

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

Rev. Geoff Ross Sunday, January 28, 2018. St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

[3<sup>rd</sup> WK: Epiphany/Core – Distractions=focus – learning/reminding basic values.]

The Good News of the Gospel is that God sent His only Son - God saves sinners/beyond our deserving; and that is the whole point: God saves us – it’s only by God’s grace that we are saved not because of anything that we’ve done – or could do. Add to this: this Good News has already happened! And because it’s happened – that it’s something God has done for you/me/us – it’s not just advice about how we can do more/be better, it’s a gift; ours to accept. But because God loves us, this Good News also leads to our transformation. By God’s love unilaterally changing our status/standing – not because of our works/acts but by our faith alone – we were saved from an eternity in exile for an eternity in God’s presence: *“God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.”* (Rom 5:8) Even though we were lost God’s love found us, we went from being alone to being loved: by God’s grace we’ve been ‘made right’/justified before God. But there’s more.

The Good News is that *“God sent His only Son so that the world might be saved through Him”* but the ultimate goal of the Gospel is not just forgiveness – it is the restoration of our relationship with God. Friends, Jesus did not die only to forgive us our sins; forgiveness was/is a means to God’s end goal/plan. Think of it like this: when you have wronged your husband/wife and need forgiveness, the ultimate thing you want is not forgiveness; you want *him/her!* You want a restored, sweet, and happy relationship. Repentance/forgiveness opens the door but the ultimate goal of the Gospel is not forgiveness – as Peter writes *“Christ suffered for [our] sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.”* (1 Peter 3:18) Or as Paul put it two weeks ago, *“God loves you and has chosen you to be his very own people:”*(Rom 1:6) He wants you/me/us because we belong to God/Him.

During my Monday workout at the YMCA, listening to Depeche Mode’s “Personal Jesus,” I was thinking that if worship is not about us, but is about God – that if the Gospel is not about what we do, but is about what God did, the same goes for our relationship with God: God is not ours, we are His; wanted/chosen/loved/blessed – we belong to God because that was God’s plan from the start. But the truth is, like the Prodigal Son, we were the one’s who left – we were the ones who did not trust the love/grace of God, choosing to seek salvation through our own efforts/plans/schemes: and like sheep gone astray – each our own way – we’ve ended up far from God, ashamed/afraid/alone. But the Good News is that God’s promises of His love/presence came true in the Incarnation – in Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us, who was born to die for us to save us. This is the unilateral, unmerited grace that Paul says God showed toward you/me/us when – through Jesus – God *“made peace with you/me/us, and now lets you stand in his presence as people who are holy and faultless and innocent.”*

[TKeller: Adam/lonely - *“perfect”* Loneliness/God-shaped hole/love – need to belong.]

The Good News – as Paul, in our first reading, tells us – is that, God loves us and longs for us to live in right relationship with Him. In Jesus – through His incarnation, but more so through His death and resurrection – God’s plan for our salvation was revealed; that even though we ‘strayed’ God never stopped loving us (once a parent...). What Paul tells us is that God is redeeming a people for Himself because we are His. And this is the Good News of what Jesus is saying in our second reading: God has been planning for our return – has been “*preparing a place for us*”. This is the promise that Jesus made to His disciple/us that because we believe in Him/salvation we will be with Him forever: this is our hope. [Memorial/Funeral Service: P 23/Isaiah 43: “*You are mine...*”/profound claim/promise: God/love created/formed us for love; precious/honoured/loved sons/daughters – God is with us/nothing can separate us from God’s love.]

Friends, this is the Good News of the Gospel: that because of this love, before we do anything for God we are loved/accepted/transformed – by grace we are made into new creations/go from being orphans to being heirs/alone to being adopted as sisters/brothers/children of God – loved as we are, where we are. And by doing this God – through/in Jesus – gave us *new life*(regeneration)/*identity*(beloved child of God) /*status*(restored/redeemed)/*possibilities*(transformation)/*hope*(glory). But most of all the Gospel tells us that we are loved – beyond measure/our deserving – by a God who, out of love/by love made/created/formed us extravagantly/unconditionally for/to love us eternally: isn’t that what we all, deep down, long to hear/know? I belong because of the Gospel – and this is Good News. Amen.