

SERMON: "SHAPED BY THE GOSPEL."

Rev. Geoff Ross, Sunday, October 17, 2021, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

174 years ago, a community of faith that would become St. Andrew's did what countless Churches before them had done: they responded to the grace that helped shape them by sharing God's Good News with their neighbours/community so that they too could receive God's offer of their redemption/salvation. Throughout history God's people have put their hope/faith/lives in the promises of God; promises of redemption/restoration/resurrection: promises made/kept when/with the coming of Jesus Christ. This was their commission from our Lord who came to embody the Good News of God's promised restoration of the whole of creation. And, it is the mission that they have handed to us/our generation/you/me to carry/live out in all we say/do wherever we/you are – not out of obligation/compulsion/even duty; but out of gratitude/with thanksgiving for the blessings – to God/for what God has given to us.

[Gospel=Good News! But, it's not an accident!/Was God's plan! Ist told to the exiled PoG/God through Jeremiah gives/promise-plan/purpose-offered/offers hope! "I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." (Jer 29:11) AND This promise of 'plans' for us/welfare/future/revealed in/through the birth/life/death/resurrection of Jesus, who became one-of-us/die-as-us/save us:has been fulfilled!]

This is the Promise/Plan/Gospel:God's plan for our salvation won for us through God's grace/love by/through Christ's death/resurrection. And throughout St. Andrew's history, in good/bad times, this Promise/Plan/Gospel was lived out/practiced/enjoyed by generations of witnesses who responded faithfully/freely/joyfully to God's Good News. But, as we also mark the 1-year anniversary of our 'return' to this sanctuary with our online/COVID services – and look forward to our hoped-for return to in-person/in-Church worship in 3 weeks – it seems essential that we take the time to remind ourselves of what it is that we believe/why we do what we do/why we are here!

[Many think "Gospel" =/is God's unconditional/unilateral/undeserved gift! But this gift isn't the Gospel – it's the effect/result/outcome of God's Plan/Promise. TK:Defines "Gospel" as the 'announcement of God's saving work in Jesus Christ.' Literally:"Gospel" means:OE: 'God'/'Good'-'Spel'/'news'/'story'. It is the message/news/story/telling/teaching of God's saving plan carried out on our behalf in/through Jesus Christ. It's great news!/worth sharing/life changing/But it's not what saves us ...]

And our sharing it is what might save those – others/neighbours/family/friends – in our lives in need of Good News/saving. Let me ask you:who couldn't use some Good News these days? We've been living in distressing times over the past 19 months, with anxiety/stress/depression/mental illnesses soaring:it's hard to imagine anyone who isn't scared/worried/uncertain about tomorrow/future – theirs/loved one's/Church's/or what's God's up to? It is to a "people in darkness" that God's Word/Promise/Plan – Good News – is a message of hope. The promise of the Gospel is about the past/present/future of God's saving act towards His creation/children – telling those hearing it that even these current hardships have been/are/will be overcome by God's saving news in Jesus!

What this means is that the Gospel is not only about what God has accomplished for us in the past; it's also about what God promises us in the future (Future is ours because of what Christ

did/finished in the past). The Gospel proclaims the saving action/work of God – it's not something we do/join/complete; it's what we receive: it's news that offers us new life. Just as the conversation between Nicodemus/Jesus in our reading; the Gospel is both 'Good' and 'New.' It tells us of what God has done AND the unexpected/unprecedented/unmerited transformation offered to us as God makes us Holy/dwells within us/transforms us. It proclaims that it is God's plan/purpose to make us 'new' – to renew us/bring about our rebirth; not just for our benefit, but so that we can participate/respond/even be His/Jesus'/God's ongoing incarnation and saving work in/to the world by to giving thanks/glory to the God who's love and grace makes all things new.

[170th Anniversary Dinner, I spoke about how “St. A's past helped form our identity:Downtown Church/to witness to God's grace to Brampton/that we were/are called to be God's messengers/agents/ambassadors to a world in need.” Still true! Witness/messengers/agents/ambassadors:All tasked/called/commissioned to tell/share/pass on what they saw/experienced/heard/were told....]

In closing, as Ian said in the introduction; we're here because of the Good News of the Gospel – that Jesus Christ came to die for our sins so that we might be saved! This is why Churches are started – to share this Good News to the world. Friends, then/now, the Gospel was/is at the centre of the Church's existence/growth/mission/being: it was what shaped our forebearers; and it's what must shape who we are/claim to be! As we prepare to start another chapter of the life of St. Andrew's, let us be shaped by the Gospel – and proclaim its Good News in all we say/do! Amen.