

INSPIRED WORD
November 8, 2017

TESTIMONY

SHARING

Last week the Lord asked, "Have you given everything to me? Have you given me your anger, your disappointment, your anxiety, your fear, your rebellion, your sinfulness, your weakness? Are you ready to give them to me now, along with yourself, your heart, your mind, and with your strength?" Where have you been challenged to give something over to the Lord this week? Anybody have anything to share? Actually I hadn't seen this until later and this morning when I was in prayer, I took my computer and I was looking for a song and the song that I found was "I Surrender All", so I thought it was rather telling that this was what Deacon Chuck had said. But so many times in my life, I say, "Lord, I'll surrender" but then I keep one thing, or maybe a few. And I don't give it all over. And the Lord doesn't ask us for that. He doesn't say to just give over the things that you think you want to get rid of, the things that I think He can handle and keep the things that I think I can handle, because I don't really do a good job at it. He says, "Just give it all to me. Just give it all to me." And then, Ruth gave her testimony and that was part of the whole closet thing. It was that we take it and we don't surrender it to God; we just take it and shove it and put it in this closet. And all of a sudden we've got so much that's in there that it all falls out. And what happens when you open that up and it falls out is that you can't get it back in, if you've ever had a closet that you've shoved things into. You can't get it back in the same way. And I remember sitting in the ladies restroom on the floor with Ruth many, many nights, and talking about how we could deal with just one of those things. And the only way to deal with it is to surrender it to God, to give it to Him, to say, "Lord, this is too big for me" or "I just can't handle it" or "I think I can handle it and I want it my way." But when we surrender it to God, we say, "Lord, I love You enough that I trust You enough to accept what You'll do in this situation." So, do you have something?

SHARING

I remember when we heard that word and I thought to myself, "I think I've given You everything, Lord. I'm really glad I've been able to do that." So I went home really feeling pretty good that, yes, I had answered the Lord. And then, I think it was not that night but the next night or something like that, I woke up and something had really been bothering me for quite awhile now. In fact, when Evelyn and I went on our trip, I told her I just needed to get away for this. Of course, I thought I had given it up. And I woke up right in the middle of the night and I can't say that I heard the Lord say anything but I remember saying, "I haven't given it up, have I, Lord?" You know, it goes back to exactly what I told you before. I remember in my mind

walking out of here saying in my mind, “Lord, I’m glad I’ve given You everything.” And when I stopped to think about that, I realized I hadn’t. And then I also remembered, because I’d been struggling with my health quite a bit, and I had remembered going back for prayer and the word I had gotten was: My grace is enough for you. And of course, when I brought that up, you know how you feel when you say, “Oh jeez”? I had to admit, “Yes, Lord, Your grace is enough if I allow You to really take it, not just think, not just be proud about the fact that I’ve given it to You, but to really, really do release it and let it go, because it was at that point that I finally came to realize that if I really let it go, Your grace is enough. But if I don’t let it go, then it can’t be enough because I’m not going to accept Your help.”

SHARING

I really love those two stories but my story is I didn’t think I was supposed to... I thought I was supposed to do everything and give nothing up. And I thought to myself, “I am trusting God” but I was not. So through all these years, and especially this year, I think I heard Him saying a couple of times to me, “Really, Betsy? Really?” And I think I even kind of felt that in the back of my head. “You need to surrender this stuff to me. I don’t expect you to do everything yourself.” But I actually, unlike other people, thought I was supposed to do it all. But I’m learning to surrender and letting God handle all of it. And it feels a lot better.

INSPIRED TEACHING

There is a pride, and I apologize for wording it like this, but there’s a pride with saying I have given it all. There’s humility with saying I’m just going to do what I’m going to do each time I seek something. But that pride that will defeat us and tear us up and beat us up is a pride of saying that I have given it all up. Look at me; I’m wonderful. But we need to come to the place where we’ll work with the Holy Spirit and let the Holy Spirit do something with us, even if it’s just one thing, or two things, whatever it is. And we need to just... I’m not teaching here because I don’t teach here but it’s like we need to come to the place to where we can just admit to ourselves that we have problems and that we need to just take this one thing out of the closet and this other thing out of the closet and just submit ourselves to the gentle, tender compassion of the Holy Spirit, because over all else, the Holy Spirit is a gentleman.

