

First Presbyterian Church
Cheyenne, Wyoming
September 18, 2011
Rev. Bob Garrard

Worship Theme: -"A Good Surrender."

Exodus 3:1-15, Romans 12:9-21, Matthew 16:21-28

"A Good Surrender," is there such a thing? I know that "surrender" is not necessarily a good word in the American vocabulary. We hold in high regard those who refused to surrender in our history of war, but fought on. Surrender quite often implies "we lose," lose the war, lose the debate, and lose the power. We may not like the word surrender, yet the reality is that surrender in some manner is a part of our lives. We surrender to sleep when tired. In marriage, a man and a woman are to surrender to one another. I am learning, very reluctantly, to surrender to the aging process. Eventually, we all surrender to death. But are these good surrenders? It is up to the individual to decide if anything in their lives is a good surrender.

It is interesting, however, to learn from today's scripture lessons, that for God and in our relationship to him, there are many- good- surrenders—powerfully good surrenders. Let's surrender some time to God to learn about these good surrenders.

First, let's consider God's call of surrender to the man named Moses. Moses is the one who, as a baby, was creatively rescued from the Egyptian King's death sentence. This was accomplished by God's grace and power working through two midwives, his mother, sister, and the daughter of the evil pharaoh. As an adult in the court of Pharaoh, Moses killed an Egyptian who was beating some Hebrew workers. Moses then took off into the wilderness of Midian to become a nomadic shepherd. Midian was a mountainous area along the eastern coast of the Gulf of Aqaba, far away from the Egyptians. In that wilderness, God found Moses, a powerless frightened man, and persuaded him to surrender to a call, a tough and dangerous call.

Let's listen in on a conversation between Moses and a fellow shepherd that might have occurred right after Moses surrendered to God's call. Moses is packing up his goods to leave the Midian area for Egypt. Diana will play the part of Moses' friend.

Friend—"Say, Moses, where are you going?"

Moses—"Back to Egypt"

Friend—"Back to Egypt!! You will be killed! You are wanted there for murder."

Moses—"Maybe, but I still have to go."

Friend—"Why on earth, why?"

Moses—"Because Yahweh told me I must."

Friend—"Who?"

Moses—"Yahweh, the God of our ancestors."

Friend—"Gee, Moses, Yahweh is an unusual name. What does it mean?"

Moses- "It is complicated. Yahweh means something like, 'I was who I was and will be who I will be?' In other words, God's name is 'being,' the one who gives life to all, the One who can be relied on."

Friend—"That is great, but, are you still afraid, Moses?"

Moses—"Yes, I am, but Yahweh said, "I will be with you all the way on this call."

Friend-“How exactly did Yahweh speak to you?”

Moses-“In a burning bush that was not destroyed.”

Friend-"Uh-huh. We know that some of the desert bushes have oil in them so that the oil burns, but not the bush. So where was God in this?"

Moses-“God was like an angel in the fire, speaking to me.”

Friend-“Now, what exactly did Yahweh tell you to go back to Egypt to do?”

Moses-“To go back and persuade the Pharaoh to let my people go. They are suffering terribly as slaves in Egypt, and God has freedom and a Promised Land waiting for them.”

Friend-“Moses, I don't want to be mean, but you are not exactly articulate in your speech. You could come across as a mumbling idiot as well as a foolish fugitive.”

Moses-“Oh, I know. I argued long and hard with Yahweh about this, face to face, to no avail. God always had an answer of assurance to my argument of doubts.”

Friend-“I am not surprised that God out argued you. But, you argued face to face with Yahweh and lived?”

Moses-“Yes, by grace, God let me live, and still called me after all my arguments.

Friend- “So, God argued you into surrendering to this dangerous assignment.”

Moses-“Yes.”

Friend-“I hope that it is a good surrender, Moses.”

Moses-“By God's grace, I do, too.”

As we know, Moses gave his life completely to the Lord. He went on to completing the impossible task of rescuing the Hebrews, and leading them to the Promised Land.

In this story we learn a great deal about the lengths God will go to persuade a specific person to surrender to a call: And, despite their weaknesses, God works with them to make the call a success. We also learn that with God, there can be a good surrender.

This is all fine and good, but if you are like the apostle Peter and me, you may be jolted by what the cost of this surrender to the call of the Lord will be. Yes, we heard that Moses risked and gave the rest of his living days in his good surrender to God's call. But with Peter, in his conversation with Jesus, a good surrender becomes even more costly. When it dawned on Peter as to whom Jesus was, Peter responded by confessing that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Great words. A wonderful insight, but not yet a good surrender. Jesus called Peter and his confession of faith, the "Rock," the human foundation for the building of the church. The very name, Peter, means, “rock” in Greek. Wonderful words from Jesus to Peter. A great nickname, but still not a good surrender.

