

SERMON: “CHOICES: Start Now.”

Rev. Geoff Ross: St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brampton, Sun., Sept., 10, 2017

Welcome to September; and welcome ‘back’! It’s good to be here – that you’re here. I’ve been anxious to get back – and to get into this series – because as long as I can remember I’ve believed that the choices that we make define us. They chart the course of our life/lives. They can reinforce our true trajectory, or they can shift our bearings leaving us in uncharted waters. It’s not often the big, obvious, ‘black/white’ decisions that end up being the life-altering choices; it’s the smaller, less obvious/unconscious choices – decisions you hardly know you’re making – that ultimately add up/compound to derail/wreck our lives. And I’ve also believed that the choice of which direction our lives will take/who we will become/who we are is up to us/me/you.

[All have choice stories: Big/Small/Inconsequential/Big Impact – who we are. “Yes!”]

If there’s one thing I’ve learned over 20 years of ministry, it’s that our “life story” can be boiled down to a simple choice: whether or not we made the choice to believe in/have faith in/trust/follow God’s plan/purpose for us? I believe that this THE choice we all have to make: do we follow God’s course for our life or not? Do we choose to accept God’s saving plan/promise for us? Or do we choose not to and – as Isaiah writes; *“like sheep [we go] astray; we ... turn to our own way”*? All we have to do is choose. It sounds pretty simple; but, as each of us can attest, it’s not easy. That’s the problem.

Don’t get me wrong: God wants us to choose – it’s that simple; but choosing is only the beginning. While the choice is there before us it is often hidden or obscured by distractions designed to lead us astray. The truth is this: God created us in His image – to be Holy and to live lives of purpose to His glory. This all changed with the bite of an apple in the Garden of Eden that ruptured our relationship with God. But God’s love for us remained, and God planned/promised to restore our relationship – but at a cost: for us, to Him.

The readings we heard this morning highlight God’s hope – and God’s plan; that we would not only want to choose to believe/have faith in/trust/follow God’s plan/promise for us, but that we would do so by choosing to live out our created purpose. In the first reading Moses, knowing he is dying, is once again teaching the People of God the importance of choosing to live faithfully. Why? Because, even after 40 years of tough love and learning faith/trust the hard way, the People needed one more reminder of what the choice was, and what the consequences of their decision would be: the choice between life/the blessings of obedience or death/the curse of disobedience.

Starting back in chapter 28, Moses lists the “blessings” for those who are faithful/obedient. In some of the best poetry in the Bible, Moses describes the length and breadth of God’s promised favour. Then, in verse 15, Moses reveals the condition for the blessings: we must choose to obey/keep/remain faithful/follow God’s ways. *“But”* says Moses, *“if you will not obey the LORD your God ...then all these curses shall come*

upon you and overtake you,” (Deut 28: 15) and then for the next 53 verses he itemizes the curses in frightening/horrific/disastrous detail. As a “Pro/Con” list Moses’ last words/warning is pretty convincing; it wasn’t.

Thankfully, the Good News is, that’s not the end of the story: from the beginning, God knew what was going to happen. Our choice to disobey didn’t/doesn’t surprise God since He knew disobedience was/is our fatal weakness: but God also knew that we would need help – that we would need the saving work of the cross if we were to become who we were created to be. [The second reading] This is where the second half of the verse from Isaiah comes in: “*And the Lord has laid on him/Jesus the iniquity of us all.*” (Isaiah 53:6) God’s grace in/through His Son, Jesus Christ – through His death for us/our sins – offers to us forgiveness for the past/yesterday/mistakes: Friends, our God is a God of today and tomorrow who offers us a new life/to be made clean/born anew.

[Divine plan/Direction for each of us – see it or not]

In closing, as I said earlier, the making a choice will require a cost – our humbling ourselves to/acceptance of God’s plan for us. For some it won’t be easy – but for all of us it will take commitment: it’ll require our taking responsibility for the choices we make – and the consequences. But God is with/for us. The underlying message of this series is that you are one decision away from making your best decision ever – from changing your life forever/from changing your future/eternity. God loves you so much that He lets you choose. The choice is yours. You can decide right now, wherever you are, no matter what you’ve done; you can choose to allow God – the finisher of your faith – to help you complete what He created/called you to be. So, as we begin another Church year, let us make the choice! And, let’s start now! Amen.