

## **SERMON: “like me: chosen by grace.”**

Rev. Geoff Ross: Sunday, February 18, 2018, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

At our Ash Wednesday service we heard about how the “fall” of Adam and Eve ushered in sin – shame/blame/pain/cycle – that drove a wedge between God/us, ripping our relationship apart, leaving a chasm between us that we are unable to cross. But we also heard how, rather than meting out our just punishment (death), God relented/banished/sending them out of Eden with a promise that one day Eve’s offspring will be freed from sin/death. As Christians we believe that Jesus was that offspring: that His coming to be-with us, His dying on the cross for us, and His resurrection erased/removed the stain of sin – and that **this** was, from the beginning – and still is – God’s plan for our salvation. But before Jesus came, God had to prepare for His coming – had to begin/start the process of the redemption some/anywhere/with some/anyone He could enter into a covenant of grace with: enter Abram – a sinner like us/like you/me.

[Gospel Series: Grace/Gift – don’t deserve/earn: given. Grace is about God not us.]

As the hymn *“Amazing Grace”* so eloquently/bluntly puts it: grace is the only thing that can *“save a wretch like me”* because we are not able to save ourselves from ourselves. Grace/God’s forgiveness is beyond our deserving/gift that no one deserves. Philip Yancey writes that grace *“is the last best word”* because it reminds *“us that good things come not from our own efforts, rather by the grace of God.”* God loves us – and wants the best for us – and out of His love for us He chose to extend grace to a graceless world: it is out of His great mercy and compassion toward us that He chose to begin to restore our relationship with Him. And, to do this, God chose to begin with one man – who, while chosen, was not special – to demonstrate His power/compassion to a watching world: one man to begin a nation set apart; a people of faith blessed by God’s covenant as a sign of God’s grace, not because of any merit of his (Abram’s) or theirs.

And God’s choice reveals the true nature of God’s love for us: Abram – an old man married to a barren wife with no power/influence and no homeland. And then God made Abram a promise – entered into a covenant with Abram that he didn’t deserve/ask for – to bless him, to make his name great, and to make of him the father of a great nation. (Genesis 12:2-3) And, just as He had with Adam and Eve before, God didn’t give Abram any laws or rules – no set codes of behaviour to follow; He simply asked Abram to receive the promise and to trust (be faithful) in Him/God; and Abram did. In response to his faithfulness God declares Abram righteous/“Blameless.” In essence God said ‘because you have trusted in me, I have forgiven you: because of your faith I promise/covenant to erase the stain of sin from your name.’

Think about that for a moment. What is God doing here? God is establishing an important precedent/example for us to follow; salvation comes through faith: from faith flows God’s grace. God, through the covenant ceremony in our first reading, commits Himself to bless/protect Abram – a commitment made unilaterally, a promise based on nothing other than faith. And through Abraham’s (name changed as a sign of how God’s grace had changed him) faithfulness God did bless him: hundreds of years before God would provide the People with the Ten Commandments, God sought a relationship built on faith and trust – and gave Abram/Abraham what he needed most and deserved the least; salvation. This is why Paul, in our second reading, reaching beyond the letter of the Laws of Moses as the standard by which

righteousness/salvation is attained, recalls the story of Abram/Abraham and tells us that “*the promise*” didn’t come “*through the law but through ... faith;*” that “*Everything/salvation depends on having faith in God, so that God’s promise*”/grace can be guaranteed to all Abram/Abraham’s descendants ... “because they have faith just like he/Abraham” – a man like you and like me.

[B.Hybels:”Sucking air/God isn’t done with you!” Never too old/poor/sick/tired! You?]

With one man God’s plan of redemption began. Because of grace God chose Abram. By grace God declared Abraham righteous/acceptable/clean. It was grace that moved God to bless Abraham – and it was this same amazing grace that moved God to offer the world His Son so that it/we might enjoy the blessing that we long for: that through faith – in God’s covenant/in Jesus Christ – the separation caused by sin can be bridged and that salvation can be ours. The story of Abraham tells us that ordinary people like you/like me can be saved by faith/grace. And this is what the Table symbolizes: the sign of grace given at great cost for us to freely receive. Come. Taste the gift of grace. Come. Not because you are deserving, but because it is a reminder of the sacrifice made on our behalf – a sacrifice planned from the beginning, made out of love, freely given to those chosen by grace/God’s amazing grace Amen.