

**SERMON:** "SHAPED BY THE GOSPEL: *The Good News is Not Simple.*"

Rev. Geoff Ross, Sunday, October 31, 2021, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

*[So Far: Talked about Gospel. Literally: OE: 'God'/'Good' – 'Spel'/'news'/'story' = Good News! And how it isn't an accident! Was God's plan/Promise – for us/welfare/future/revealed/fulfilled in/through the birth/life/death/resurrection of Jesus – all to save us! LW: Talked about how this GN is not advice – it's an "announcement that proclaims the unconditional/unilateral/unmerited lifesaving Gift we're given that can change/shape us – if we/you/I accept it!]*

Over the past two weeks I've quoted Timothy Keller's definition of the "Gospel" – it is the "announcement of God's saving work in Jesus Christ" – because it is both precise/simple, but I've also said that it is too often this neat/tidy/precise/simplified/sanitization of the message/news/story/telling/teaching of God's saving plan carried out on our behalf in/through Jesus Christ that robs it of its power/purpose/cost. I repeat this, because as much as we may have diluted/dulled the true/full/profound message/meaning of the Good News, it's essential/crucial/important for us to be reminded/rehear that, while the "Gospel" sounds simple – it isn't. Nor is it easy.

*[TBC: This doesn't mean that the "Gospel" can't be presented simply/clearly/briefly – it can – but it is not a simplistic(superficial/facile/casual) thing! It came at a cost: Jesus' – ours? We diminish/dismiss/disregard the clarion call/warning/invitation of the "Gospel" at our eternal peril.]*

And this is why it's important for us to be clear about what the "Gospel" is. Over/over again Paul/Peter/John/others condemn/warn against false preaching/gospels. But this doesn't mean that the "Gospel" is uniform. The "Gospels"/Books of Matthew/Mark/Luke proclaim the message of the "coming kingdom"/while the Gospel of John announces the need to receiving "eternal life." Both ARE the Gospel/Good News that Jesus claimed He came to pronounce(Luke 4:16-21)/both point us to/toward the/a future with God; but they're different: John focuses on individual/personal of salvation/others are more external/corporate/societal. Like two sides of a coin they offer us a vision of the promise/plan but, by focusing on the end we miss the sacrifice that makes it possible:focusing on grace only we forget the full cost. This is where Paul, in our Acts reading comes in, with his call for the/our need "to repent"/to be "judged in righteousness" /for our 'justification.'

*["Justification:" a forensic/legal term – opposite to condemnation. Judicial act of God by which God pardons the sins of those who believe in Christ, and accounts/accepts/sees them as righteous according to the law: all claims/debts/crimes are satisfied/paid/erased/cleansed from ledger/record – we/you/me are set free/made whole/right/restored/redeemed, all through a payment that satisfies the penalty of sin.]*

Paul – on top of Mars Hill/opposite the Parthenon/Acts reading – calls on his listeners to repent/straighten up/get right with God by accepting the gift offered in/through Jesus' sacrifice/death. By this we see the full price/cost/extent/complexity of the Gospel: justification is God's unilateral/"good"/loving act of removing the condemnation/guilt/penalty of sin, by grace, making/declaring-pronouncing the unrighteous(us/me/you) to be righteous/ "straight"/at one/peace with God through our faith in Jesus' sacrifice. Righteousness/Justification honours/is the Law but

because of God's grace/love – and the cost of Jesus' death, the kingdom/eternal life/salvation is ours... not because of who we are/done but because of who God is/did on our behalf.

*[Literary critic/theologian/English professor-Northrop Frye(Great Code) wrote of the Bible as rhetorical oratory which claims to bring/provide Revelation/truth about creation. The Bible, to Frye, was "kerygma"/Ancient Greek word used in the NT for: "proclamation."/to "cry or proclaim as a herald"/to "proclaim, announce, preach" – Literally the Bible is/what Jesus/disciples/apostles/early Church did/has done/extension of! The GN explains/is the purpose/meaning/practice of our faith!]*

Called a "proclaimer" by the philosophers of Athens, Paul is asked to explain what the "new teaching"/"good news" he was "presenting" meant. And, like Jesus/Peter/Stephen before him, Paul tells the Gospel/Good News found/heard throughout the whole of the Bible: From creation in Genesis to the vision of a temple not "made by human hands" in the Book of Revelation(Additional reading) he proclaimed THE story of God's love/saving plan for all of His creation!. By doing this, Paul states that the Good News has a message/meaning that explains/indicates/reveals history/events/actions/truth while moving us/God's story towards a final moment/judgement: our need to repent/respond to the saving arc of God's eternal/saving plan/story revealed/from the incarnation/Word made flesh in Jesus Christ – and made possible in/through the cost of Jesus' blood/life!

Transformed by God's grace, Paul was reborn/re-made/made-new – not for his sake/glory but for God's, to live out the single purpose of proclaiming/announcing God's Good News! In other words: Paul, saved to proclaim God's Good News lived a life shaped by the Gospel. Friends, this is the purpose/meaning/practice of our faith/what the Gospel requires of us by calling us to be re-shaped by living lives won by/paid for/freed through the cost of the Cross. To be fully shaped by the Gospel we cannot forget this. Thanks be to God for this 'news' we call "Good." Amen.