

March 4, 2012
Luke 9:18-27
Creekside COB
Pastor Janet Shaver

“Sweet Surrender”

JOKE:

The *Doonesbury* comic strip has a recurring bit about the Little Church of Walden, a decidedly nontraditional congregation presided over by the Rev. Scott Sloane. Pastor Sloane is trying very hard to keep up with the changing times.

In one particular strip, Michael Doonesbury is back for a visit. He’s asking Scott to tell how his church got started.

Aerobics, is the minister’s reply. Aerobics?

I needed something to attract folks from the community. The focus group suggested an aerobics class. It worked, so I added yoga and bingo, and then a few 12-step programs, then we opened a soup kitchen, which led to cooking lessons. Before I knew it, I had my own denomination.

So that’s how religion spreads, Doonesbury muses, in reply.

In the next strip in the series, Sloane is giving Joanie Caucus a tour of his church. She hasn’t been there for a while, so he’s bringing her up to speed on all the changes: The old house is used for our spiritual wellness seminars and various 12-step recovery programs. In the new wings, we have the food court, a fitness center and our interpretive dance studios.

Caucus wonders where, in that vast complex, the people worship. “On our Web site,” Sloane replies. “Keeps the heating bills down.”

The final installment is a longer one, from the Sunday comics. In it, Sloane is talking with a couple of first-time visitors. He asks

them what they're looking for, in a church.

The husband replies with a question of his own:
Well, what's your basic approach here, Reverend? Is it traditional gospel?

In a way, I like to describe it as 12-step Christianity. Basically, I believe that we're all recovering sinners. My ministry is about surrendering, denying ourselves, spiritual growth, redemption. It's all in the brochure there.

Wait a minute! says the husband, sounding suspicious.
Denying ourselves, redemption doesn't that imply ... Guilt?

Well, yes, I do rely on the occasional dis-incentive to keep the flock from going astray. Guilt's part of that.

I dunno, says the husband, turning to his wife. There's so much negativity in the world as it is.

That's right, she replies. We're looking for a church that's supportive, a place where we can feel good about ourselves. I'm not sure the guilt thing works for us.

On the other hand, muses the husband, paging through the glossy brochure, you do offer racquetball.

So do the Unitarians, honey, the wife shoots back.
Let's shop around some more.

Surrender – It is a word that generates not so good feelings.

SURRENDER

What do you think of when the word surrender comes to mind?

Fly a White Flag – what does this mean to you?
Raised Arms – what does this mean to you?

When we talk about surrender, we do not think of it as a good thing.

We might see it as a sign of weakness or cowardice.

- giving up, yielding relinquishing, relinquishment**
- surrender - a verbal act of admitting defeat**
- To relinquish possession or control of to another because of demand or compulsion.**
- To give up in favor of another.**
- To give up or abandon: *surrender all hope.***
- To give over or resign (oneself) to something, as to an emotion:**

OUR VIEW POINT

The gist of the word is that we are giving something up or giving in to something or someone.

That is not easy for us.

The cultural place of surrender

- I did it my way**
- Pulling ourselves up by our boot straps**
- We are independent – especially on our Western Culture**

That is why it is so hard to surrender ourselves to anything.

MOVE 2 – TERMS OF SURRENDER

VERSE 23 – LET THEM DENY THEMSELVES

PICK UP OUR CROSS DAILY

We deny ourselves – we surrender ourselves to Jesus . In practical terms for the Christian, it means dying to one's own desires and will in total submission to God to be, go, and do whatever He calls one to do.

The Apostle Paul said, “I die daily.”

The more digestible term is “Letting Go and Letting

Are you all familiar with the term “Let Go and Let God?”

I want to try something with you.

Close your eyes. Close your eyes and imagine in your closed fists – place in your fists - that thing you need to let go of or that thing you are having trouble letting go of...right now in your life. Maybe it's a painful event, a sadness, something that has hurt you. Maybe it's a person, a bad relationship, a loss, a fight – something you've wrestled with over and over in your mind and just can't figure out or come to grips with – you're just stuck. Hold on really tight...and now we're going to say – let go and let God – giving these things that we've been holding on to up to God – trusting that they are now in God's capable and loving hands and for a bit – we can rest without them. And as we say Let go and Let God let's open our hands – palms up to God.

How is that? Is it gone? Maybe not?

We have a hard time surrendering to God – to letting go of some things.

We become attached to many things that make it hard to let go and let God. It's because we get attached. We get attached to people – people we love, people who are good for us – sometimes even people who aren't good for us.

We get attached to things we have stored away in our attics or in our pole barns.

We get attached to the past. Why can't things be like they were? I miss those old times.

We get attached to old understandings and will not adhere to new ideas. I still like my paper calendar. I still like hand writing my journal. I still like writing letters and cards.

We are attached to our way of thinking about God and about the things of God. We believe that we have the answers.

We get attached to places – those places we grew up, those places we go to on vacation year after year, to our homes.

It reminds me of a couple I spoke to recently who grew up in OHIO and God moved them here. They came here believing that they would move back and they continued to hunt for jobs in their field in Ohio. They have been here ten years and still want to go back to Ohio but have surrendered their desires to God.

This is where God has them. This is where they began something new and they love it here but still long to be home.

We get attached to feelings. Good feelings – like the kind you get when exercise – or just take a breath and slow down. Or that feeling you get when you sit down to that first cup of coffee in the morning – or tea – those are good feelings and when we don't get them – we miss them.

Sometimes get attached to bad feelings – sometimes we get stuck holding onto pain, the memory of being hurt. We hold onto anger – for far too long, we nurse grudges sometimes long after the object of our grudge is gone – because we're just used to it.

