

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

Rev. Geoff Ross Sunday, January 21, 2018. St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

[*“Set free”* – both readings: for hope/future/purpose – life honours God/good deeds.]

Last week I spoke about something that I called the “burden of freedom” – (CBC “Ideas” program: South-African woman/mother speaking about the need/burden of having to be aware of the past while looking to the future; living in the present but being both aware of the cost/price of her freedom and the cost/price that her son’s future freedom will require) because as Christians we have the same need/burden/impulse in response to the Gospel, the Good News of our salvation through/by God’s grace. And it’s true; God’s love/grace is a gift we were/are not worthy of or deserve – nor is it a gift we can even come close to repaying: it is in this awareness – that without God’s love/grace we are lost – we find our freedom as God’s saved children and the burden of living in response to the freedom we enjoy by being transformed because of the Gospel.

To recap: as James just said – and, as we learned last week – the word “*Gospel*” means “*good news.*” And, while we’re at it; “*Grace,*” in the simplest terms, can be understood as “*unmerited kindness.*” Together, Jesus’ Gospel of grace is God’s good news about his unmerited kindness towards us – which we heard can be summarized in three words: *God rescues sinners.* [Martin Luther: “*God justifies us through faith/felt reborn*”/set free. Gospel not a ‘law’ – Good News: that, accepted by God, not because of anything we’ve done but by our faith alone, we go from being lost to being found.] In other words, the Gospel is news about what God has done to reach us; it’s not – as it has become practiced – advice about what we must do to reach God. And what is this news? God, in/through Jesus Christ’s life/death/resurrection, entered the world to achieve a salvation that we could not achieve on our own – offering to us a ‘new life’ that transforms you/me/us and the whole of creation into who/what God intended us/it to be.

In the “*Parable of the Prodigal Son*”, the two brothers are us [ID with Y/son – in fact O/son] – and they serve as an allegory of how to live a life of faith: the ‘lost’ younger brother, by grace; the ‘good/dutiful’ older brother, by the law. As a lesson on how we are to live it is stark – (older brother is left lost outside) – but it is also a parable about the power of God’s grace/love: in the Gospel – as seen in the parable – we are simultaneously lost **and** loved. But it’s more than that; it is also a lesson on how we are to respond to God’s grace/love. Being simultaneously lost/loved, the younger son goes from pride to humility (knowing that he/we doesn’t deserve salvation) to confidence in knowing that in having experienced the saving grace/love of God that nothing can/will separate him from the love of God.

[Wedding: love/better people/accepts/transforms us into who we were/are meant to be.]

And this is the reason why the Gospel is Good News: that even though we are more flawed/sinful than we ever dared to admit, we are more loved/accepted than we ever dared to hope – at the same time. It’s about how Jesus lived/died to pay the penalty for the rebellious life we live. Because of this we have been reconciled/resolved before

God's judgement – an act that frees/saves us, that was done for us not by us, that is beyond our ability/doing/deserving – we “*are set free*”, “*chosen for His/God's purpose*” “*become like His own Son.*” To do this we can't just ‘accept/believe’ the Gospel, we must allow its power to change/transform us from the inside out. Looking at it this way we do not ‘get saved’ by believing the Gospel and then ‘grow’ by trying hard to live according to Biblical principles saying “*I obey, therefore I am accepted/transformed.*” The Gospel is that we are “*accepted/transformed through Christ, therefore I obey.*” Friends, the Gospel is not only the way to salvation, but also the way to grow/transformed into God's plan/purpose for us. The Gospel addresses our greatest need (salvation) and brings change/transformation to every area of life/lives.

But how does this transformation work/happen? As Paul wrote in both readings, the Good News is that by/in/through grace/love God not only sets us free/accepted us in Christ and treats us as redeemed/restored, but has also sent His Spirit into our hearts to shape us into a new person/creation. Paul tells us that it happens by/through God's acceptance/grace/love but that it isn't always easy – it's sometimes painful, like the pain of childbirth ushers in new life. In other words, the Gospel is not the goal of our faith; it is the means by which our accepting Christ/Christ's sacrifice – changes/transforms all that we say/do from the inside out. We/all/none of us are the people we want/were meant to be says Paul but because of his experience – and the saving/transforming work of Christ and the Holy Spirit for/in us – he also says “*if God is for us, who can be against us?*” Amen.