PRAYER

Thank You, Lord, for fighting those battles for us. Mighty are You, glorious Lord. Thank You. You are on our side. Isn’t that a consolation, people of God? Wow!

PRAYER

Your arms are wide open, Lord, here we come. Glory to You!

PRAYER

Lord, You are so indescribable. We can't explain it in words, so we lift up this song to You, Lord, from our hearts.

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 95:1-7: *Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the rock of our salvation! Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth; and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down and worship. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker! For he is our God; we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.*

SCRIPTURE / PRAYER

From **John 10:14:** *I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.* Such a simple phrase and yet so profound: I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me. Lord, help us to know you and to show that we know You by responding to You and Your call in our lives. To hear that sweet voice calling us across the meadows of our lives, and knowing, "That's my Shepherd and I will come because He has called. I will answer."

CONFIRMATION

And in confirmation of that, we've heard this Psalm many, many times but I think the Lord wants us to hear it with new ears tonight. This is our Shepherd who is calling to us, and it says (**Psalm 23**): *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.*

CONFIRMATION / SCRIPTURE / EXHORTATION

Just to confirm a couple of things that have been already said tonight, from **Isaiah 51:12-13:** *I, I am he who comforts you; who are you that you are afraid... and forget the Lord, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth.* It's like that song says: we have our Father in heaven; we have the Holy Spirit within us; we have Jesus our Savior. Who are we that we are still afraid? We have God, the Lord, who stretched out the heavens, laid the foundations of the earth, who are we to be afraid? He tells us not to be afraid. We don't know better than Him. He says, "Do not be afraid." Who are we to still be afraid?

SCRIPTURE

This is **Isaiah 12:2-6**: *God indeed is my Savior; I am confident and unafraid; my strength and my courage is the Lord and he has been my Savior. With joy you will draw water at the fountain of salvation, and say on that day: "Give thanks to the Lord, proclaim his name; among the nations make known his deeds, proclaim how exalted is his name. Sing praises to the Lord for his glorious achievements, let this be known throughout all the earth. Shout with exaltation, O city of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."*

SHARING

It seems to me that everything that's been said and everything we've sung is just for me tonight. And I know that's not true, but it feels like it is. The prophetic word that we need to give our whole self to the Lord is something that I have been struggling with and again, I was like that man that thought I gave everything. But the thought came through a Life in the Spirit Seminar to be presented at our church, St. Benedicts in Florence, and I tried to push it away because I knew it was going to be a lot of effort and I would be the one that would begin the effort. So I argued with the Lord and said, "Lord, don't you know I'm 74-years-old. I can't do this by myself." And of course that was a stupid thing to say to the Lord because... I closed my eyes in my self-pity and I could see the Lord in my vision directing my steps. He wasn't just directing my steps. He lifted my whole leg to follow in His footsteps. He would lift one and then the other. And it made me laugh, broke the tension, and maybe because I realized the Lord would provide. And that's just what we heard tonight, that the Lord is our shepherd, that there's nothing we shall want, and not to fear. The Lord is near; He's here. And He has provided like the blessings flowing from the water. Those blessings just flow all around us as we've begun and have begun to prepare because look who's come to our aid? And we thank everyone here, especially Deacon and Barb and Betsy, and all those who have offered to help us with this Life in the Spirit Seminar. The Lord has really truly provided and I thank God for all of you.

SENSE / SHARING

One more thing I think the Lord wants us to know about surrender. It can be like Jimmie said right up front about why we don't surrender. It can be a prideful thing, like, "I've got this. I can do it. I've always done it and I will do it." So it can be a prideful thing. But also surrender has a bad connotation in our culture because of a fear... like me, I was brought up in a family with a very strong work ethic and we don't give up. And surrender to me kind of has a connotation of giving up, and we just didn't do that. We were taught to push through and work and work, and don't give up. But the Lord is saying, "This surrender I'm asking of you is to let me be your shepherd. Let me lead; let me take you to these places of refreshment. Let me lead you in battle and be the strong one. Let me put that whole armor on you before you go to that dark place, or when you're in that dark place. Let me hold the shield of faith. Let me take you to those cool streams. Let me shepherd you to the banquet that's overflowing and overrunning." So it's not that we have to be strong and do everything ourselves; it's not giving up like raising

the white flag, you know, and just giving up. It's letting the Lord shepherd as He asks to do, remembering that He's the shepherd and we're the sheep. And that's the part of surrender that the Lord wants us to dwell on tonight.

