Romans 13: 11-14

Gospel Reading; Matthew 24: 36-44

Sermon Title: BE READY

Summary: We were put here to do good things. Be ready to DO good things and to ENDURE all things.

We started this first Sunday of advent by lighting the candle of Hope.

Hear God’s promise of hope: Faithful God, out of war’s chaos, you bring the order of peace. Renew us in hope, that we may work toward Christ’s advent of peace among all nations. God of promise, God of hope, into our darkness come.

In our old testament lesson Isaiah spoke to this hope by saying: Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore.

We need to remember at the time of Isaiah the Jews were in exile, Jerusalem had been sacked and the Temple, the center of Jewish life, had been destroyed.

These were not “The best of times and the worst of times”, these were the “worst of times and worse than the worst of times”. These times really sucked. Only a total idiot or a true man of God could possibly prophesy a coming utopia.

Our responsive reading tells of what Isaiah is envisioning; “Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together, Where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, To the Testimony of Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, Prosperity within your palaces.”

I used to wonder why we Christians would rehash the prophesy of the end days as we prepared for the glorious joy of celebrating the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Why think about the end of the world as we prepare to celebrate the start of our walk with the God/Man Jesus who came down from heaven, put on flesh and blood and walked with us, talked with us and gave us a first hand introduction to our loving Father in Heaven.

In our Gospel lesson Jesus says “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.”

Jesus goes on to say that in the days of Noah, people were totally oblivious to what was about to happen. Life went on as usual right up to when live ended as was not usual. He says we should more aware and not get caught like the master of the house who got surprised by a burglar. “Therefore, you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

Like the days of Isaiah things are not all peaches and cream. North Korea and Iran are still perfecting nuclear weapons. Never Trumpers and MAGA hats are not ready to kiss and make up. Pro Choice and Pro Life are still squaring off as are Evangelicals and the Atheist Republic.

We are still stuck enduring a lot of drama, and it does not look like it is about to change.

When Jonah was sure that the great city of Nineveh was about to be destroyed by God, he picked a good spot under a shade tree to watch. Boy was he ticked off when it did not happen.

Neither Christ or Paul want us to “be ready” by setting up a good place to view the event.

Paul says, “The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”

In my summery for this message I said, “We were put here to do good things. Be ready to DO good things and to ENDURE all things.”

If we are going to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, we will have to endure unpleasant nature and politics and world events. We may, or may not agree with sanctuary cities but if we put on Jesus Christ, we can agree on sanctuary hearts. We can love because God first loved us. We may not be able to usher in the Kingdom of God but maybe we can use what God gave us to put down some blacktop to make it a smoother road for Jesus’s grand second entry.

Put on Jesus. Open your heart, extend your hand and put a leash on your tongue. God is waiting for us to wait for him and wait on each other. Do good and endure all!

Hallelujah and Amen