Jesus then told the disciples that in order to free humanity from its enslavement to sin, and to deliver us to eternal life, he, Jesus, would have to die. He would have to surrender his life, or lay down his life for us. The power in this awful, yet good surrender, would be seen as God raise him up on the third day. When Peter heard this, he was filled with deep concern for Jesus. He then sternly said to Jesus, "God forbid this would happen to you, Lord!" Jesus was much less patient with Peter than God was with Moses. Jesus emphatically told Peter, “Don't tempt me like Satan, don't be a stumbling stone, and quit setting your mind on the ways of the world. For the world to be redeemed from its slavery to sin, you must do as I have done. You must deny

yourself, take up my cross and follow me.” Now that is the good surrender, filled with the power of God. The boastful, yet cowardly Peter who denied Jesus three times, eventually surrendered his life to faithfully leading the early church; and being crucified upside down in Rome for his faith in Christ. He surrendered his life to Christ believing that he too would be raised from the dead and have everlasting life with Christ.

In Romans, Paul also spoke of a good surrender to Jesus Christ. He urged us to present or surrender our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, and be transformed to do God’s will. God’s will for a good surrender is what we find in Romans 12: 9-21. To summarize it, our love is to be genuine: for the Lord; for our friends and even for our enemies. “Beloved, never avenge yourselves” but surrender your desire to get even. Let God take care of any judgment that is to come upon those who hurt you , ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ Instead of getting even, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Instead of surrendering to our desire to get revenge, Christ calls us to surrender to his ways of forgiveness, mercy and compassion. As Diana preached last week, we are called to stop keeping score. This is the good surrender we are to practice in our relationships with each other. We are to do this with joy and gratitude for what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. As a former persecutor and murderer of early Christians, Paul experienced this grace being given to him. Paul made these words good in his surrender to serving Christ as the first Christian missionary to the world. He too died for his faith at the hands of the Romans with the certain hope of a resurrection. It was a tragic, yet good surrender to Jesus Christ, and his promise of the resurrection.

One of the best examples I have seen of the kind of surrender Paul wrote about was in the life of Martin Luther King, and his followers in the heat of the civil rights movement. King preached the following words during demonstrations aimed at integrating the stores in Birmingham in 1963.

“We must say to our white brothers all over the South who try to keep us down; We will match your capacity to inflict suffering with our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we will not hate you. And yet, we cannot in all good conscience obey your evil laws, because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. Do to us what you will and we will still love you. Threaten our children and we will still love you...Say that we're too low, that we're too degraded, yet we will still love you. We will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We will so appeal to your heart and your conscience that we will win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory.” pgs. 105-106 in Power of the Lamb by Ward Ewing.

We may gasp at this cost of being persuaded to serve God in the manner of Moses, Peter, Paul, or Martin Luther King, who also died for his faith in Christ. We may want to run even further away than Moses did to Midian. We may want to try to stop Jesus on his mission as Peter tried to do so that we do not have completely surrender our lives. We may not want to be as patient and loving as Paul exhorted us to be. We might say Martin Luther King had his weaknesses, just like Moses, Peter and Paul, and pooh pooh him as

an example of surrendered faith, as I have heard some people do. But, the truth is that there is no place to hide from Yahweh, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave his all for us. There is no denial of the powerful witness made by these fellow Christians, who like us had weakness, yet who made a good surrender to God. In the midst of our fear, Jesus causes us to see this surrender, this call to labor for God in another way. "If you die to the world, you will live for me, if you lose or surrender your life for my sake, you will gain it and more." There is no doubt that the way of the Lord is both beautiful and costly. It takes enormous faith and courage to live it for it is very hard to do. Yet, we must be filled with gratitude that God has called us, that God is the power behind our surrender.

All of us have had or will have a call from God to surrender our lives to Christ. God knows where we live. God knows our weaknesses. And when God comes to us, we can argue with God about the call, but God will work on us to change our minds, to persuade us to surrender. Actually in the surrender, we are empowered, not weakened.

I hope God is not calling you or me to die for our faith in Christ. But, one never knows. God may be asking you to confess your faith and join the church. Maybe God is calling you to surrender a part of your life to teach Sunday school, work with our youth, serve on a session ministry or deacon's committee of the church or be a church officer? Maybe God is calling you to surrender more of your hard earned income so that this church and Christ's kingdom might have the continued financial where-with-all to be more effect as witnesses. God may be working on you to persuade you to say "yes" to serve the body of Christ in some other way. Hide or argue all you want, but in the end, realize that it is a gift from God to be called to a good surrender to labor for the Lord Jesus Christ. As God empowered Moses, Jesus, Peter and Paul, so will he empower you and me to do the mission, and to do it well. Let us surrender to him and gain our lives, again.