

SERMON: “I Will: *I Will Serve.*”

Rev. Geoff Ross. Sunday, May 4, 2017. St. Andrew’s, Presbyterian Church, Brampton.

[last week – Said I Do/Will! Marriage/love – about saying I Serve...]

Open your pew Bibles to Philippians 2:1-10 (we heard this passage last week but it bears some expanded interpretation.) So much of what people expect me/Rebekah/Rosemary to stand up and say is that we are to do what Jesus would do – that we’re follow Jesus’ lead; and it’s true. The problem is, most people either don’t want to hear it, or don’t believe it: that’s true too. Last week we heard Paul in this letter ‘beg’ his listeners to take on the “attitude/thoughts” of Jesus: why? Because he wants us to make the same choice that Jesus made. But Paul also wants us to pay attention to what Jesus actually DID.

And what did Jesus do?” By using what many believe was a 1st Century creed describing Jesus’ role in God’s plan to restore/redeem His people, Paul says that what Jesus did is an example for all who follow Him. Jesus, says Paul, didn’t assume the mindset/attitude that because He was God he should Lord it over us; instead He chose to act by becoming a **servant** to those who couldn’t help themselves: He chose to be-with us, to die for us. This is what Jesus – the Son of God – did for us! He came to serve. Paul tells us that we are to have the same mindset as Jesus and that in our relationships, we are to “*give up everything and became a slave*” – that we are to serve others, our neighbours, those we know and (especially) those we don’t.

I guess the reason that the whole WWJD? thing happened was because people didn’t like Paul’s message! But a quick read through the New Testament reveals that the whole servant/serve message wasn’t a secret. Take today’s Matthew reading for example. After an exchange with James and Johns’ mother about her request to promote her sons to positions of status, Jesus “*calls them together*” to explain what it means to be His disciple. Turning it into a teachable moment about the stark difference between this world and God’s Kingdom, Jesus tells them what they already know about foreign rulers and other ‘great leaders’ who ‘order their people around’/Lord their power over them.

Then in the clearest statement about what the challenge is to be a Christ follower in a self-centred world, He warns them “*But don’t act like them.*” ‘Just the opposite’ He says; “*If you want to be great, you must serve others; If you want to be first, you must meet the needs of others first.*” Did you feel that thwack against their foreheads? Then, echoing Paul’s words, Jesus reveals Himself as the example for serving in God’s Kingdom – He chose to come to be-with us, He came to serve – as a servant, to give His life/die for us. Jesus said, “*I will serve*” and changed the world. He wants us to follow His example.

Thom Rainer, in his book **I Will!**, says that Churches today need a “serving revolution;” that the Church needs exercise, to get up and get out, to – essentially – put it’s faith into action. To this end he suggests a 90 day test during which members are to put others first by committing at least two hours a week to serving someone else by writing an

encouraging letter to members of the Armed Forces, visit and serve shut-ins, work at a local mission, clean or landscape around the Church, pick up trash in a local park, drop off food to the food bank. Sound familiar? It should.

What I like his suggestion is what he says next: the by-product of this “serving revolution” isn’t the work that will get done – although the kingdom would benefit from thousands of servant hours – but is the spiritual shift from being an “I Want” people to “I Will Serve” servants, a shift that brings us inline with the attitude/thoughts of Jesus; a shift that transform St. Andrew's from the inside out. This shift is simple – it takes an intentional choice to serve, to use the gifts we’ve been given (Romans reading), and then to doing it – but each of us must do it; we each must put our faith into action.

[Rocket Science/Just Show Up. Jesus Showed Up/Be-With God – Be-with Others.]

As Christians – as followers of a Be-With Lord – we are called to be God’s ‘first responders;’ chosen/gifted to be the first on hand/the scene wherever the world needs God’s love/hope/grace/presence. On a “Christian First Responders” Facebook page I found a post about the PTSD suffered by those who are first on the scene for the worst of life that drove this point home. On the post there was a picture of the badge with “Code 3” and “Isaiah 6:8” emblazoned on it, above and below a cross. “Code 3” is emergency service response code for “hot/emergency” – an active/volatile/evolving emergency. And “Isaiah 6:8”? [Look it up] And while you’re looking it up let me tell you that this verse comes during a dark period for God’s people and it reflects God’s desire to meet His people/children where their need was, so He decides to call for a prophet – a representative, a first responder: Isaiah, a man just like us. OK, let’s read it together. *“After this, I heard the Lord ask, ‘Is there anyone I can send? Will someone go for us?’ ‘I’ll go,’ I answered. ‘Send me!’”*

As we continue our faith in ACT!ON series – and campaign – answer God’s call, say “I will!” – “I will serve!” Choose. Make the commitment. Get involved. Sign up. Together let’s put our faith into action. Amen.