

SERMON: "THE CITY OF GOD: *Serving the City.*"

Rev. Geoff Ross: Sunday, October 25, 2020, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

At the beginning of our "City of God" series I talked about how there are two cities, the Earthly City/City of God, that are defined by two distinct traits/characteristics: the first is based on power/pride/greed/hatred, the second on service/humility/generosity/love. I also talked about how these cities exist, simultaneously, here/now/always – and how the City of God is available/possible to us EVEN in/within the earthly city in our fallen world. And, I believe its true. We live as exiles in the earthly city, weary/exhausted/waiting for God to bring about our salvation/the City of God. But I also believe that that's the problem: We expect God to do it, when God's plan calls for us to.

[“Ambassador”: “Official/representative of one country sent to another/foreign country.”/ Latin: “servant”- “Person who acts on behalf of another country/king.” Isaiah: Messiah/“servant” – sent. Philippians/Paul: Jesus-Servant/slave: Jesus-not of this world/came into this world/represented God/God’s plan/purpose to us/where we were/needed Him.]

This was the message that God(through Jeremiah) sent when He called the exiled People of God in Babylon to move/live/work/serve in/love the city of Babylon/earthly city. What God was doing was sending them as His ‘ambassadors’/for the City of God – sent/there/represent God’s love/grace to/within Babylon. This was God’s plan/purpose for the people of God then/it’s the same plan/purpose today/for us. As ‘ambassadors’ – saved/redeemed/restored – we live in the first, yet we are citizens of the second – representing the hope/offer of life in City of God. This is what Jesus is getting at in the first reading(SotM) when He tells His disciples; *“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid....”* We are to be the *“light”* in this dark world that shines so others will see our actions/live/faith and respond – not to us, but to God grace they received through us.

[Light of the world? Jesus: “The light of all people. The light shines in the darkness. The true light, which enlightens everyone, (that came) into the world.” John 1:4,5,9 “I am the light of the world.” John 8:12/9:5 Jesus: “Whoever follows me will have the light of life” in them:they/you/me/we will be His light/shine like stars/diamonds/lamps/lighthouses in the darkness offering hope-a way.]

What Jesus is saying is that having been saved/become followers of Jesus/God we are supposed to be changed/Citizens *“with the saints/members of the household of God/one with Christ.”* By God’s grace we were made citizens of the City of God(Paul/Phil 3:20) and, as such, we are to live/act/be like our King – not just in Church/bushel – but out in the world, in the face of the darkness that surrounds us. God planted us here – and wants us to stay here – to be-Christ to our city; to love/serve/act/sacrifice for our neighbours, not for reward or payment, but to/for the glory of God. Being Christ to/for others/neighbours/city isn’t about us – it’s about our doing for others what God/Jesus did on our behalf, and paying forward.

This isn't that complicated – but it's not easy. Being saved/redeemed/restored yet still here/of this world makes us qualified to be Christ's ambassadors/from this world-but no-longer of this world. After all we have the power/pattern/ability to bring about the city of God, God's final vision of/for creation/us – but somewhere/how we lost our way. Maybe our faith has become too disembodied/'other-worldly'/excarnate rather than incarnational and 'this-worldly' – faith embodied in practice/action. Or maybe it's more about us/looking to serve/save ourselves/self-growth rather than seeking to love/serve/save others, as a part of the city(messy/people/needs/problems). Or it's more about withdrawing/avoiding/retreating from the city/others than engagement with the city/neighbours(messy/people/needs/problems). Friends, to be saved/redeemed/restored doesn't mean that we're called out of this world, it means we are called in order to be sent back into the world to join God/Jesus in/on His saving mission.

[“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid..../Reference:Decapolis city/Hippos-plateau/eastern shore of the SofG:bright lights/big city-can't be hidden. Jesus knew cities:were like/what happened there/how they treated the lost/orphaned/widowed/weak/poor.He also knew that there was a better place.]
At 3:08am Monday morning, a woman/one of the many downtown/street population that have – since COVID19/shutdown – been using our property to sleep/other things, died of an OD. For the 8 years I've been at St. Andrew's, there has been a growing/systemic/chronic homelessness/addiction/street problem that has now become a life-death problem; and it's literally on our doorstep/outside our doors. We can't ignore them – they are our neighbours/part of our city; this is where God planted us. What-Would-Jesus-Do? What He did do was call you/me/all of us to live incarnational lives of faith/service/love.

[Incarnation:Latin:In/into-Carno/flesh – “In human form”/“embodied”-God ‘in the flesh’. Chora Church/fresco of the incarnation:God/Christ poured into the manger. Like Paul/poured himself out to make case for Christ-we are to embody/be-Christ to our neighbours/city incarnationally in say/do.]

Friends, it's not enough for us to be 'just' witnesses, we're called to actively BE the incarnation of Christ/be-Christ for/to neighbours/others/city. As God's ambassadors/"citizens" of heaven – as His "light" – we are to be-Christ/Christ's Body to the world/city/neighbours. And, as God's emblems/exemplifiers/emissaries we are to reveal God's grace in/through our service/love/lives as God did in/through Jesus, who as Emmanuel – 'God-with-us' – came to fulfill God's saving plan for you/me/us by entering/incarnating into our world as one-of-us/live-as/die-for-us to offer us God's Good News of salvation/grace. Jesus didn't just come into the world; He came to call us to the same incarnational ministry so that we would witness to the God whose "light" of love/grace saved us by sharing that light with others as we serve the city. Amen..