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 Fourth Sunday of Lent

Time to Surrender
Luke 9:23-27

*Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must **deny** themselves and **take up their cross daily and follow me.**" ²⁴ For whoever wants to **save** their life will **lose** it, but whoever **loses their life for me** will **save** it. ²⁵ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? ²⁶ Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. ²⁷ "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God."*

Pastor Rick Warren has a story about surrender.

A man falls over a cliff and grabs a branch on his way down—he's 500 feet down, with another 500 feet to go.

He yells: "*Is there anybody up there?*"

The voice of God says: "*I'm here. Trust me. LET GO.*"

The man responds, "*Is there anybody ELSE up there?*"

From John Ortberg's sermon, "Get a Grip"

How **many of us** have been there—God is saying to us: "let go", and we want to know if **someone else is available** to give us advice!

In his book, "*Waiting: Finding Hope Where God Seems Silent*",

Ben Patterson describes climbing the highest peak in Yosemite National Park.

Where he got trapped on a slope of ice.

His friends saw him, and one of them said this:

*"Listen carefully: As you step across, **don't lean into** the mountain!*

*If anything, **LEAN OUT a bit.** Otherwise your feet could fly out from under you and you will start sliding down".*

Talk about **counterintuitive**, right? **Lean OUT? Not in?**

Writer and priest **Henri Nouwen wrote about surrender.**

He was fascinated with a group of trapeze artists called ***the Flying Rodleighs***. He was ***inspired by their courage, trust and dependence*** upon one another, and saw their act as a ***symbol of our life with God***.

He learned a lot from the troupe.

The flyer, Rodleigh, the one who flies through the air after letting go of the bar, appears to be the star of the show.

I mean—isn't that when everyone watches and holds their breath?

But the flyer explained that the ***real star is the catcher***.

Why?

The secret is that the flyer does NOTHING and the catcher does EVERYTHING.

Rodleigh the flyer said, "*When I fly to Joe (the catcher), I have simply to stretch out my arms and wait for him to catch me and pull me safely...behind the catchbar...The astonished man asked: You do NOTHING? That's right, Nothing. the worst thing the flyer can do is **try to catch** the catcher...*

a flyer must fly and a catcher must catch, and the flyer must trust, with outstretched arms, that his catcher will be there for him."

From John Ortberg's sermon "Get a Grip".

Now think about that for a minute.

The flyer decides to let go.... in trust with outstretched arms, that the ***catcher will catch him***.

So ***what if we are the flyers, and God is the catcher?***

What if ***our job is simply to let go, fly, and trust?***

Easier said than done, right?

All of this talk of letting go,

is echoed in ***the third step of AA***, Alcoholics Anonymous.

That's where we turn our lives and our will over to God.

We let go and let God.

Only when we surrender like this,

do we ***receive the power to do*** what we cannot do alone.

So, when have ***you faced a moment of letting go?***

Scary, right?

Was it like leaning out from a mountain?

Or flying off a trapeze bar?
I always compare it to stepping off the pole for a zip line—yikes!

But could this surrender be **what Jesus means** when he says in the Gospels,
“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves
and take up their cross daily and follow me.
²⁴ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it,
but whoever loses their life for me will save it.

For Jesus, surrender involves denying yourself.
But denying ourselves—is **not our natural inclination**, is it?
We look out for ourselves, don’t we?
And kind of like hugging the mountain makes more sense,
and trying to catch the catcher seems logical,
it’s not natural to deny ourselves,
take up a cross, and follow Jesus.
Surrender is not what most of us do best.

**Most of us are trying to SAVE our lives.
To take care of ourselves.**

We are trying to **hold tight** what what we **have** and what we **want**—
our **own happiness, safety, security**.
We **rely so much on ourselves**—
you know the old pull yourself up by your bootstraps mentality?
We rely on our pride and talent, what we’ve made and built for ourselves.

The problem is, when we try to save ourselves and hold tightly,
is we miss out on a **meaningful life**.
It can **actually cause us to lose** ourselves.

It’s kind of like the old adage about truly loving someone,
And letting them go.
In the life of a believer, **we must let go—
so that Jesus can catch us—and give us that amazing life with God.**

If we **hold too tightly** to anything but God, we might **lose ourselves**.
Only by **letting go** can we embrace something bigger and better—
like life with Christ.

But it's just *so tempting to hold fast* to what we've got, isn't it?

In Tolkien's book, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, there's a great scene between the hobbit Bilbo Baggins and Gandalf.

If you know the trilogy you know that a theme of the books is the way that the *power of evil takes possession* of anyone who thinks they can possess it.

The only way to be *free* is to *let go of the ring*.

In one scene, Gandalf is trying to convince Bilbo to let it go.

Gandalf says, "I think Bilbo I should leave it behind. Don't you want to? "

He says, "*Well, yes—and no....I don't like parting with it at all, I may say. And I don't really see why I should...it is mine, I tell you..and I shall keep it.*

To which Gandalf replies, "*It has got far too much hold on you. Let it go! And then you can go yourself, and be free...*"

Bilbo finally releases the ring, and says he has found happiness.

