

SERMON: “Authority.

Rev. Geoff Ross: Sunday, July 8, 2018, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Brampton

[Car Update:Cottage/Porcupine:Quills = \$2200! Sympathy for Porcupine:not me!]

This is the third Sunday or our summer look at “Selected verses” that are important for us to hear: today’s ‘selected verse’ is from Paul’s Letter to the Romans, chapter 13:1. It’s a complicated verse – a passage that dealt with the earthly reality of “politics” that addresses/challenges our understanding of to whom we are to pay respect/honour to; it deals with the question of authority. And, interestingly, as we see the context of the verse, like last week’s verse from Paul’s 1st Letter to the Corinthians, this verse also focuses on the command to love, making it a law.

[Last Week:Growing up/Cottage – Peanuts waste-paper basket: “*Love is ...*” *Smiling; Hugging; Holding hands; Sharing.*” Worst:*Never having to say sorry.* Wrong! Best:*A gift for no reason at all.* LOVE is everything: a gift that changes everything.]

Love does change everything – but only if we submit to it/the one we love: love isn’t about us, it takes two to find love; it’s about relationships. In 1st Corinthians 13 – the “Love” reading often heard at weddings – Paul tells us that as God sees it “love” is about sacrifice/service/submission to/for another. Paul argues that we are to imitate this loving act by Jesus who offered Himself wholly/completely to/for us not out of obligation/duty but out of obedience/love. To Paul, the incarnation/cross is THE example of the love of a submissive God: to truly love, we must submit/sacrifice ourselves for love – it requires us to think not of ourselves/needs/desires/wants but of the needs/desires/wants of the one we love. And, since we were made in the image of God – with the heart of God – this should be natural to us; love is in us to give.

God created us out of love for love to love and live in love – love for God and love for each other; a love that calls for us to submit to it, a love that “*bears/believes/hopes all things,*” that doesn’t boast/isn’t arrogant/rude; a love – given freely/openly/honestly – that is meant to build up relationships/each other/communities/kingdom; a love that can/should last forever: but as fallen creatures in a fallen world, we/our relationships fall far short of this ideal. We live in a world corrupted by sin/fear/greed/power in which the submission that love requires is viewed of as weakness: relationships, rather than being about the other have been perverted to being about us/control/authority. Which is why Paul – even 2000 years ago – feels it’s important to warn the early Christian Church about the issue of authority – and is why it’s just as important for us to hear today.

In June, US Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, quoted Romans 13:1 in defense of his President’s immigration policy to separate children from their illegal immigrant parents, saying the administration has the right to do it while claiming the respect/honour/authority due to the government as a “higher power” because “*God has ordained the government for his purposes.*” With respect to the office he holds, like countless rulers (good/bad) before him, Mr. Sessions is guilty of the blindness/hubris/sin of power: thinking that the ‘power’ that he/they wield is theirs to exercise rather than a

responsibility/duty/privilege to fulfill. As Lord Acton observed “*Absolute power corrupts absolutely*” – and, as a citizen of the Roman Empire, Paul knew this and sought to remind those early Christians/us that we believe that the ways/sins of this world are not the final word; that God alone is supreme/divine/all-powerful, worthy of praise/honour/worship, in charge/has final authority over all things.

[Lessons: If you have to claim authority you don’t have it – given not taken/right! Authority is a trust/covenant/relationship. All I’ve learned about love/authority I’ve learned from dogs/kids.]

As John Calvin – the Swiss Reformer – wrote in his *Christian Institutes*, “*Paul was induced*” to acknowledge the rank/role/rule/authority of ‘governing authorities’ because they were “*placed there by the Lord’s hand*” and that we show respect/honour out of “*common duty of obedience*” – but that’s it. All authority comes from God; not only Paul, but also Jesus says this, Calvin reminds us. To reinforce this point Paul/Calvin say that “*government is ordained by God for the wellbeing of mankind*” – not for its own ends. And it does this not by force/power/violence/authority but by obedience/submission/love/humility. Authority – like love – is given/revealed by God to be used/given for/to others just as Jesus gave up His power/authority out of His love for us. Friends, we are not our own, we are God’s – none of us is exempt. Rulers/laws come and go but one constant remains: God’s rule/authority – and the one law we are called to fulfill. “*Love does no wrong to a neighbour;*” therefore let us subject ourselves by showing our love for God in/through/by our fulfilling the law to love others. Amen.