

SERMON: “I Will: *I Will Make a Difference.*”

Rev. Geoff Ross. Sunday, May 28, 2017. St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Brampton.

[Good to be back/Cottage/Always work/Ownership has responsibilities & sore back!]

Two weeks ago I talked about how the DNA of the Church is to serve – and how membership in the Church is defined by our participation – I talked about how there’s no “me/I” in the Body of Christ/Church/team; and I mentioned that the health of the Church – like that of any body – is in jeopardy because too many of its members are sitting on the sidelines/watching while others (80%/20%) do all the work. I’m not making this up – as someone asked me after Church – the reality is that Church health/vitality/decline is directly connected to the willingness of members to participate in the life – worship/prayer/congregational/financial/and community – and by pitting their faith into action. Faith is – and always has been – a physical activity, not atrophy; too much sitting around, waiting to be served, leads to lax/lazy/slack and sloppy habits and dis-ease that breeds discontent, disenchantment, disenfranchisement and disobedience to the commands and commission that Christ makes on the Church. Saying “I Will!” is important – but saying it means nothing if we don’t do it!

[fiA ‘stuff’/Internet: 16,393 ideas repurposed Pallets/Beds/Desks/Coffee Tables.]

(Question: Why do forklift operators not like puns? They find them unpalatable....)

The thing about pallets though, is they’re everywhere/millions of them, pretty plain/basic, and they were made for one purpose – to ship, stack, store, and move anything anywhere. After the pallet has served it’s purpose it might be reused; but if it’s old, worn out, or broken, it’s discarded. But do you know what? I don’t think the trees that were cut down and planked grew from seeds wanting to be pallets. Sure they wanted to be useful, but I think that they wanted to be more – wanted/of use/valued: I think they wanted to make a difference. But, as much as I love wood, I’m not talking about wood.

Our two readings speak to what I think is the two deepest desires each of us – in fact every human – has: to live purposely/to make a difference, and to feel fulfilled. The problem is too many of us don’t, living lives in futile unfulfilled frustration, feeling depressed and disillusioned, far from who we wanted to be/what our purpose is. The Ephesians reading makes it clear that “*God planned for us to do good things and to live as he has always wanted us to live.*” It also makes clear that God planned this as a “*gift to you*” so we could live life free from worry/constraint by living a life of faith in action: “*that’s why He sent Christ to make us what we are.*” The reading from Paul’s 2nd Letter to the Corinthians takes it further by telling us that what we are ‘made to do’ is to “*give*” – give freely/without compulsion, generously, joyfully – of ourselves – our gifts/talents/resources – not for our gain/glory but for God’s!

To be clear – and this is essential as a follower of Christ – Paul says clearly in the Ephesians reading that we are “*saved by faith in God*” and that this salvation is not based on “*anything you have done on your own – or earned.*” But he then says that we

were made – then saved – for a purpose: “*Good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.*” (NRSV) What this means is that God not only has a plan for us but has also prepared us for it; God has prepared the “*good things/works*” for us to do, and God wants us to do them for others. And we’re to do these things/works to please God by doing the tasks that God knows will meet our neighbours’ needs. This is the Christ Commandment in action: we show our love for God by loving our neighbours.

If we do this two things will happen. First, God’s plan/purpose for us will be fulfilled: we will have accomplished what God created us to do. Second, by fulfilling God’s plan/purpose we will enjoy God’s blessings. This is true for each of us as individuals – it is even truer for us as a congregation! And this is where Thom Rainer (author of the book “***I Will!***”) drives home his concern, and his challenge. As a Church consultant, commissioned to assess/assist congregations around the world, his assessment on the cause of Church decline is that the problem is not the “*institutional Church – or the denominations; the problem is me. And you.*” “*Denominations,*” he writes, “*are no stronger than their churches. And churches are no stronger than their members.*” Just as a body is weakened by a underperforming part/member so is Christ’s Body, the Church. The solution he says is clear; ***each*** of us must commit to shift from apathy to action. ***All*** of us must intentionally commit to say, “*I will make a difference*” and then let God use us to make it happen. This is how God does things; He starts small.

[Nail/H/R/B/K rhyme – small things/actions = BIG impacts/consequences. Starts w/ 1]

*For want of a nail, the shoe was lost;
For want of the shoe, the horse was lost;
For want of the horse, the rider was lost;
For want of the rider, the battle was lost;
For want of the battle, the kingdom was lost;
And all from the want of a horseshoe nail.*

As we near our faith in ACT!ON weekend (sign up/show up) make the decision to not only make a difference but to ***BE*** the difference. I believe that if you’re angry or bugged or upset or moved by something/anything that’s God’s way of directing you to change whatever it is – it’s God’s way of calling you out of your comfort zone and complacency to be the difference between the ‘way it has always been/nothing ever changes’ and God’s plan/purpose for this congregation/community/world. The Good News is that whatever you end up doing, it’s what God wanted/planned for you to do! But that’s not all: you will not be alone! God will give you all the strength you need (Phil 4:13) and will bless whatever you do to His glory. We are made for a purpose – to do God’s “*Good Works/Things*” – together, let us say, “*I will make a difference!*” Amen.