Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

September 29, 2019

Old Testament Reading; Jeremiah 32: 1-3a, 6-15

Responsive Reading; Psalm 91: 1-6, 14-16

Epistle Reading; 1 Timothy 6: 6-19

Gospel Reading; Luke 16: 19-31

Sermon Title: THIS TOO SHALL PASS

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: All things, good and bad, will pass. Only God remains the same, then, now, and always.

In our Old Testament reading things are in dire straights in Jerusalem. Babylon’s army had Jerusalem surrounded and the city was under siege. At that time, it was common practice that when an army had another at an extreme disadvantage the army that was about to be defeated could surrender and the residents would be allowed to live but if they fought and lost, the conquering army would often kill all the residents.

Jeremiah had prophesied that Judah would be defeated and therefore should surrender. This did not go over well with King Zedekiah so he had Jeremiah locked up in the court of the prison. While in prison Jeremiah had a vision in which the Lord told him that a relative would come to him and ask him to buy a parcel of land that was outside of the city. Land ownership was restricted to the family of the owner so no one would lose their family inheritance. This family ownership dated back to when Joshua split up the spoils of war with the 12 tribes of the Hebrews. It was a really big deal so it was protected by civil law.

To make a long story shorter, it happened. Jeremiah took this as a sign from God that in the future the land of Judah would revert back to the 12 tribes of Jacob. He very publicly bought the property and used that sale to reassure the people that things would eventually return to normal.

God was telling his people not to give up hope. God was saying that He had the situation under control and the coming defeat would not be the final end for the people of God.

In our responsive reading from the Psalms the author is urging the reader to have faith in God and believe that if he kept true to the faith the great God Almighty would then come through for him and or them.

Now likewise in the Epistle lesson Paul is telling his listeners that they should hold onto God and not put their trust in man or money. Paul does not say that money is bad but warns that the love of money might entice people to honor money above God. Paul encourages the rich not to be haughty and to give God the glory and God would come through for them just as he does for the common man.

This brings me to the title of this message. THIS TOO SHALL PASS. Other than God the only thing that never changes is the fact that everything changes. Good days will not last forever and neither will bad times. God is the only thing that never changes. God is the same, then, now and always.

Our gospel lesson is often thought to emphasize the existence of a heaven and hell. This may be so but I believe that the object of Jesus telling this story was to show that all things change and that not even death can prevent the inevitable. In life the rich man had everything and was not willing to share it. In death Lazarus had everything good and could not share it if he wanted to. God has already established right and wrong and if we can not learn from the past, we probably will never be able to learn.

Much like the Bible times we now live in very uncertain and frightening conditions. Politically things are a real mess. It seems that everybody is at everybody’s throat and reason is a myth.

If this message says anything to us, I think it is saying that we should take a deep breath and believe in our hearts that God has got this. Normality will return and this turmoil shall too pass. I also believe that this message does not speak to political things as much as to our relationship with God and our fellow man.

When I was growing up, I would often hear someone respond to a beautiful day in a stormy season and say, “We will pay for this later.” My mother would always become relatively upset at this. She would say that we never pay for a gift from God. We could have 365 terrible days so any good day was a gift and not something that we would have to pay for at a later date.

I was talking to a woman at the senior citizen home where I live and I asked how she was doing. She said, “Pretty good. Whenever I wake up and things are terrible, I thank God because I know that they have to get better.” I responded by saying that this was the theme of my sermon. I said, “When we have a good day, we should know that it will not last forever and so we should thank God for the gift. When we have a bad day, we should likewise know that this too shall pass and we should thank God for being there to help us get through it. God is the only thing that never changes.” I then said,” there you just got my sermon and I am not even going to pass the collection plate.” Tears started flowing from her eyes and she said that that was just what she needed to hear.

Obviously, that did not sound like an inspired message but sometimes when we are reminded of a simple truth about God’s love it hits home.

It is kind of like God is our rock. On a good day we can climb up on it and watch a beautiful sunset, and in a hurricane, we can hold on to it for our dear lives.

I guess what I am trying to say, and what I think the Bible is saying, is that things are pretty much the same now as they were in the time of Jeremiah. We are going to have good days and we are going to have bad days but we always have a wonderful loving God and GOD IS GOOD ALL THE TIME and GOD’S GOT THIS.

Hallelujah and Amen.