CONFIRMATION / IMAGE / SHARING

And just a confirmation but also, and I know that we're at the end of the night but I just want to share one last image for you to take home with you. This is a story that maybe some of you have seen or heard before. But I'm just going to act it out a little bit so that you have the visual that goes with it. Have any of you ever been to Niagara Falls? And it's so... that massive water just (whooshing sound). And there's really no way to get around the Falls without going quite a ways up to go across the river, or quite a ways down to cross to the other side. But there was a man who stretched a tightrope across Niagara Falls, across the river and secured at both ends. And he said, "Do you believe I can walk across this tightrope?" And everyone said, "We believe! We believe!" And he said, "Okay, I'm going to walk across the tightrope." And he did and he slowly, carefully balanced his way across. And he got there. And he said, "Do you think I can come back across this tightrope with a wheelbarrow?" And everyone said, "We believe! We believe!" So he carefully, quietly, wobbly, pushed the wheelbarrow across. And so he's looking at the crowd and he says, "Okay, do you think I can do it again with my eyes closed and blindfolded?" "We believe! We believe!" "Okay, get in the wheelbarrow." And I guess my point is that faith is an act of the mind that says we believe. It's also that act of the heart, which is an action. So surrender is an action; it's not a giving up; it's a going out in trust. It's an, "Okay, I believe because you showed me you can do this. You've shown me that you're trustworthy. I don't know how to get across this river on my own. But you're the wire and you've got the wheelbarrow and you've invited me to get in. I'm going to say I believe and I'm getting in the barrow. Let's go." So let us go. And the last piece was that they're doing a beatification of a priest... of course, I'm completely blanking on his name right now. He's a Capuchin priest which is an order of the Franciscans, and I was reading his biography today, just briefly, and I think it's the other part of surrender. The man had grown up in the late 1800s; he lived until 1957 in the Detroit area, and he had a conversion where he decided he wanted to become a priest, that God was calling him to do that. But he had a very poor education, and he struggled in minor seminary, about to flunk out. And the Bishop said, "I think God does have a call on your life but I think if you go through the orders, you might have a better shot at getting to where God wants you to be." So he became a Franciscan. And after a lot of struggle, he did graduate; he did pass but they said, "You made it through but we're going to ordain you a simplex priest, which means you can say mass but you're not allowed to preach in public and you're not allowed to do confessions", which would be really difficult for somebody if that was their dream, and in the world's standard, that is the goal, not to be a showoff, but to be in the limelight and to share God's love that way. And in his humility, he didn't become bitter about that. He was grateful and he said, "I'm serving Your will, Lord, wherever that place is that You take me." And he became the porter for 21 years, which meant he opened the door to the

monastery and he had a healing ministry that had so many miracles, and this is in our time, the 30s-40s-50s, of documented miracles for the sick, because he would pray for them. He couldn't do confessions; he couldn't preach. But he could just love on them and pray with them for healing and God used that humility to heal them and do that work. And he is now about to become Blessed. His miracles have been approved and he's going to be... that next step from Venerable to Blessed. We know that he's with the Lord. In our humility, in our surrender, just do what God asks you to do. And that may be saying "I'm willing to start a Life in the Spirit Seminar. I don't know how but I'm getting in the barrow. And You'll make it happen. I'm just doing my part, that You're calling me with the voice of the Shepherd to do. That's enough." And that is a miracle and an amazing work of grace.

CONFIRMATION

And the last confirming thing to that and what was said by Laura is that the one phrase that has really stuck with me that we sang tonight was from the song "Joy", and that is: "Though I am broken, I am running into the arms of Love." And I think that helps sum up the night too. We are broken but we're running into the arms of Love.