

SERMON: “All Things.”

Rev. Geoff Ross: Sunday, July 22, 2018, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Brampton

[Start vacation:12:01 – working/clearing desk/cleaning office; meetings; Busy/Ready/hoping to get some rest/restore/refresh. Baseball:Blue Jays – beat Baltimore – God is good/loves baseball – it’s true; baseball all about hope.... In another week of sad/difficult/bad news, we all could use some hope.]

For the past few weeks [unintentionally] we’ve been looking at random/selected verses that [unsurprisingly] have coalesced around the theme of love. And why not? After all, love is nature of God/Trinity and God created us out of love for love to love and live in love – a love that is in us to give, a love that reveals God’s heart/plan and purpose for ours: to live in right relationships – based on our submission to love – with God and each other – by our following the Golden Rule to treat others as we would have them treat us. Not just a feeling but a law that should govern our every thought/action/interaction. Put into practice this law becomes a “reciprocity of grace” – a practice/exchange based on the unilateral/unmerited gift of God’s forgiveness/love/grace that becomes a love that “*does no wrong to a neighbour; a grace sufficient for all, made perfect in weakness.*”

[This week we turn to the source of our hope/faith.]Earlier this week I was reading through several online news sites and found on BBC/CBC coverage of the former President Barak Obama’s address at the Centenary Celebration of Nelson Mandela’s birth in South Africa: watching reminded me of two things. The first was how much I miss words – words spoken/written/heard/used intelligently by a person who both understands what he’s saying and how words can inspire and move people beyond their current condition toward something bigger/better for them/others/the world. The second is the hope – the simple/shear/unlimited/audacious aspiration of words used to paint/plant a vision of what could/should/can be – that the darkness/hatred/pain/suffering/violence/division of this corrupt/sin-filled world is no match for hope – the hope that will, one day, be the last/better word.

[I’ve said it before/again; I’m a word guy: Had me at ‘Hello. ’]

The reason I mention this is because in his speech Mr. Obama said that all this/things is/are possible through “*persistence and hope.*” “*Persistence and hope:*” “*persistence*” in the midst/despite of hardships/setbacks/despair to not only survive but to “*hope*” that the promised vision of a world/life free from pain/misery/distress/desolation will one day be real. Now I know that they sound like pie-in-the-sky fantasy/utopian/optimism/pretty words – but they’re more: they’re a declaration/belief/faith that there is something more – even if it takes work/time/suffering/distress, a lifetime of striving/reaching/working, giving up everything, and maybe even not being alive when it happens.

[Facebook:Glass-half full/empty.

Optimist/pessimist/realist/relativist/utopist/scepticist (fake news) – Hope=glass overflowing. Always been a ‘Grace Guy’/God is great/good/can do all things.]

Paul, writing to the persecuted Christians in a hostile and brutal world, having written about how we – as a people of faith living in a faithless land – are to put on/imitate the likeness/mind/heart of Christ even/especially in the face of hardship/suffering by doing what Jesus did: submitting Himself to God’s promises/plan/purpose for Him/us. In Jesus’ surrender Paul saw trust/confidence – contentment in knowing that God is all He/Paul/we/you/I need in good times/bad times/times of trial/need/distress and success/abundance/comfort because Christ/Jesus gives him his strength, because for Jesus/God nothing is impossible, and because of the sacrifice Jesus/God made to give us what we don’t deserve. Paul knows that it is by grace that he has been saved – and for him, everyday/everything is reason for gratitude. But he also knows that a life of faith isn’t easy.

This is why, in his closing remarks to the beleaguered Christians in Philippi/then and to us here/today, Paul reminds/tells them of his challenges/hardships/struggles – not to boast, but as an example of how we are to “*stand firm in the Lord.*” (Phil 4:1) He “*urges*” them to help each other in their struggles/treat each other as they would want to be treated/as Christ. He says the “*Lord is near*” and “*do not worry about anything*” because God will provide a “*peace*” “*which surpasses all understanding*” that will protect us and “*will satisfy every need*” in/through God’s love. (Phil 4:19) He does this because he has complete faith/trust/submission in/to God’s love - a love that bears/”carries” (as U2 sings) all things/endures all things/changes everything/makes all things possible.

Maybe its because I’m tired – worn out/discouraged/about to go on vacation – but Paul’s words speak directly to me here/today/where I am: they give me courage/confidence/contentment – they tell me that it’s not about me/not up to me/because of me – that I must trust/hope have faith in the promises/plan/purpose of God for me/St. Andrew's, that I should look to Jesus/God alone for those things I feel I lack and not in others/things. As I/you/we face the challenges set before us today/tomorrow/summer – let us live the life faith offers: may the peace that sustained him/gave him strength/enable you to do what you say/do in/through the God who makes all things possible. Amen.