

## **SERMON: “CHOICES: Big Impact.”**

Rev. Geoff Ross: St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brampton, Sun., Oct., 15, 2017

Over the course of this series on CHOICES we've talked about how our choices can either make or break our lives: how they will determine our eternity. We've talked about 'Choices' because they're important – they make a difference; to you/me/everyone in our lives/those we might only meet today. We've talked about how choosing to 'start,' 'stop,' and to 'stay' the course of God's path/plan for your life is largely an internal decision/action – and how the last two choices to 'go,' and to 'serve' are, by their nature, external 'choices'/actions; but I would like to make something clear: each choice – in fact every choice we ever make – requires trust. It's our trust – in God/God's plan/promises – that enables us to hope; it is the foundation to our faith: it's what enables us to live with confidence. And who here doesn't want that? I know I do.

[Babies: So much before them – Pour into them like God does for us]

The problem is life is far from certain and offers no guarantees: From beginning to end and in between, the path of this life is winding/hazardous/thick with thorns to ensnare/catch/trap/bringing us down, hobble us with doubts/fears/despair. And, on our knees, this is where most of us are when that 'choice' must be made: that choice where our life is either won or lost. I mention this because each of us have/will find ourselves there and how we respond/the choice we make will come down to the simple question of whether or not we trust in God. And, yes, trust doesn't come easy – it takes courage – but I know it changes everything: trusting God is the choice that will change your tomorrow/eternity.

Again, this doesn't mean life's easy/smooth from there: no. One of the toughest questions I'm asked as a minister is, 'why does God cause/allow bad things to happen?' Some of you've asked it/I have. While I don't think that God causes bad things/storms/crisis to happen in our lives, I can honestly say that I know that God always uses them to test/temper/transform us. Stuck in the middle of the moment it is hard to see the good/God's plan but God is always/already there, “working all things for [our] good” (Rom 8:28), giving us “grace sufficient enough” to make us/our faith stronger. You don't have to be strong – you just need strength enough to choose trust/faith that/in God will turn you/your weakness/sins/mistakes/yesterdays into something that only God could do.

[India/Bhil: My/God's plan – Broken/changed/5 years later – Knox]

Paul's moment came at the height of his career/power/abilities on the Road to Damascus. A zealot for the legal letter of the Law, Saul was a bright/ambitious/ruthless defender of what he thought was right who persecuted those he believed had 'strayed.' In his pursuit of those who followed Jesus – even capturing and killing Stephen – Saul was feared, hated, and reviled. “*Breathing threats and murder against the disciples*” (Acts 9:1) Saul set off to Damascus where he met Jesus and the full transforming power

of God's grace/love offered him a choice and changed Saul's story into Paul's – a story chosen by God for him from before creation, all part of God's plan.

Did you hear it? Our reading – written years later, after many trials, hardships, difficulties, persecutions, and losses – is informed/inspired/filled/infused by the amazing grace/love that Paul experienced on that road. The wonder/joy of that moment is evident throughout his thinking/writing/preaching, it sustained and strengthened him, enabling him to do “*all things through Him that strengthens*” him. (Phil 4:13) Paul's hymn of joy to God – for what God has done for him/you/me/us, for choosing us, for the grace of our adoption, Jesus' choosing to live/die for us, for God's “*mysterious ways,*” and that all of this was all part of God's plan ... for us – could be our hymn too.

[2 talks: death/dying – not afraid/faith-trust. “*Who they were not what they did*” – God working through them.]

I believe that what is unclear to us now will, when we get to read over the story of our life, become clear, illuminated by God's plan/hand: steps on a dark path each choice leading into the next; how that decision to ‘start’ led to your becoming who God created you to be, that choice to ‘stop’ changed your life allowing you to fulfill God's dream for you, that choice to ‘stay’ on God's path helped to lead you to that job/career, by choosing to live obediently by ‘go’-ing where God led meant that you met the love of your life, and by giving of yourself by choosing to ‘serve’ enabled Christ to work through you to save/change/transform the life of that person you helped.

God's plan for you/me/all of us is that our lives will have a big impact. How do you want to be remembered? Friends, the choices that you made/will make add up to shape your future/eternity/life/story, how will yours end? The Good News is that your/our stories haven't finished yet; it's not too late to change it: God is offering you a new life/fresh start/rebirth/resurrection: grace. The choice is yours/ours.

Amen.