

SERMON: “I Will: *I Will Be the Church!*.”

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

[Great weekend! Thank you for putting your faith into action!]

In many ways it’s fitting that we end our faith in ACT!ON series on Pentecost Sunday because both are calls for us to live up to our calling by living transformed and faithful lives. And this isn’t because it makes for a good sermon series – it’s because it’s what God longs for us to do/how God longs for us to live/act/be as individuals/a congregation. Seen this way our ‘faith in ACT!ON’ campaign every year is like a prescription: it’s for our own good/for our improved health/it’s vital for our survival.

Thom Rainer calls for a shift from the “preference driven Church” to a “purpose driven Church” where the whole focus is on the needs of our neighbours and not on our own. I’ve said it before – and you’ll hear it again and again – “Church” is not about us; it’s about what Jesus did for us through His self-giving sacrifice and what we’re called to do with this gift of grace. Here’s a hint: we’re not supposed to keep it – we’re to give it away. It is only by giving away – or giving forward – the grace that we received freely through God’s love that we get our needs met. I call this the reciprocity (reciprocal relationship or act/involving mutual exchange) of grace: I look after you, you look after her, she looks after him, and he looks after me.... this is the way a community of faith – what a body, the Body of Christ – the Church functions. And it’s true. It was for the 1st Century Acts 2 Church; it is for us here, at St. Andrew's, Brampton, today.

And we do this because, as the recipients of grace, we know that all that we have/are is a gift from God, that membership in the body of Christ – the Church – is a gift; and that generosity begets generosity. But, to be honest, this level of self-awareness, takes humility: and every Christian since those who heard God’s Word in their ‘own language’ over 2000 years ago knows that our salvation is a gift – not something we earned – and that having received a gift, we should be joyous, grateful, and generous in response. And, I don’t know about you, but I can tell you that my greatest joy comes when I put others first – and as Christians there is no other source of our joy than showing our love for God by showing our love for our neighbours. Friends, when we serve – when we give our grace/gifts/resources/lives away – we are acting like Christ who gave Himself for us and we come to know the joy (His joy!) that came through serving. [Wonder Woman/I can save today; you must save tomorrow – love; give it away.] When we do this we become more and more like the Church we want to be, that we can be – that we are: a Church that lives up to its commission, that continues what the Holy Spirit started in an Upper Room with the disciples.

Throughout this series I have talked about how the DNA of the Church is to serve – that, and how membership in the Church is defined by our participation. Once again our reading from Paul’s 1st Letter to the Corinthians talks about the need for us to review our ‘interpretation/understanding’ of what ‘membership’ means: it’s not membership as in check in, get pampered, chalk up reward points; it’s membership as in being a member

of something bigger than yourself, as in being connected and involved – belonging – to others/to one another. In a body, Paul tells us (as if we didn't know!), that when one part hurts the whole body suffers, that when a part is honoured the whole body is happy. This type of unity is essential because it keeps us focused on what's our collective/corporate purpose – that of worshiping/serving God. But for too many churches – and Christians – 'Church' is only something that they 'do' 1 hour a week!

["I do/Will"/wedding. Not a 1h/wk commitment. Paul/attitude/Church=Bride of Christ:no]

If there's one thing that that I hope this series has stressed it's this: Faith is – and always has been – a physical activity; it's not passive; it's not casual – ask Pakistani sisters and Brothers about how their faith in Jesus Christ is a life or death choice; it's not careless either. Our belief in Jesus Christ – our worshiping of the God of grace/love – is not something we just 'do' it's to be the priority – our full, undivided, totally committed, nothing else matters/is as important – in/to our lives. It is something that should inform and influence everything we say and do. Like living out your love for your husband/wife/children, it's time we loved God/Jesus Christ with as much joy/service/commitment. This series is over but the call/commission goes on. It's not enough to exercise only 1 month out of 12. Saying "I Will!" is important – but it'll mean nothing if we/I/you don't do it!

With the gift of God's Holy Spirit everything changed. Almost immediately the 1st Century believers started ministering, healing, teaching and preaching – putting into action what they had seen/heard/experienced; they became a community – a Church – (Acts reading) that practiced its faith, transformed lives, and changed the world. This is why we read these passages every Pentecost; they remind us of who and what we are: a community committed to loving God by loving our neighbours (GRACE Groups), to learning together to know God's love through worship and study, to putting our faith into action by loving and caring for each other, and to using God's gifts to go forth to bring others to Christ. The first Church did this – they were the church. This week/weekend we did it too, we said "I Will!" – we chose to be put our faith into action, to be the Body of Christ, to be the Church. Amen.