

## **SERMON: “CHOICES: Stop.”**

Rev. Geoff Ross: St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brampton, Sun., Sept., 17, 2017

Last week we began a new preaching series – CHOICES – because, big and small, the choices we make define us; they chart the course of our life. And it's true: our choices add up/compound to either make or break our lives – they each have an impact on our lives/future/eternity. We also heard that the choice of which direction our lives will take/who we are/who we will become is up to us/me/you. After the service, a few people asked me why we're doing this series – one didn't think he had anything left to decide; the others thought that “making the right choice” was pretty obvious. The truth is; each one of us have choices ahead of us – our ‘story’, as we heard last week, isn't over and the choices we make today will change our tomorrow. And, even if it might seem obvious, who here couldn't benefit from being reminded that there is a Divine plan/Direction for your life – and that God/HS promised to guide us to that path?

But what about the choices that we've already made – the choices that went sideways, that didn't live up their promise, that ended up wrong/being the worst decision you ever made? Any of you made ones of those? I have: didn't feel good did it? Helpless/hopeless doesn't begin to describe the feeling. Maybe there are some of you who struggle with the belief that God truly loves you – the real/true/unvarnished you – that you're worthy of any kind of love/grace. This series is for all of us – each one of us here – because the Good News is that God not only has a Divine plan/Direction for each of us, but also forgives us our trespasses – when we've walked where we shouldn't have – forgiveness for our past/yesterdays/mistakes; grace beyond our deserving! We're doing this series because there are still choices to make: and for most of us these life-changing choices first require us to choose to stop – to stop the thing/habit that is keeping us from being/doing what we want/were created to be/do.

[Regret: Had a few. “Packed own lunch.” Look of the cake..../Apple.... Lost.]

One of the best known “biting off more than they could chew” stories aside from the Adam and Eve story that we heard a few minutes ago, is the parable told by Jesus of the Prodigal Son (Luke: 11-32) – who made some pretty bad choices/decided to ‘cash out’ his inheritance/blew it on what the NRSV describes aptly and pithily as “dissolute living” – otherwise known as the “highlife of wine, women, and song.” That is until the money ran out, followed by his so-called friends. Hungry and penniless, alone and far from home, he hit rock-bottom; so he “hired himself out” as a servant feeding pigs –envious of the slop they ate. [How low would/have you go/gone?]

From the first misstep – a fateful/misguided/rash choice to leave (maybe there was a promise of something more/bright lights/big city?) – the younger son, like countless others/you/me, tumbled down the road to regret lined with cascading ruins of relationships, reputation, respect – self/others – only to end up alone, “without a name, in the palace of his shame.” The fall is unnoticeable at first; the slippery slope imperceptible

– until it becomes a slide. It starts as it always does, with a bad choice. It gets worse as the effect/trajectory of that decision drives us further from our desired course, fueled – often – by our unwillingness to accept responsibility for our choices. Every choice we make – big/small, good/bad – affects aspects of our lives. How we respond – live out our choices – shapes who we become. But we don't have to end up lost; the Good News is that God has better plans for us! All we have to do is to stop!

[BT: Blazes/hard to see: had to stop/look around/back/to go forward: Came to himself.]

In the midst of the storms of our lives/world God commands that we “be still” to know Him. To be still means to stop. And it doesn't matter who we are/what we've done: God wants the best for us, and God wants us to make sure that our next choice/step is to return to Him. This is the Gospel truth: God planned from the Adam/Eve's fall to come to be with us in Jesus Christ to restore our relationship that was ruptured with the bite of an apple; He came in Jesus to redeem us – to pay our debt/s – to release us from an eternity in the grave of death to be free to live out eternity at God's side in a place prepared for us. And to help us find the way, Jesus promised that God's Holy Spirit/God's GPS to guide/warn us when we stray from our path – planned and prepared for us. The choice is ours/yours/mine. Friends, God is calling us to stop, to turn/return – to stop/let go of what we've been chasing/holding on to: so we can receive what God wants to give us. Chose life: for some it means to make the choice to stop. Amen.