

SERMON: "Welcome Back: No Perfect People Allowed."

Rev. Geoff Ross, Sunday, September 26, 2021, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

[1st:What Would Jesus Do?Go to Church! 2nd:What Should We Do?Be the Church! Mother/comments:Church/Worship:1st answer to the Shorter Catechism:Chief aim is to worship/glorify God – Church membership does not exempt us from living out love/faith in action – it's requires us to do so! Yet/LW/heard how the reasons/excuses – guilt/shame/fear of being judged – for not going to/being the Church.]

Now, the purpose of talking about 'going to/be-ing the Church' isn't to scold anyone/making people feel guilty, it's to remind us of why we're called to go to/be the Church: it's not for us to 'feel good' – although that's a good thing;about coming together (wherever you/we are) to show our love for God by showing/in/through our love for others/neighbours. It's also about praying for others – not just ourselves:it's about wanting to share what we know/enjoy in our being in community with God. BUT, all too often, our attitudes/biases/prejudices/thinking/acting towards each other/people who are new/different, undercuts who/what we're called to be/do.

[News Flash:All fallen/As-is/sinners:Prayer of Confession:"If we think we have no sin in us we deceive ourselves." All need forgiveness! Gospel/Good News/Grace:"If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered." (Ps 130:3-4)]

The problem is, too many people – out there/in here – are under the misconception that the Church is where only 'good'/'perfect' people congregate; but the truth is that it isn't:it never was meant to be either. Jesus said in that He came for those who are broken/live with dis-ease/those who truly need to be healed.(Mark 2:17) In other words, the Church **is the** place where sinners are not only welcomed; they're the expected invited guests!(Luke 14 reading) The attraction of the Acts2 Church was its inclusive nature – it was **the** place where women/slaves/Gentiles/Jews/Romans could mix as equals/where people – the orphaned/abandoned/outcast/excluded/shunned – could live together as a community/brothers/sisters united by Jesus. Unfortunately, somewhere along the way the Church stopped being the place where those who were broken/shunned/shamed could come to receive restoration/rehabilitation/relationship – healing/belonging/Welcome.

[As Church grew/disconnect between what it preached/should/made to be – love/acceptance/forgiveness/community. Church not a gated club/meant to be a welcoming place/prepared for everyone. God's Church/house is not ours to run/ruin:Parable/Luke 6 reading – Blind to own faults/see them in others:If we want to be welcomed back/we're to welcome others!]

The challenge for us is this: if we are to be the Body of Christ/to be Christ to those who we come in contact with, then we have to put the skin on grace – we're to extend a welcome to our neighbours/especially to those who we would rather not. This is what Paul writes in the Romans reading: we "must please our neighbour for the good purposes of building up the neighbour. For Christ did not please himself." (Rom 15:2-3) He goes on to say that as recipients of God's grace we are to "welcome one another... just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." (Rom 15:7) Paul's blessing that the Church in Rome grow/live "in harmony with one another... so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" is a call to a communion of equals working together to be the true reflection of Christ. If we were created to be

conformed into the likeness of Christ (Rom 8:29) then we were created to strive for what He came to call us to:community.

[Makes sense. Dietrich Bonhoeffer:can only truly know Christ/God's love in community.Body of Christ isn't one single organism/amalgam of countless small organisms that form/together/make a whole/create community:Our believing is lived out/nourished by our belonging, in community/to each other.]

Friends, if the Church(and I mean us/you/me) is/are to be the locus/site of God's grace/love/acceptance then it/we must become a living example of that grace/love/acceptance. If (Luke 14 reading) we're to be the servant/"messenger" going out to invite people in, then, - according to the other readings – we're also need to be/become the "message." In other words, wherever we are – at home/work/'Church' – we're to be/model/live out the grace/love/forgiveness/acceptance that we've experienced/received unconditionally to/for those we're thinking of/praying for, by/through our actions/loving our neighbor:practicing what we preach! To do this we must represent/re-present Christ by displaying the reality of God's grace at work.

And we can do this/be the Church if we treat each other the way we'd want to be treated/way that God/Jesus treated us – with grace/love/open hearts/arms/doors to those who *'were once far off, whom the Lord draws near.'* (Ephesians 2:13) None of us are "perfect people" but by God's grace we were saved. Because of this, we're to respond/reach out to those around us – the broken/lost/neighbours and do for them what God/Jesus did for us by welcoming them/us back/into loving community/relationship with God. Then/only then, will we see each other as they/we/you/I are; people whom God loves/people we are called to love. Amen.