You know Byrl is a West Virginian– home of the legendary feud between the Hatfields and McCoys. Does anyone know how it started? Let me tell you.

The feud began in 1865 when one of the McCoy's was allegedly killed by one of the Hatfields because he joined the Union Army during the Civil War. What followed is the stuff legends are made of - revenge, violence, accusations, shady dealings, affairs more murders. The feud officially ended when both families agreed to stop fighting in 1891 and in 2003 they signed an official peace treaty to show people they actually got along now. And I bet many do – but in the hills and hollows of Appalachia they say the grudges still remain. You watch what you say when you're in that part of the country.

Families have feuds - not all are as drastic as the Hatfields and McCoys but we've all heard of siblings who haven't talked in

years – even those who can't remember why they're not talking in the first place.

Even churches have feuds. There's a story about this one church where the pastor and the choir director started fighting. A parishioner who was there says it happened like this:

One week our preacher preached on commitment, and how we should dedicate ourselves to service. The director then led the choir in singing, 'I Shall Not Be Moved.'

The next Sunday, the preacher preached on giving and how we should gladly give to the work of the Lord. The choir director then led the song, 'Jesus Paid It All.'

The next Sunday, the preacher preached on gossiping and how we should watch our tongues. The hymn was 'I Love To Tell The Story.'

The preacher became disgusted over the situation, and the next Sunday he told the congregation he was considering resigning. The choir then sang 'Oh, Why Not Tonight.'

When the preacher resigned the next week, he told the church that Jesus had led him there and Jesus was taking him away. The choir then sang, 'What A Friend We Have in Jesus.'

Attached to these feelings – they belong to us. Our ways of thinking and feeling belong to us.

And there is something about our way being right – being good that makes it hard to “Let it go and let God.”

Richard Rohr quote

He says it has everything to do with the “center and the circumference.”

Rohr says that we spend more time on the edge of the world and less time in the center. He says that we live in a material world in

a culture of affluence which only rewards the outer self. Rohr says we spend more time in that circumference than we do in our center where God we will find a deeper relationship with God.

He says our center place where we dwell with God weakens it can not withstand the pressures of the world. Rohr is saying that we spend so much time in the circumference instead of the center where God is we have a hard time discerning the things of God.

We spend so much time in our business, our career track, our technology even our families that the less time we spend with God the more that the center can't hold. We get confused between what the ego desires and God's desires. We get mixed up.

That is why we hang onto the ego. It is part of the circumference. That is why we have a hard time letting go.

Ego tells us – we want what we want

A pastor tells a story about his dad who did not like his call into the seminary. He writes. I can well remember when I made the decision to attend Dallas Theological Seminary. I had been raised on a small cattle ranch in East Texas and had a degree in animal husbandry from Texas A&M University. Through my experience on the ranch and my studies at A&M, I was fairly well prepared to manage a cattle ranch. After graduation, I was offered an excellent job working for a large feed company in our area while managing a large ranch. But God had also been at work in my heart and I had become convinced that God's will for my life was to prepare for the pastorate (shepherding sheep rather than herding cattle) through attending seminary.

My father thought I had lost my mind! He claimed I would be wasting my life, my education at Texas A&M, and did his best to dissuade me. He was ashamed of the fact I would be going to seminary rather than taking a job in the market place. Ironically, I was also offered a position with a pharmaceutical company in

the Pacific Northwest, and this would have been okay in my dad's eyes because this job was with a well-know company and came with an excellent compensation package. I would not have been using my training in cattle and pasture management, but that didn't seem to matter. Though his attitude changed before I finished seminary and my dad became very supportive, at first, before God had worked in his heart, my dad was simply not willing to see his son go into full-time ministry. To him this was a sacrifice he was not readily willing to make.

The father had a hard time letting go and letting God – surrendering it to God. He wanted what he wanted. He was attached to a dream that he had for his son.

**Fear – of not getting what our heart desires the most
What if I let it go? I might never receive it.**

At age 28 Oprah was a reporter at a TV station when she read the Color Purple and it changed her life. She'd hidden her own abuse before that. It inspired her. When she heard they were making a movie she wanted to be in it. She did all she could. She auditioned but didn't hear back. Months went by. She got discouraged. She was convinced it was because she was too heavy. She went away to a health retreat to lose 50 pounds. She realized that dream had consumed her. All her energy and focus was on it. As she was out running on the track she began singing I surrender all, all to Jesus... A few days later Steven Spielberg called her and said you've got the part but if you lose one pound you're out.

We believe that if we let it go it won't be what we want it to.

That may be the truth or not. But what we want to take away with us is this.

When we release something up to God – whether it is our feelings, our fears our desires – our lives become sweeter.

That is what Jesus is saying. We gain new life when we die to old life. There is a sweetness about letting it go. Surrendering up to God and relinquishing our lives to him

We live in freedom as we “Let Go and Let God.”

**Peter answers, He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"
Peter answered, "The Messiah of God."**

Peter knew Jesus because he was close to him. He dwelled with him daily. As we draw into God, our releasing becomes a daily event.

Paul says, “I die daily.” This is something that we let go every day.

Chaplain from Dayton illustration

He never went to the VA but he knew that God had this purpose for him in the prison ministry.

Robert Schuller coined this phrase “Our disappointments are sometimes God’s appointments to a greater good that can come in no other way.”

So now that we have had some time to digest this message.

Let’s try this exercise again. While I pray.

**Close your eyes. Tighten your fist. Now let’s pray and as I end the prayer I will say to you, “We are letting go and letting God.”
Open your hands placing your palms up to God.**