

**SERMON: “Sharing the Vision: Learning together to know God’s love through worship & study.”**

Rev. Geoff Ross. Sunday, Jan., 15, 2017. St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Brampton.

Growing up, coming to Church wasn’t really an option; we seemed to be there every Sunday. While not exactly the first there, we got there on time but we were often the next to last to leave. One of the reasons why we were always cutting it close was not everyone was on the same schedule. [ad lib “You’re standing on it...”] Once we got there my mother and I went off to the choir room, my father to the ‘family pew,’ and my brother and sister to their Sunday School classes: Church was where we worshipped and studied. Then later, at home, over lunch, like the Acts 2 Church, we ate and talked about the sermon/Sunday School lesson. This was how I came to know and love God.

Last week we started our Epiphany series (“*Sharing the Vision*”) in which we are examining the new vision statement that the Session spent the past 16 months discerning and distilling what God’s purpose/plan for St. Andrew’s future is. Through this process we realized that to transition/prepare a 170 year old congregation for the future we didn’t have to reinvent the wheel; but instead was to reorient and recommit ourselves to the Church’s ‘prime directive’ – the Mission known as the ‘Christ Commandment’ that the Session adapted – “*A Community loving God by loving our neighbours.*” Today we shift to the supporting statements that outline how we are to live out this vision. Appropriately, the first statement emphasizes the primacy/importance of worship and our discipleship through the study of God’s Word to our relationship with God. (At St. Andrew’s we: “*Learn together to know God’s love through worship and study.*”)

[Look up Luke 4:16 p.872] How many here have heard of the acronym “WWJD?” For a while – about 15 years ago – “WWJD?” was everywhere and was meant to prompt you to ask yourself in any given situation “*What Would Jesus Do?*” all in the hope that you would act more like Jesus. [ad lib: excuses; “What would Jesus do?”] Well Jesus would/did go to Church; He took part in the service, prayed and worshipped. “WWJD?” was also a question that the Acts 2 Church leaders – the same disciples who went to synagogue/Church with Jesus – used to instruct the 1<sup>st</sup> generation of Christians on the importance of worship – and of worshipping together. Why? The early Church leaders were teaching that as Christians they were to live out Jesus’ teachings by living up to how He lived His life. [“*Jesus went back to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and as usual he went to the meeting place (Synagogue) on the Sabbath.*”]

I love this passage – it reminds of one of the most memorable places on our trip to Israel: the synagogue at Nazareth Village. [ad lib: Nazareth Village] It’s one of two places that changed my view of Church because village synagogues of this era were indeed “*the meeting place*” for everyone (m/f, y/o). This small building was the most important building in the village – it was not a segregated place but a space shared where they came as a community to know God together – and it was where they came to know/love each other. Later, not surprisingly, the Acts 2 Church was the locus of the community, the ‘Church’ was the place where people gathered to have all of their needs

met: it was THE place to go as they worshipped and studied God's Word. For Paul and Barnabas it was where they worshipped and taught others about Jesus in Antioch.

Then, as we do today, in worship, they gathered to tell/retell the story of God's plan/purpose for us – how we were created in God's image to live in right relationships with God and one another, and how through sin we now live in a fallen world in need of redemption. We worship God to remember and to rejoice in the story of God's love for us through Jesus Christ who came to save us through His death and resurrection restoring us before God's sight. Worship is meant to be a grateful response offered in humility and love. This is because, at its core, worship is about love. And because it's about love, our worship – and how we live out our faith as worship with our lives – is how we exhibit/express our relationship with God; it is literally our 'ascribing worth' to God. It is a response to God's love – a love given freely that gives/makes us worth/y before God – by returning to God our love first by offering ourselves then in/through our actions/relationships.

We gather together as the Church to praise God for what God has already done/is doing in our lives, to praise God – and to acknowledge God's lordship/place in our lives. Worship is a time/space/act in which, together, we offer ourselves in response to the One who created, redeems, and sustains us. By offering ourselves we commit to live what we profess. But, seen this way, worship and life/work are inseparable: it's not something we go to/do 1 hour a week, it's what we were/are created for/to do; our lives – all that we say and do is meant to be worship, something we give up to God. The worship of God and the study of God's ways are to be our first/primary acts as a people/community of faith seeking to live out its commission to show its love for God by loving our neighbours.

By proclaiming that at St. Andrew's we are committed to ***“Learn(ing) together to know God's love through worship and study.”*** reveals the importance/value/worth we place on worship; at St. Andrew's we gather to worship God out of our love for God and to learn how to live in right relationships with God and one another. This is not just the task of a few [ad lib: “You're the Minister!”] – it is the work of the Church/everyone. Jesus worshiped. His disciples attended the synagogue and studied the Word. Paul taught. The Acts 2 Church gathered daily to learn how they were to live out their lives faithfully. So should we. Amen.