(J.R.R. Tolkien, Fellowship of the Ring, (New York: Random House, 1965), 59-62.

I wonder, is there something *you need to let go?*

So that you can be *free?*

Jesus offers us something so much better than holding onto anything else--
to any object, person, or just our own way.

But Jesus' path seems upside down.

It seems *counterintuitive, or illogical.*

But is it?

Have you ever heard the proverb

about the *man who did everything he could think of to find his own happiness*, and he couldn't find it.

Finally, he did everything he could think of to *make someone else happy* and then he found true **JOY**.

A prayer of St. Francis of Assisi is very similar:

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

To be consoled as to console;

To be understood as to understand;

To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

*It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.*

It seems upside down to let go of our lives, but it's the **way of Jesus Christ**.
He let go of his identity as God, and embraced his humanity to save us.
In *Philippians 2*, Paul describes this:
How he emptied himself, became human, and obedient unto death.
He showed us **God's self-giving, self-emptying, self-sacrificing love**.
All through his death on the **cross**.

What if we are called to love sacrificially too?
Do you ever find yourself doing that?
Maybe as a **parent**—as you sacrifice yourself for your child,
Or as a **child**, caring for parents?
As a **best friend** to someone you love?

When do you find **yourself sacrificing** what you want,
So that someone else may have what they need?
Have you ever found that by **giving up what you want**,
You find what you **REALLY need**?
Could this be **what Jesus meant**?

What are **you being asked to surrender**?
How are you being asked to let go?
And let God be in charge?

Sometimes we are faced with this decision **in a crisis**—
like when the Israelites saw that what was between them
and freedom was the Red Sea and had no idea how to cross.
Ever had a time when *you've come to end of your rope*?
With nothing left? No way out?
What if the way out is to trust, and LET GO?
What if the best thing to say is: **Catch me, Jesus!**

My daily devotional *Streams in the Desert* say this for August 20th:
*Each of us will have a time of crisis, when all our resources will fail,
and when we face either ruin or something better than we have ever dreamed.
But before we can receive the blessing, we must rely on God's infinite help.
We must be willing to let go, surrendering completely to Him,*

and **cease** from our own wisdom, strength, and righteousness.
 We must be crucified with Christ and yet alive in Him.

L.B. Cowman, *Streams in the Desert*, August 20th.

I feel like this letting go is something
 That I **have to do again and again**, what about you?
 Just when I think I know how to do it,
 I find myself faced with **another situation** where I've got to surrender—
 And God is again saying "Let Go!"

Thankfully, Jesus says in Luke 9—that surrender is like that.
 He calls us to, **deny ourselves, take up a cross DAILY**, and follow.
 This is not a one-time event—It's a daily decision.
 Which is actually great, because we have a clean slate each day!

Our **temptation in life is SELF-RELIANCE**.

Like the '**resume**' Paul describes in Philippians 3,
 You know—all the things we have going for us.

Paul makes a list of everything like that in his life—his position, power,
 education...then he says in Philippians 3:7-9:

*Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as **loss** because of Christ.
⁸ More than that, I regard **everything as loss** because of the surpassing value of
 knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things,
 and I regard them as **rubbish**, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in
 him...*

What is your **internal 'resume'**?

And, what would it mean for you, to **let it all go**?

Not easy, right?

Somewhere we hope that what we have will help us with God.
 But it doesn't.

We are **saved by God's GRACE, not our own good works**.

God doesn't have a 'holy scorecard'.

We must come to a point like Paul,

Where we consider all of our stuff, to be **unimportant--**

And a **relationship with Jesus to be the most important** thing in life!

We must let go of what we hold so tightly,
 So we can have the life Jesus offers--
 And understand what Paul says in **Philippians 4:13**:
*I can do all things, through **Christ** who strengthens me!*

Well, here's some help---***we don't have to do this alone.***
 Paul wrote to church families—
 and encouraged them in their faith journeys—together.
 We can get ***support and accountability from one another***
 in the body of Christ.

And we have the ***power of the Holy Spirit inside us to help*** us and guide us.
 We are not alone.
 We can ask for help, and trust that God will help us surrender and let go.

The key is to ***commit to following Jesus no matter*** what.
 We ***can't 'make a deal' with God***—
 where we are still in charge, and God just helps with special projects.
 That's not surrender.

True surrender is letting go of what we ***want***,
 So that Jesus can provide what we really ***need***.
 True surrender is about ***finding the JOY*** that life in Christ can bring.
 Just as Jesus said, *those who lose their lives for my sake will save them.*

Friends, the Good News is that SURRENDER is the pathway to JOY.
 Or as Jesus says in John 10:10,
I came for them to have life, and have it abundantly.
 May we all embrace the call to surrender,
 And together, all God's people can say, Amen.