

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

Rev. Geoff Ross Sunday, February 4, 2018. St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

[4<sup>th</sup> WK: Gospel – Not ABC but the A-Z of what it means to be Xtian: Joy/Hope/Power] Last week I ended the sermon talking about how the Good News/Gospel is that, God loves us and longs for us to live in right relationship with Him. In Jesus God’s plan for our salvation was revealed: that even though we ‘strayed’ God never stopped loving us. This is the promise that God made in Isaiah 43: *“You are mine...”*/profound claim/promise: God/love created/formed us for love; precious/honoured/loved sons/daughters by a God who, out of love/by love made/created/formed us extravagantly/unconditionally for/to love us eternally. Friends, this is the source of our joy/hope/power.

But let’s be clear, the power is not ours, it’s God’s, offered through the Gospel – through the Word in the form of the Son of God, the Word made flesh, and the by the word – the words of God/Jesus passed on by those who heard them/experienced the grace of the Gospel. It comes from believing and understanding/knowing/accepting fully what God is offering, not just for this, but also our eternal life. And this is the stumbling block for so many: the truth of the Gospel is more than a set of ideas; it’s something you possess/have/keep/treasure in your heart, a gift that you accept/believe and hold onto because of what we experienced/know of what God has done in/for us through His love, then, now, always. The power comes when we first believe: everything changes after that.

Which makes sense since the Gospel is not an academic thing: we can’t intellectualize a leap of faith because it’s not a head thing; it’s a heart thing. That’s because it’s about relationships. It’s not a set of bullet points, tracts to memorize, advice to live by; it’s Good News from a person to a person. This explains why it’s personal. And it explains why we respond to it so personally: when we experience a love so profound/complete, so generously/freely given we want to meet that love by wanting to look like/please the One who did this for you/me/us. [Loved/love back.] Friends, this is the Gospel/Good News; you are loved – and, if you’re loved, you’re called/chosen/drawn/attracted to that grace that accepts/loves you as/where you are. This response – to want to change how we live/act/behave – is a loving response to being loved: we want to be-like/reflect the one who gave up so much [arms spread wide] to love us this much. And, loved, we want to share this love with everyone we know.

This is the response we heard in the first reading: two blind men *“shouting”* for Jesus to *“have pity on [them]”* who, when asked by Jesus *“Do you believe I can make you well?”*, responded with faith – by which, Jesus tells them, *“you will be healed.”* Now able to see the two men can’t contain their wonder/joy/excitement about their Good News – that by their faith God’s love/grace has healed/restored them – that, despite being told/warned *“not to tell anyone,”* they go out and tell it to everyone! In this short account of a brief – but life-changing – encounter we see the clarity/simplicity/purity of the Gospel: God/Jesus meets/comes to us as/where we are – in our fallen/broken/less-than state – and offers us

unmerited grace. Jesus asks the question – “Do you believe...?” – and, in answering “Yes” they were changed/restored/saved.

[Growing up: Irish/didn't talk/just did/lived it: muscular faith/fiA/preached w/o words]

It's that simple but yet that's what makes it hard. The Gospel's simplicity contradicts everything – every thought, system, culture; it offends our sense of the world. But that's what it requires of us: to give up our trust/reliance/faith/belief in everything of this world for everything God can give. The Gospel changes everything. We are saved by believing the Gospel, and then transformed by it to live out what we first believed. We do this – like the two men – with new eyes/vision. By offering/giving to us something to believe/hope in/for beyond ourselves, by bringing change and transformation to how we live our lives, and by addressing our greatest need by providing us with a sense of belonging/purpose – the Gospel changes how we see and respond to the world and the pain/suffering in those around us because now we see the world/others through God's eyes. This is because God sees the world through His heart.

[18 inch journey:head-heart. Head-knowledge v heart affect! Faith without works:dead]

Through the lens of the Gospel we see the world – and others – for what it/they/we are: marred/separated/alienated from God and what/who God made/meant us to be. By removing the cause of our separation/alienation from God, the Gospel/God's grace, begins to treat/heal the dysfunction/dis-ease/disorder that flow from it. Changed from the inside out, this change compels us to go out/share with the world/others, not out of guilt but out of generosity/love. Mindful that we were saved by grace alone, we are freed from fear to share/go out/witness to the love we have received – and our love for God – by loving our neighbours as we ourselves were loved. As people of the Gospel the only response to what God has done for us is to “go out” – witness – because of the Gospel in all we say and do. Amen.