

SERMON: “CHOICES: Stay.”

Rev. Geoff Ross: St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brampton, Sun., Sept., 24, 2017

[Growing up/Dream: Corridor of doors. 16: What do you want to be?]

So we're on week three of our preaching series – CHOICES – over which we've heard the choices we make define us: for good/bad, they chart the course of, make/break our life/future/eternity – that we “live or die with the choices that we make.” Last week we heard two things: first, that, for each of us, there are still choices to make; and that the first/best choice we can make is to stop the thing/habit that is keeping us from God/being who we were created to be. And it's true: God is calling us to stop, to turn/return so we can receive what God wants to give us. We ended with the Good News that God loves us and will forgive our ‘trespasses’ – our past/yesterdays/mistakes – offering us His amazing grace. We are lost but can be found, we only need to choose to be. But, as important as ‘stopping’ is, it's what we do next, after we've realized that we we're lost, that is the bigger choice: for some, that next choice is to stay.

Now, I want to be clear about what ‘staying’ isn't: it is not about staying out of obligation or by force; it's not about suffering, pain, abuse; it's not about coercion or constraint because I don't believe that God calls us to endure such things. Having said this, I also don't believe that God promised us a rose garden: life plays hard and we get knocked down sometimes. But, as the saying goes, ‘when the going gets tough the tough get going....’ Sometimes we need to be persistent, courageous, and faithful to get to where God is leading us; which is why often the choice to “stay” is the hardest – but right – choice. Seen this way, ‘staying’ means you're not quitting/giving up/in: it means you're staying the course, persevering, pressing on to complete what it is you were created/called/commissioned/saved to do.

[Fork in the road: Pick it up/YB Take it:Keep trying/Stay humble/Trust yourself/Act/Take it.]

If the story of the Prodigal Son was an example of how we all are to ‘stop/turn/return’, then the story of Ruth is the example in the Bible of making the choice to ‘stay.’ Ruth's story – her hardship/suffering/loss; her commitment/faithfulness/sacrifice to ‘stay’; her being a part of God's plan – is also our story. The story begins with heartbreak: Oprah and Ruth's husbands have died. A widow herself, Naomi offers to ‘free/release’ her two daughter-in-laws so they could return to their homes/families; an offer Oprah takes. Ruth chooses to stay, saying; “*Where you go, I will go; where you live, I will live.*” (NRSV Ruth 1:16c) Desperate, Naomi and Ruth head to Bethlehem and to Naomi's relative, Boaz, hoping he will let them work/serve for him for lodging and food. It's hard to see but by ‘staying’ is part of God's plan.

Boaz sees Ruth and feels compassion for her – and because he's heard of her loyalty to Naomi, he blesses her. (Staying/paying off) Later, after a number of unusual events, Boaz chooses to marry Ruth. Soon they are blessed with a son - Obed. Even after Ruth dies, her story doesn't end: from Ruth comes Obed, King David's Grandfather; from

David came Joseph, Mary's husband – Jesus' earthly/legal father. Without Ruth there'd be no Jesus – without Jesus there'd be no salvation. But this was God's plan. By staying Ruth's story became part of God's bigger story – God's plan for our salvation! What's God's plan for you?

[Plan A: Eng Prof/God: Other Plan. Now, No Plan B. – becoming/work in progress.]

Paul, in the reading this morning, talks about his story – how he hasn't 'reached his goal/isn't perfect' but that that's ok since we're all 'works in progress' – that God isn't finished with us yet because God's not a quitter: He didn't quit on His children – on Ruth/Paul/you/me/us – that's why He sent Jesus: He came/stayed/gave His blood to save us not to give up on us. Because of what Jesus has done, Paul tells us that he has chosen to 'run toward the goal/keep going in the direction' given to him by God – that he's chosen to stay the course.

And this is what Paul also tells us: God will guide/change/transform us through our race/story/life – which is why God wants you to finish strong/doesn't want you to give up/in. Even though things might not be clear/easy/simple – (another fork in the road/another choice to make) – chose to stay with God, to accept that God has a plan for you – formed before you were born/that guided your life/will play out after your last breath. Chose to trust God – the God who knows all there is to know about you. Chose to stay faithful when it would be easy to doubt and your story (like Ruth's) will be one in which your choice to live/glorify/honour God – to stay with God – ends up changing your eternity. Yes, sometimes, the decision to stay is the hardest choice to make, but don't give up: Don't. Give. Up. Make the right choice: Stay. Amen.