

SERMON: "THE CITY OF GOD: *The Church in the City & World.*"

Rev. Geoff Ross: Sunday, October 4, 2020, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Today is World Communion Sunday – the day which celebrates both the global reach of the Body of Christ/Church and the meal that unites us in a 'common union'; the Eucharist/Sacrament that commemorates the saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ (NOTE: "Eucharist"/"Thanksgiving" or "to give thanks" 1st used in the Didache(1st C OS/BoF/A2Church) and by Ignatius of Antioch – 1st City "Church" outside of Jerusalem.) It's a day on which we celebrate/give thanks for the work of the countless Christians throughout the centuries who took the Good News to every part of the world ("beautiful feet" Paul/Rom 10:15) and, now, back again as we at St. Andrew's know from countries once considered 'mission fields', now evangelizing here in Brampton.

As Emmanuel – 'God-with-us' – Jesus came to fulfill God's saving plan for God's people/creation by being incarnated into our world as one-of-us, and His life/ministry embodied His 'be-with-us' methodology/agenda. God/Jesus didn't just snap/fingers to save us; He crossed the universe/came down from heaven and became like-us to live/die-for-us in order to bring to/offer us God's Good News of salvation/grace. But Jesus didn't just come into the world, He came to where we were/live – in most cases; cities. Why? Because cities were places of refuge/safety for those in need of protection – or in need of help/food/healing/forgiveness/community; then/today. But how did something that happened long ago/land far-far away not only last/but grow beyond the small empire/backwater region of the Eastern Mediterranean?

[World we enter in Acts:most-modern in Bible! Action takes place in big/famous cities. Not just metropolitan:international/cosmopolitan- 'the City' is redeemed by the Church!]

Our first reading – the first few verses of the Book of Acts – contains the DNA of the Church/Body of Christ. Found in the words of Jesus/told to His disciples just before His ascension/return to heaven, we hear what is known as the "Great Commission": "Be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."(Acts 1:8). And, after the disciples/followers received the 'power/gift of the Holy Spirit' (Additional reading/Pentecost:people from known world) this is what they did – by planting the 1st Church/Acts 2 Church in the heart of THE City: Jerusalem, where those who ate at Jesus' last meal became Jesus' Body, incarnate as His hands/feet/face/voice/heart for/to those in/who need/most.

[Book of Acts:all about Christians in cities/almost everything in BoActs happens in a city! In fact:entire early church's history unfolds in cities/every Christian you 'meet' in NT lives in a city.Ports/trading/travel-trade routes multi-cultural/diverse]

Acts 8 begins by introducing Saul/Paul, who after overseeing the stoning/death of Stephen, starts to violently persecute the Jerusalem Church, scattering the Christians out – Judea/Samaria/beyond – where they took the Church/spread the Gospel/preached- "evangelized" wherever they went – specifically to cities. This forced everyone/every Christian/member of the Body to take up the 'mission'/'commission' – to

embody/incarnate the Gospel by be-ing with/caring for/teaching/loving/sharing their neighbours/others in need as Christ did for them – one person/place/city at a time.

[God never calls you radically in without sending you radically out. He never calls/blesses/loves you except to make you to be a blessing/send you out to others (cf. Psalm 67:1–7). Abraham: “I am going to bless you/Now go/leave Ur/country/comfort.” God still calling us in the same way!]

The Book of Acts is about/an account of a movement – of people by faith/faith by people on a mission/with a missional plan put into action by those(people:you/me/us) who lived out the commission because they were apart/incarnate of/in Christ’s body, visible in the world/city. Acts tells us that God didn’t send them – they went!/out/into the places where the need/people was/were! And what was that mission? To do as God commanded the exiled People of God as they were being taken into Babylon: go; “*seek the welfare=shalom/peace/prosperity of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare/ you will find your welfare.*”(Jer 29:7)

[Saul/Paul-City-dweller/spoke the language of the city. Plan/wanted to preach/reach a province/region/nation-went into the biggest cities! Antioch/Ephesus/Corinth/Athens/Rome – cities where groups/displaced people/Jews were:Bema/Bama- “marketplace” of ideas/philosophy/religion:Poured himself out to make case for Christ.]

This is the Call/Commission that we’ve heard over the past three weeks: ‘*Love your enemies/neighbours as yourself*’ And, in case you missed it, God is also commanding them/us to love them with all that we are/have – mind/body/soul. This is the incarnational model of the First Church/Christians – it’s the DNA of the Body of Christ: by loving/pouring ourselves out/seeking good for neighbours/others/city our actions/words/faith/lives/presence will be true witnesses of the God who’s love/grace saved us.

As we prepare for/turn to the Communion meal, let us be reminded that, like those before us who have shared in this incarnational/“God-with-us” mystery, that God continues to call us to be-with-within/pray for/love/serve/give-share/pour out ourselves to relieve the suffering/pain/oppression of those around us. And, friends, as we share in this meal – this incarnational proclaiming/act of grace – may we each live up to what Jesus calls us to do in His name by be-ing/bringing Christ in/to the heart of the city. Amen.