

## **SERMON: “faith in ACT!ON:be the church”**

Rev. Geoff Ross: Sunday, June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

*[Pentecost/favorite Sunday of the year! We celebrate what/who we are as the Church.]*

Pentecost is the day we celebrate how; through the promised presence of the Holy Spirit we are enabled to be the Church – by putting our faith into action as Christ in the world. And what better way to celebrate this Birthday than to retell the story of the Church’s birth. We’ve heard this text before but just as a family retells stories about their history to remind themselves about who they are, we too need reminding, not only who we are but also what it is we are called to be/are capable of. But first, let’s unpack that NCC answer a bit more.

*[NCC question: “What is the Church?” Answer: “God chooses and preserves for himself a community elected for eternal life and united by faith, who love, follow, learn from, and worship God together. God sends out this community to proclaim the gospel and prefigure Christ’s kingdom by the quality of their life together and their love for one another.”]*

Echoing what we’ve heard so far in our fiA series – “be the Church” – the answer tells us; God chose us! But not only that, like our reading it tells us that God continues to choose us by ‘preserving’ us from harm/providing for us/our needs – for Himself! – a community ‘elected for eternal life’ not just to sit on the bus of survival but to be faithful. And, as we’ve learned, for a purpose: to be faithful means to be active – a faith lived is a faith in action! In an answer that sounds a lot like our vision statement that we print on the bulletin: we learn together to know God’s love through worship and study/through our putting our faith into action by loving and caring for one another using God’s gifts – not just for ourselves – but to go out, and with the Spirit’s help, bring others to Christ – all to God’s glory.

*[Semiotics: Signs(words/objects)/Signify(points to/indicates/symbolize/represent) revealing Meaning(purpose/importance/significance). The word “ecclesia” an “assembly of people/elected/citizens”(Ancient Greek); “Called out/forth” to gather/perform a function/serve. “Church” is not a ‘steeple’/‘people’; it’s an action.... “to/be Church”]*

Two years ago, I spoke during our 2017 fiA series that, in his book ***I Will***, Thom Rainer called for a shift from the “*preference driven Church*” to a “*purpose driven Church*” where the Church’s whole focus is to be on the needs of our neighbours and not on our own. Rick Warren, in his 2003 ***Purpose Driven Life*** book, says we “*are not saved by service, but [we] are saved for service;*” adding: a “*non-serving Christian is a contradiction in terms.*” This is what Paul meant when he wrote that it is only when we’ve truly become the “*special utensils, dedicated and useful to [God] ready for every good work*” (2Tim 2:21) – not for ourselves but for those God longs for us to love/serve – that we become what God longs for us to be: Christ to the world – the Body of Christ – that we be the Church.

The Church can/has been many things – good/bod – but first and foremost it is a miracle! As part of God’s plan/purpose for us, the Church exists because of God’s will/grace/power to reveal/prefigure/manifest God’s/Christ’s love to the world in all it says and does. All of us are called – indeed, created – to serve God to be someone who does something. In other words, as Christians, acts of service/putting our faith into action, is not optional: it is the foundation/expression of living out a Christian life. The Acts 2 Church got this: Daily – despite having nothing in common (Jew/Greek/slave/free/make/female) except their experience/faith of/in God’s saving grace – they submitted themselves to acts of sacrificial service to love those who they didn’t know. This is what it means to be the Church.

*[Sacraments:baptism/communion: “Go/Do/Remember” – who/what we are/to be/do:live out your faith/defined by our love/faith/participation.]*

The Church is a community of grace with God’s grace in its DNA to live out that grace/serve. Almost immediately they practiced their faith, lived out grace-transformed lives; they put into action what they had seen/heard/experienced. And, as they did this, God blessed it/them. With the gift of the Holy Spirit the Church was born – and there’s nothing it/we are not capable of if we live out our faith! God still has a plan for us/Church/St. Andrew’s. Since the birth of the Church God has used ordinary people to do extraordinary things in/through our faith/power of the Holy Spirit. And, because we do – put our faith into action/live out our faith – God will bless us (as God blessed them/Christians throughout history) and use our actions to continue to change the world! Amen.