

SERMON: “THE CITY OF GOD: *The Heart of God in the City of God.*”

Rev. Geoff Ross: Sunday, October 18, 2020, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

At our 170th Anniversary dinner I quoted from the Jeremiah 29 passage that we have been using for our City of God series, and what I said that night/still true today as we return to this place/“*House of the Lord*”: after 32 weeks of being shutdown/locked out: 173 years later, standing here today, I can say again; God still has a plan for St. Andrew’s!

[1st 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)Most powerful promise/Bible!]

And, it’s true. Throughout history God’s people put their hope/faith/lives on the promises of God; promises of redemption/restoration/resurrection: of protection/prosperity – promises made/kept. As Christians, this promise – the 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 Gospel: God’s plan for our salvation has been won for us through God’s grace. And throughout history, in good/bad times, God’s grace/divine protection was enjoyed by generations of witnesses who responded faithfully to God’s message of hope. This was the saving/transforming hope that moved those who, 173 years ago, founded the Church that became St. Andrew’s – and it is the hope that sustains us/offered to us today, by a God who “*is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*” (Ps 46)

[173 yrs/ago:God planted St.A’s where God wanted/needed His Word - grace/love/peace/hope lived out/say&do/byshowing their love for God by loving their neighbours/by ‘be-ing’ Christ/Christ’s Body in/to the City.]

The Church IS the Body of Christ in the world – the same world that Jesus came/was “incarnated”(Divine became flesh/bone) into – and, for generations, trusted in God’s plan/purpose/promise for St. Andrew’s and sought to ‘be’ Christ Body in the midst of the city/downtown Church, to witness to God’s grace in Brampton. And, over the 173 years, downtown/Brampton has changed – but, since our beginnings, our mission/commission hasn’t: in hope/faith, we were/are spirit created/guided to witness to God’s glory where we are/the City. Over the years St. Andrew’s has labored/it has struggled, its people sacrificed; but it /they/we also prospered – and, when it did, it did because it served the city and created a legacy of witness that transformed our community/countless lives.

[Anniversary Sunday:chance to remind ourselves that we cannot turn our back/ignore the city God planted us in to minister to. Past/formed our identity/present:city in our DNA!]

The Bible doesn’t condemn the City, instead it concludes a history with a vision of the City of God. The first city is likely Eden-Garden City, but the word ‘city’ appears in the 4th chapter of Genesis – where Cain went for protection after being expelled from Eden. We’ve heard how God instructed the exiled People to live in Babylon – the evil/pagan city of their captors – and to seek its peace/prosperity and pray/care for it/love it/build it up.

Later, God sends Jonah to Nineveh – another big/bad/pagan/city(capitol of the Assyrian Empire) – to save it: why? Because God cares for it/has concern/compassion/love for it and its 120,000 people – even though they don't know who God is.

Jesus' life/ministry was an urban ministry from Nazareth to Jerusalem. The 1st Church/Acts 2 – was birthed/planted by the Holy Spirit in the heart of Jerusalem/shadow of the Temple. As the Church expanded – it planted Churches in the major cities of the known world. And, in the Book of Revelation/the end of history, God recreates the “new heaven/new earth” as a city – like Eden – where we're told that God is making “*all things new.*” This is the ‘*New Jerusalem*’ – the “*City of God.*”

[Fun Fact: the City of God is 1,500 miles/square:2,250,000 milesBIG! That's 7,435.5 NYC's!/5.41 Ontarios! Inhabited by all the Tribes of the People of God!Big enough for 62 billion(61,988,402,803) people/7.947times more than global pop!]

In John's vision, a “*Holy city/new Jerusalem*” comes out of “*heaven from God*” and it will be a place where God “*dwell/be-with*” His people/He will be their God. It will be a place where God will – in an echo of Jesus' proclamation of His ministry/mission, predicted by Isaiah – “*wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.*” (Rev. 21:4) This is the vision/promise of the City of God! The vision/promise is one of hope – a better place/where no more death/grief/suffering/pain/sadness – only light/grace/love/joy/peace in God/Jesus' presence. If this is the promise of God's/vision for humanity/the City – and this is what we're called to hope for/witness to!

But we're not just witnesses, we're called to actively **BE** that grace/love/peace/hope by living out that grace/love/peace/love in all we do/say where we are – in the heart of the city. This is the incarnational model for every Christian – 1st Century/173 years ago/today – it's the DNA of the Body of Christ: by be-ing Christ for/to neighbours/others/city our actions/words/faith/lives/presence will witness to the God who's love/grace saved us. We are the Church/body of Christ – may we be-Christ to/for our neighbours, by being/bringing the heart of God in/into the heart of the city. Amen.