

SERMON: “Q&A/God: What is our only hope in life and death?”

Rev. Geoff Ross Sun., Jan., 6, 2019 St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brampton

[Happy New Year - 2019! Hope everyone had a great Christmas/NY! Great week/HDR – but back to work: I pray that God will bless St/A's in 2019.... Let's get started!]

Today, as we begin a new year, we begin with the season of Epiphany with a new series that I've been anxiously waiting for. Eight months ago, I came upon a resource called ***The New City Catechism*** produced by Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, by Rev. Dr. Timothy Keller, and I started reading/getting excited by it. Let me explain why. When I preached for the call (#314), I said that my focus was/would be on you (now us) and on our understanding of who you/we are as children of God. My job then/now as a 'teaching' Elder, in good Reformed tradition, means that what happens/I do up here isn't about me/you – but is about God, and our relationship with God. And there's no better time than Epiphany – a time for core learning – to do this.

[Not great SS student: Mother as a teacher – saved my memory work/Fail! Least likely to become a minister... Not good on the memory work/but knew one thing: Grace.]

The NCC is an updated combination of three of the major teaching documents of the Reformation: the Geneva Catechism, the Westminster Shorter and Longer catechisms, and the Heidelberg Catechism. For those older than I am, catechisms were a beloved/hated part of Church life/worship/education – used to teach/educate members in the tenants of the faith. “*Catechisms*” (“*katechein*”, Greek: “*to teach/instruct orally/by word of mouth*”), and their use have a long/historical tradition in the Church as a process/way of introducing/teaching doctrine/theology simply/uniformly. Don't believe me: let me ask those who learned a catechism; “*What is the chief end of man?*” (*Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Goal/purpose/end-say/do=glorify/worship God.*)

And that's how catechisms work – Question/Answer, both meant to be memorized/internalized/believed as they form/shape/build up our faith. They did this in three ways. First, they simply/clearly explained/taught the Gospel and the doctrines of God/human nature/sin/salvation. Next, they addressed/counteracted heresies/errors/false beliefs then/now. But, more importantly, they developed/transformed/built up a 'people' into the likeness of Christ as individuals/community. And this makes sense; the practice/discipline of Q & A/memorization is more communal; used in dialogue with one another to explore lives of faith. Seen this way, catechisms are not just for Sunday school/Bible studies, but are perfect for worship where, together, the Church can confess their faith and respond to God with praise. And, to do this, we start with the most important question: *What is our only hope in life and death?*

[Q&A Insert. A: “That we are not our own, but belong, both in body and soul, in life and in death, to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ.”]

Did you hear what I heard? I hope so. In both the Q/A the words 'our'/'we' were used, not 'my'/'I' – and this has profound implications on our faith, and how it's to be lived out. And this is because, while you/I/we are saved individually, we're saved into a

diverse/universal family; saying “*we belong to God*” makes more Biblical/theological/practical sense: created in the image of an eternal, communal, God makes being a community/His community essential to belonging to Him. And this is the truth about who/what we are: we belong to God/we are His, not our own. This is the first/basic principle of Christianity: we exist/live to serve God, not ourselves – not to the other way around. Friends, there is no more important message to hear than this: as a Church St. Andrew’s exists/is to serve God; everything we say/do should/must flow from this foundational/fundamental belief/understanding

[Hope/comfort – security of knowing: who’s we are/belong to/not alone/ God’s children/loved/esteemed; God’s plan/purpose:Lego – each unique/part of the team/body with a part/role to play.]

When we recognize that we are not our own, it should change the way we live/we should live differently – from our ‘old’ ways/the world/sin. This is what Paul, in our Romans reading says when we’re not to sweat/worry about the small stuff (what others do/don’t do; judge/argue). We can do this by making sure that our own hearts/motives/actions are pure/properly focused on God. (No problem if we’re doing what the Deuteronomy reading tells us to do!) What this means is that this life – your life – is about what you say/do and how you say/do it. As Christians, we are not our own: we are God’s – and we should live/think/act like it.

And this is what John Calvin – the Swiss Reformer – wrote: “*We are not our own: we are God’s: let us therefore live for him and die for him.*” Echoing Calvin, Timothy Keller adds that this is our basic motive as Christians – that “*God sent His Son to save us by grace and to adopt us into His family: we’re not our own, we were bought at a price.*” And, because of this grace/belonging/sacrifice – gifts beyond our deserving/repaying – we should/ought to want to please God, not ourselves/others/this world, giving ourselves wholly to Him who gave Himself wholly to us in/through His Son, Jesus Christ, as a living sacrifice, Holy, acceptable to God. And we do this because we owe Him everything! So, today/start of a new year, let us respond/give/place ourselves to God/God’s hands and trust God to govern/guide our lives/life of St. A’s as our only hope. Amen.