

SERMON: “I Will: *From ‘I Am’ to ‘I Will.’*”

Rev. Geoff Ross. Sunday, May 7, 2017. St. Andrew’s, Presbyterian Church, Brampton.

[Parenting/“I’m bored....”/Boredom is a choice!]

And it’s true! Boredom is a choice – and so is happiness, contentment, and a sense of belonging. So much of what happens in our lives isn’t about what happens out there – as we heard in the introduction to the readings: out there in the world, the media, our culture – but is about what happens in here (head/heart); it’s about our response to what happens to/around us – it’s about our attitude. And attitude is a choice. In fact, it’s the choice that makes all the difference. Don’t believe me; let me ask you, ‘do you see the glass as half full or half empty?’

It’s a simple question – an idiom really – often used (according to the scrupulous editors of Wikipedia) rhetorically to determine an individual’s worldview – meaning how we see/perceive the world/people/objects around us. In other words, our choice of frame (how we see the water in the glass) both comes from our preconceived biases and reinforces our assumptions: we choose the frame and then allow it to be the frame through which we see the rest of the world.

Not to belabor this; psychologists and philosophers have long classified those who see the glass as half full as ‘optimists’ – and those who don’t as ‘pessimists’ (I’m not judging) – with the ‘optimists’ identified as being more hopeful, cheerful, positive and the ‘pessimists’ as being less of all of the above (again, I’m not judging). Agree or not, the one thing that’s true is that optimism creates hope/opportunity whereas pessimism kills it. They each become self-fulfilling worldviews, views that are lived out every day in/through every choice we make; the attitude we adopt affects every aspect of our lives – including our faith and how we put it into action. [Glass more-than-half-full guy/not just hope – faith/not just about me – you/us/God.]

As Colin mentioned in the introduction to the readings this morning, today is the launch of our annual faith in ACT!ON preaching series and congregational *grace@WORK* campaign. Over the next 5 weeks we will be examining how we can live up to the plan and purpose God has for us/longs for us to live out as a community of faith. And, as we start this series, I want to be clear about why we’re doing it. Over the past few years I’ve been asked that question by a few of you and the simple answer is; the DNA of the Church is service – serving God by serving others – and St. Andrew’s very existence depends on our choice or not to live up to this fundamental commission of putting our faith into action.

As you should know by now, the Session has been seeking to discern God’s ongoing plan and purpose for St. Andrew’s (Vision/Mission Statement/glass is more than half full) but one thing we know for certain, Churches that have shifted from the DNA of service to others have atrophied/withered, and died – and we don’t believe that this is what God wants for St. Andrew’s! But, like every organism/organization we’ve grown

comfortable/contented/complacent, (self)satisfied/selfish/self-serving: it happens (not judging); but, as we'll hear, we can choose to do something about it.

And the first place to start according to Paul is with our attitude. In the reading from Ephesians, Paul 'begs' us/followers of Christ to "*patiently put up with/love each other, and to try to keep our hearts united*" (NRSV: "*make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit*") telling us then that this is made possible because we "*are part of the same body.*" [Membership: Active/functioning not passive] For Paul, while the whole body/community supersedes the individual – bound/bonded together the whole is greater/stronger than its parts – the individual is still vital to the whole. But – and here's the essential/vital truth – you/I/we have to choose to be a part of that whole if the unity of the body is going to exist; we each have to choose to put the group/body/others before our needs. This doesn't happen accidentally, it requires intentional(choice) humility, gentleness, patience, love – and sacrifice.

The aim of every Christian – and Church – is to 'imitate'/be like Christ. Both the Ephesians and the Philippians reading call us to not only be like Jesus but to seek the same 'attitude'/"*thoughts*" as Jesus – a sacrificial attitude rooted in service over being served which understands that the greatest joy comes when we put others before ourselves – in here/out there/not even here yet – even if it means our own death. This is what the members of the Acts 2 Church/1st Century Church did – they heard the call to serve God by serving others – it is same the call we must respond to today by putting our faith into action. And, if we do this, we will be transformed.

[Baptism/Wedding – I Will/Do/Commitment. Choice/Live up to it – some do/don't.]

Thom Rainer – the author of the book "**I Will!**" that this series is based on – speaks directly to each of us; "*It's time. It's time for a decision. It's time for a Church membership revolution. ... It's time. Christ is calling all Church members to forsake self and to serve others for His sake.*" As we start our faith in ACT!ON series – and campaign – let us begin by making the commitment to change our attitude from 'I won't' to 'I will!' I invite you to decide to get involved, to shift from a 'me first/I am' attitude to an outward focused attitude that is focused on serving/meeting the needs others. I hope you will join with me as together we say, "I will put my faith into action, I will serve, I will go out, I will make a difference, and I will be the Church/St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brampton – in all I say and do as I serve in His Name. Amen.