

SERMON: *“I Believe – because of the Gospel.”*

Rev. Geoff Ross Sunday, January 14, 2018. St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

[Christmas/NYE – Thank You! Sunday off/Worship: St.EUO –Cold!Standing!2hrs!]

As Regan mentioned in the introduction to the Bible readings, today we begin our Epiphany preaching series entitled “...*because of the Gospel*” – and today’s sermon was very much on my mind as she and I were worshipping at St. Elias. Watching the priests and other worship leaders, and following along with the worship liturgy, it was clear by what they did/said that the service wasn’t about us – it was about God.[JtB] Which is what it should be: worship is about God – not us. And, similarly, true worship – as a sign of our faith/belief – is not about anything we’ve done, it is because of what God has done for us. These days there’s a lot of talk about worship styles, being an ‘attractive’ Church – about music/architecture/tradition/minister – but being a Christian, going to worship, being faithful isn’t about any of that stuff; we believe because of the Gospel.

But what do we mean by “the Gospel”? I’m pretty sure most of you know but for the sake of this series I think it’s important to be on the same page. “*Gospel*” – translated from the Greek word “*ev-aggelion*” that literally means “*Good*” “*Angel*” – from which we get “*Herald*”. And what did ‘heralds’ bring? “*News*”. So, “*Gospel*” means “*Good News*.” And why is it good news? Our first reading tells us: The angels/heralds came tell the world the Good News that God’s promises of our salvation/redemption have come true. This is why we celebrate Christmas: with the incarnation – the coming to earth by God/Jesus in the form of a baby – God with us/for us/to save us. And, like any birth announcement; this was/is good, joyful, life/world changing news!

[ff: “*ev-aggelion*” – 23 x OT, 133 x NT: Gospel is good news/to be announced/shared]

While this might seem obvious, ‘news’ reports report events that have already happened: this is what the angels say to the shepherds – “*This very day (today) in King David’s hometown a Saviour was born for you.*” So the Good News is about something that’s already happened: that we’ve been saved. Did you catch that? Most don’t. Christianity is good news because it’s about something that already happened/been accomplished – that God has done for you/me/us – it’s not good advice about how we can do more/be better/buy/earn brownie points; it’s about what’s been done for you/me/us outside of us by/through God/God’s saving grace and love. It is a gift given/offered freely/that we’re invited to accept, but we live in a fallen world and we’ve even perverted something as good/pure/simple as the Gospel making it about us! [?Is worship/believe about you/your needs/you need to do or about God/what God has done?]

And what is this Good News/Gospel – what has God done? Paul, in the reading we just heard, tells us: “*The good news [Gospel] tells how God [reveals God’s righteousness] accepts everyone who has faith, but only those who have [through] faith.*” The good news/Gospel is God’s changing our status/standing by “accepting” us not because of anything we’ve done/works/acts but by our faith alone: we have been saved/rescued

from eternal exile into God's presence. This change in our relationship with God is all in what God has done in/through Jesus for us, not by us. By God's grace we have been 'made right' before/accepted by God: or as Paul writes; "*God loves you and has chosen you to be his very own people.*" Loved and chosen, changed/transformed by God's grace and love we respond not out of duty/obligation but with joy/gratitude/love, wanting to please/serve/worship the One who acted toward us. It's not about us but this is where we come in. [CBC: Ideas/Burden of freedom – Pay-it-forward]

I've heard it said that Christianity is always only one generation away of extinction unless it is passed on; and I believe that it is true, but only in the way that the game 'broken telephone' distorts the message until it's no longer recognizable. This is especially true for the Gospel. As Christians – especially living 2000 years after the resurrection (after all we are an Easter/resurrection people!) – we have an obligation to do two things: live out our response to the Gospel/Good News through our lives and, believing the Gospel is indeed Good News, we are to offer to the world what it truly needs; the gift of freedom. Paul writes about this in another letter: "*For freedom Christ has set us free.*" (Galatians 5:1-15) Set free we are free to respond by offering the good news of their freedom to others.

In closing, as we begin this series I want you to think about this: the simple, easy, powerful truth of the Gospel is that God saves sinners! God, the all-powerful Trinity alone, by love out of love, elected to choose/redeem/to save His fallen/sinful people from their death in sin to life in glory, sanctified/justified free to stand before God. God didn't have to but God did this for you/me/us. I don't know about you but to me this is Good News! I/we believe because of the Gospel. Amen.