

SERMON: “Live Generously: The Reciprocity of Grace.”

Rev. Geoff Ross. Sunday, Nov 12, 2017. St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Brampton.

It has been a week of Remembrance that started off with our service last Sunday on which we read the St. Andrew's Honour Roll of those members who heard the call to serve and, in turn, paid the ultimate price by dying for us – a debt that can never be repaid. That was the context of the message from last Sunday – that we are to both remember those who gave their lives for ours and that we are to remain vigilant by living lives worthy of the sacrifices made on our behalf, of the gifts – freedom, peace, hope – given to us. But, as Christians, we are also to hear the call to live lives of service – and vigilance – lives changed, worthy of God’s saving action toward us in Christ’s crossing the universe to be with us and to die for us – as our first reading reminds us. But first, let me recap.

As we began our annual Stewardship series – entitled *LIVEGenerously* – two weeks ago, we heard what generations of faithful have known: we worship and serve a generous God – and, since we were created in the image of a loving/giving/generous God, we were created as/then called to be a generous people! We also heard the verse that defines/reveals God true loving/giving nature: that; *“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”* (John 3:16 NRSV) This is the foundation of living generously: but to live generously requires trust – faith/trust in that God will provide for us/our needs because God loves/gives – unreservedly/faithfully/generously. And it is this trust that frees us to not to live for ourselves, but to live generously for a generous God by loving and giving ourselves for others. Which brings us back to our first reading.

On the surface, this passage from Paul’s Letter to the Philippians doesn’t sound like a text for a Stewardship sermon: there’s no mention of time/talents/treasure or the other things we’ve come to associate with stewardship. There is no call to give, no guilt laden plea for your time. No, this is no mealy-mouthed appeal/apology: it is a full-blown declaration that a life of faith – a life as a child of God/follower of Christ – is a life of discipleship – life-giving sacrifice/service. Don’t get me wrong – while the giving of your gifts/time/talent/treasure to the church is important, the call to living generously/Godly stewardship goes far deeper: it goes to the heart of our relationship with God as recipients of God’s gift of grace through Jesus Christ. Seen this way stewardship cannot be separated from discipleship – both require complete faith/trust.

[PEI: I’m home/Catch me! Life/Faith requires leap of faith!]

At the heart of our call to discipleship/stewardship is a call to trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and follow him as Lord. As we heard two weeks ago, by God’s grace – given freely, out of love – we received the gift of Jesus: God gave first by giving of His own Son. And this is what we hear in Paul’s Letter; Jesus is God’s gift given to us who, in turn, calls us to give back to God by giving the gift of grace forward to our neighbours. By appealing to all Christians – then/today – Paul calls on us to imitate/be of the same

mind as Jesus, the gift given who gave of Himself. Friends, a life of faith/discipleship/stewardship is lived within the wheelhouse of this circle/reciprocity of grace: we seek to become more like Jesus by being more like Jesus, we give ourselves to God by giving to others the gift/grace that we received by living generously and sacrificially. But – and this is the crux of the matter – we don't. [Biggest enemy of generosity/fear.]

The second reading makes it clear: the circle/reciprocity of grace only works if we engage in the mutual exchange – the reciprocal act – of giving: selfishly keeping as/for ours/ourselves what God freely gave to us to give away breaks the circle; it breaks the trust/love needed to transform lives/others/world. God did not give us his love so that we could hold it for ourselves, but so we could share it with others. To do this we need to first focus on what God has done/is doing/will do. The starting point to loving/serving God – the beginning of our discipleship/of living a life changed by grace – is receiving God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

It is also the beginning of our stewardship – our living generously – as God's grace/Spirit works in/through us to do His will/work. Created by/in God's great giving/generous love – and saved through God's generous grace by Jesus – our existence/call/commission is all about being stewards, receivers/givers of God's love. We are who we are/identity/have because of God's free/generous/gracious gift: behind all that we say/do is meant to be the giving/sharing of God's love/grace. By letting God be God – and by letting/trusting God to use us by letting go of our fear – when we serve/love/give to others, following the example of Jesus – God blesses our service/sacrifice. Amen.