

SERMON: "Live Generously: Finding Balance."

Rev. Geoff Ross. Sunday, Nov 19, 2017. St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brampton.

[Reciprocity of grace/exchange of grace/love – see their face]

I've heard several people say lately that they're frazzled – that things are out of whack – is out of balance: and they're not alone. I feel that way – and, judging by the several million Google hits – so do a lot of people/you. The truth is we're the victims of our own choices – we chase the next new thing, want more than we need, desire what isn't ours: we voraciously want it all and complain about the effort it requires. I'm not sure which came first: the desire to consume or the consumerism/materialism that conditioned us to crave more? Either way we are caught in a cycle of consumption (in every meaning of the word) – that is both unsustainable and self-destructive.

The accelerated pace and demand for instant gratification has shrunk – if not erased – the boundaries between what was once private/public, personal/work, reality/fantasy. There's a growing "FOMO" – fear of missing out – since "YOLO" – you only live once – that is fuelled by fear: we feel insecure and vulnerable because the world/culture tells us that we somehow lack something. So we spend our lives reaching just beyond our grasp/means, reaching for the next goal/more, never happy/satisfied. I was reading an article in yesterday's Toronto Star about the anxiety felt by the rich and guess what; they have the same fears that those without money do: that they have everything but they feel like nothing at all/don't have enough! Some confess to envy those who are able to simply be content. It seems everyone is looking to find balance in his/her lives! And, as people of faith, Christians encumbered with burdens/worries/fears/needs, we're caught in a world we're not to be a part of.

[Pre-trip:Clothing store/another clothing store/money for money's sake]

I get it. The tension between living one way and believing another isn't new – and I live it too. It's passages like these that make people feel judged – that God is anti-money/wealth; that they will never measure up: what's the point? But I believe that the tension we feel when we hear passages that say; "*you shall have no other gods before me,*" and that "*no one can serve/be the slave of two masters ... you cannot serve both God and money*" (Mat 6:24); that we are not to "*love the world or anything that belongs to the world,*" that if we "*love the world, you cannot love the Father/God*" (1 John 2:15); offers us a chance to right our relationship with God, others, and ourselves. That dis-ease we feel with the excesses we succumb too – the longing/desire/yearning we have for contentment/peace/shalom – is our thirst/hunger/craving for balance, for the life God created/called/commissioned us to live.

[March 2013/#29 - #253! Balance beam/Straight&narrow. Hard/Play it safe:fearXfaith]

As Christians, at some point our fragile balancing act becomes a Faustian pact: our readings tell us this; there is no half measure – there is no measurement for love. The John passage acknowledges that we live in the world with its material needs and that being a Christian doesn't mean we are to ignore the world around us – or that by

attending to our needs means we love/conform to the world. It's when we live our life in pursuit of things that we do. In God's theology of enough there is no place for hoarding or greed where want outpaces need: in God's kingdom there is sufficient resources for the needs of everybody, not for the greed of a few. By striving "*first for the kingdom of God*" we find balance by living in/not of the world. This happens when we allow God's generous grace to reorient our hearts to His priorities not the world's – a life modeled by Jesus: one of humble service, unconditional love, total trust, and generous sacrifice.

But let's be clear: this balance/commitment is about much more than our relationship with material possessions. The lack of things doesn't make us holy/simple; belonging fully/completely to Christ – who simplifies – does. [Bhil Field/nothing/grateful faces.] Finding balance is less about what we have and more about why we have it and how we use it: God did not give us His gifts (love/grace/salvation/all that we enjoy) so that we would hoard it for ourselves; we've got to give it away/share it with others. By seeking/trusting God's priorities we see the world/others/ourselves differently/with empathy/compassion that moves us beyond ourselves to caring to sharing the generosity that we've received. If our first priority is to fearlessly imitate God/Jesus' sacrificial/other focused grace/love then it becomes easier to discern how much is 'enough' and to love generously with what God has given to us to give forward to others. Amen.