Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

December 9, 2018

Old Testament Reading; Malachi 3: 1-4

Responsive Reading; Luke 1: 68-79

Epistle Reading; Philippians 1: 3-11

Gospel Reading; Luke 3: 1-6

Sermon Title: AND YOU, CHILD, WILL BE CALLED

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: Ya you. Not the guy behind you. Not some guy named John, but you. You will be called.

I have chosen to use the word “preparation” for the second candle of advent over the traditional word “peace”. Although I am big on using the traditional for Advent and Christmas, preparation is an acceptable alternative and fits better with the scriptures used for this Sunday.

Christianity is not a spectator sport. We are not asked to sit on the sidelines and say, “Ooooh and Aww,” or clap and cheer. We are supposed to get involved.

Our Old Testament lesson is taken from a much-neglected minor prophet named Malachi. Malachi predicts the coming of the prophet Elijah, in Chapter 4 verse 5 Malachi says,” Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet.”

This is probably why the Pharisees ask John the Baptist if he is Elijah. What the Pharisees fail to recognize is that the preparation expected, for the return of Elijah, is for the hearts of the people to be changed. Chapter 4 verse 6 says, “And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”

Preparation, a “place” for Jesus and “hearts” for Jesus.

Our Gospel lesson shows John the Baptist “Preparing a way in the wilderness” for Jesus. By getting people to take an affirmative action toward preparing themselves for Jesus through baptism and repentance, obstacles are being removed. The road to the heart for Jesus becomes level and straight.

OK, this is a little over simplified but it sets the stage.

In Philippians Paul goes into a little more detail what this may really look like. Let me reread the Epistle lesson for you.

Philippians 1: 3-11: “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

Finally, from the responsive reading taken from Luke, the title of this message. “And you child will be called.” Completing this thought, “And you child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

The spirit of Elijah prepares the hearts of the people, “Turn the hearts of the fathers toward their children and the hearts of the children toward their fathers.”

John the Baptist prepares a place for Jesus, i.e. makes the hills level and the roads straight.

Paul is acting for Jesus and revealing that all Christians act with him their completion of “good works” started in them by Jesus, i.e. Partakers in grace, abounding in love, and a hunger for knowledge of Christ and a discernment that will help them to be filled with the fruits of righteousness.

As we make the lives of others richer by our witness to the precepts of Christ, Christ makes our lives richer. There is no greater gift we can receive then the gift of richness of life by being servants, friends and family of Jesus Christ, and extending that family membership to all who see us.

We prepare the way for Christ when we live as he would ask us to live. Actions speak louder than words. When we extend a helping hand or a pleasant smile. When we light up our neighborhood with a happy demeanor or maybe some Christmas lights. When we refrain from putting someone down that might deserve it and maybe toss a few coins in the Salvation Army red kettle