

**SERMON: “Sharing the Vision: ‘A Community Loving God by Loving our Neighbours.’”**

Rev. Geoff Ross. Sunday, Jan., 8, 2017. St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Brampton.

Over Christmas and New Year’s I did what anyone who reads too much for work when resting; I bought more books! [BS vs. PC!] I also caught up on several online blogs that I had fallen behind on. One ‘article’ – blog really by a classmate of mine – entitled “**6 Disruptive Church Trends that will Rule 2017.**” Like the other articles/blogs that seek to alert Church ‘leaders’ to the shifting sands of the world that has now entered a ‘post-Christendom era,’ this article boldly states, “*too many Church leaders are perfectly equipped to reach a world that no longer exists.*” But, unlike the majority of this type of writing Carey set out to not only identify the trends but to also offer some solutions. While the world has changed – and it has changed! – this isn’t altogether bad for the Church; but it won’t be easy either: being the “Church” in the future will take commitment.

The trends – the decline of ‘*consumer Christianity*’ and ‘*cool Church,*’ and the need to do what many Churches have forgotten how to do – reach out to the ‘*unchurched,*’ to practice what Jesus preached, to become authentic, loving communities, and to engage in/live out the commission to put their faith into action; to make the love of God, and loving God relevant by/through loving its neighbours – are broad and not new but Carey’s suggested ‘solution’ to them resonated with me. What Carey calls for isn’t new either; the Church needs to “*reformat and repent*” and to become “*more authentic, more selfless*” by returning to the Gospel which calls for us to die to ourselves/lose ourselves by living for Christ by loving God and by loving and reaching out to the world for which He died. Simply put, the Church will prevail by doing what God/Jesus commissioned it to do!

The reason this article resonated with me – and the reason why I took the time to mention it – is because this article speaks directly to what the Session here at St. Andrew's has been wrestling with: the navigating of a, now 170 year old, congregation through the turbulent times we’re in and that will come? In 2015 the Elders and I have been discerning, distilling, debating about what God’s purpose and plan for St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brampton is. The good news is that we truly believe that not only does God still have a purpose/plan for us, but also that God will bless us as we seek to be faithful to God’s commission for us!

As part of the process I used a book – **Canoeing the Mountains** by Tod Bolsinger, now vice-president for vocation and formation at Fuller Theological Seminary – that used as its premise the Lewis and Clark expedition to find a waterway to the Pacific Ocean from the Mississippi River at the beginning of the 1800’s as our ‘guide.’ The book is about how Lewis and Clark responded to the reality that the world they encountered was uncharted territory for which nothing they knew had prepared them for: they were a paddling expedition that ran into the Rocky Mountains! Tod’s challenge to the Church is stark: the Church must reorient, adapt, and recommit – or die. The key for Tod is that the

Church must return to its Mission (over method) – that the future of the Church was what created it in the first place: the Great/Christ Commandment!

The Great Commandment isn't new – and that's the point; in fact it's older than the Church – it's as old as creation. And it hasn't changed. Documented at least 5 times in all 4 Gospels (a clear sign of how important it was!) and, judging by how often it is repeated throughout the epistles by Peter, James, John (Jesus' disciples) and then by Paul, it's clear that Jesus' lessons about loving God (with all that we are) by loving our neighbour (with all that we have) took! As a result, embedded in the DNA – the essence of the Church – is love; which is why the Acts 2 Church is the template and standard for every Church since. The Acts 2 Church lived out its love for God by loving its neighbours and God blessed it and used it to reveal His glory to the world. What we see in the Acts reading is the 1<sup>st</sup> Church living out its faith – its commission, its love – by being “*doers of the word.*” (James 1:22)

John tells us that love requires passion and courage but it also takes full devotion, dedication, whole-hearted, hold nothing back commitment; without commitment, love cannot exist – and without love nothing can exist. The exchange of love is the basis of life – and of our relationship with God. This love first came from God – a love that created us out of love for love; Jesus then came to reveal that the heart of the Law is love – a love that lived and died for us; then the Holy Spirit came as the love that moves us to respond in love of/for God and for our neighbour. The command to love – to love God and to love our neighbours – is THE command for all followers of Jesus Christ to live out as a sign of their faith, it is what God created the Church to do; it is what God called/still calls us to do.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brampton is “***A community loving God by loving our neighbours.***” This is both our mission and vision for who we are – and strive to become – as a community of faith. Over the next 3 weeks we will hear how everything from our witness to this love by living it out fully in our worship and Bible studies, by putting our faith into action in our GRACE Groups or other groups, and by using God's gifts to bring others to Christ, all of this stems from this statement/command. This is why St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brampton was founded 170 years ago: may God's love move us to live it out for years to come! Amen.