

SERMON: “Welcome Back: Just What Jesus Would Do.”

Rev. Geoff Ross, Sunday, September 12, 2021, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

Welcome back! I am glad that you are there/with us today! Thank God that we’re able to be/worship together. Thankfully we – you and I – are able to be online/here this morning: there’s a lot of other places/things you could be/doing – but you’re/we’re here/together, worshiping God! It’s good that you’re here – but there are a lot who aren’t... and it’s not because we’re not in the building/of COVID19! And this isn’t new news. The truth is that a lot of people have given up on the Church: surveys reveal that attendance is declining due to shifting demographics/aging populations/cultural forces. For many, Church isn’t as important/essential as it once was. And St. Andrew’s hasn’t been immune: Here – and elsewhere – once active/faithful Christians have fallen out of the habit/custom of going to Church. So, thank you for being here!

[I get/hear it: People tell me: commune with God in nature/pool, practice meditation/walking alone on the beach/etc... but not in Church! And/again, this isn’t new! Read the NT: the early Church/Acts 2 Church/1st Century had the same problem!]

The truth is, building/maintaining a community of faith is a constant struggle – but, it’s not a new problem/neither is being the “Church” in a pandemic! Curiously: data from those surveys shows that the people who’ve given up on Church say not to having given up on God! – implying/guess, that “Church” is an unessential relic that can be discarded – in favour of a personal/feel-good piety/spirituality. Remember the acronym “WWJD?”/“What Would Jesus Do?” Oddly – (according to data) – these same people were also likely to wear “WWJD?” bracelets – some even told me that their decision to answer to the question “WWJD?” was why they didn’t come to Church! (Hint: not the right answer to “WWJD?”) Ironically, though, it was just what Jesus would do – which is what the early Church leaders explained to the first generation of Christians when asked why they were supposed to go to Church.

[Debate: “Go to Church?” in building/with people/music/singing? Yes/no. Only requirement to worship is people/community – and, what we’re doing, worship/prayers/reading the Word/praising God in both music/words, together. “Communion” in common union with Christians all over the world: community=Church.]

I mentioned the early Church because it faced many of the same challenges we do – if not more/worse: life-threatening persecutions/false teachers (Paul’s Letter to the Hebrews); but the early Church leaders weren’t trying to convince the lost/lapsed/lazy to do something new/unheard of, they were reminding them that as Christians they were to live up to not just the teachings of Jesus, but also to how He lived His life. The reading we heard this morning reveals/reminds us that Jesus walked the walk/lived the talk. This is why Luke has intentionally depicted Jesus partaking in the religious rituals of Judaic life “When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day” – and why we’re told it “was his custom.”

[Said many times/Words/important! Writer/Luke: intentionally fixing Jesus’ historic/religious/social context to confirm/claim His identity/role BUT also that His ministry/mission was about people, not buildings: Church – the Body of Christ/community of believers! TRINTIY/Community-HS unites us!]

And this was true of the place/location in which this reading takes place – the synagogue in Nazareth Village. This was the Church/community centre where Jesus went to as a child/to school/community celebrations/went to as a young man/Bar Mitzvahs/went to (possibly) for His father's (Joseph's) funerals: it was the most significant place/building in the Village – not because it was itself important, but because of the community and what they did, together, within it. The synagogue was where they – men/women/children – became a community to know/love God together/to know/love each other. To be clear: it was the worship – done in the midst of community – that defined their community/them, that made them the Body of Christ. The Church was the place where people gathered not just for one hour on one day but was the community where they came to every day to have all of their needs met: they went to Church because it was THE place to go/the people to be!

The mere fact that the writer of this Gospel reveals that Jesus went to Church –because it was just what Jesus would do – tells us something important for us today: Jesus' practice/habit/custom of "going to"/attending Church affirms His faithfulness to the Sabbath(Deuteronomy reading). But, more importantly, it is His reading of scripture/scripture that points us/people of faith outward/toward the community within/outside the building. As we 'return to Church'/Welcome Back series – even if we're still worshipping online – let us remember that in/through Jesus, we're called to worship God – not in a building, but as a people! If gathering with God's people on a weekly basis was important for Jesus, it must be important to us to do as well. Afterall, gathering to know God together, to celebrate and worship God, and to love and care for each other – is just what Jesus would do! Amen.