

Surrender and New Life

(Please know this sermon was written to be preached and not for publication. Thus, when you read it, please understand the punctuation and syntax may not be grammatically perfect.) ~ Rev. Emily J. Kellar

Eugene Peterson's The Message.... the Bible in contemporary language says the following for today's passage.... I wanted us to hear a little from it today as well.... ²⁵⁻²⁷*One day when large groups of people were walking along with him, Jesus turned and told them, "Anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters—yes, even one's own self! —can't be my disciple. Anyone who won't shoulder his own cross and follow behind me can't be my disciple.*

³³*"Simply put, if you're not willing to take what is dearest to you, whether plans or people, and kiss it good-bye, you can't be my disciple. Letting go...new life.... new church year...surrender...*

At some point a few years ago I adopted a new posture for prayerit feels somewhat personal to share this with you today bc we do not really know each other yet but I will choose vulnerability today and share....several years ago I kept struggling with surrender.....on leaning back into the Divine...and letting go...letting go of planning and predictability.....and I began to lay face down on the floor....in full surrender while praying.....and on Sunday mornings

early....long before anyone arrived at the church I was serving....I would go to the sanctuary and kneel and lay face down and pray for the church....you see lying face down....is a posture of giving up control....of letting go...of saying I am not in the driver's seat....it is one of saying 'I am yours....my whole life is yours'....praying in that posture has had a dramatic effect on me personallybut it is definitely not for everyone...

So, this morning we hear Jesus talk of this full surrender.... this laying down everything Jesus says to his disciples be willing to let go...of everything.... of your whole life.... Jesus says you are not in the driver's seat I am.... follow me.... if you want to find your true self.... if you want to find freedom.... die to who you are and discover who you are in the Divine plan.... if you want to follow me...be my disciple...stand on the side of love...Jesus says...

I have often thought to myself....what kind of marketing campaign for Christianity would it be to use this text this morning....come follow Jesus....learn to let go...give up control....lose your own self and die into a larger reality in life....if we say these things then we have to finish the story....we have to complete the scenario....if we do all these things, we will find our true self....and we will find freedom....and serenity....if we let go....if we let go of control and of always being in charge...we win....it's ironic....Jesus says follow me....surrender....let go....be willing to lay your life down....and by doing

this....by giving upyou will gain everything....what a paradox....we have to lose to win....we have to let it go to get it....

We stand at a new place here together this morning. It is a new church year. Your beloved minister, Will is on sabbatical. Your amazing church staff and church leadership have been shepherding you all through the summer. Maybe you are here this morning, and we have not met yet.... and you are sitting here wondering about me.... wondering where my accent is from.... so, I wanted to tell you something briefly of my life this morning.... I was born and raised in Atlanta Georgia.... went to college in North Carolina...there I met a man from Duxbury, Massachusetts.... after college, we married and had three children in four years. My first career was one of teaching...eventually I went into special education. I left seminary twice in my life before returning in 2011 for a third and final time. My mother was thrilled.

We lived in South and North Carolina and eventually moved up here 20 years ago to my husband's hometown of Duxbury. My daughter, Emma and her wife, Autumn met at Va Tech. They are in the civil engineering field....2 different companies and work and live in Dedham. They have a 4-year-old named Nathan. He calls me Mimi. My son, Edward is a marine mechanic and lives in Duxbury. And my youngest, Ross and his wife Meaghan work with my husband, live in

Westwood and have a one-year-old named Cadogan. I served the Pilgrim Church of Duxbury.

And I most recently served a wonderful church, The Congregational Church of South Dartmouth down on the south coast...near Westport...the church was in the village of Padanaram. After 8 years of service there, I felt God calling me on to a new thing and what that new thing is, yet I am not exactly sure. Surrender. I had planned to take the summer off, and April 27 was my last day in South Dartmouth the gentle folks at the Congo in South Dartmouth gave me an extravagant farewell and ...I woke up on April 28 meditated and sat in the quiet as I have done for a lifetime now and later decided to check my email...there was an email from your pastor asking me if I would be interested in covering his sabbatical. When I met Will for coffee I told him he caught me in that threshold moment of having a call ending and waiting on the new thingI remember coming to meet the staff here and driving away knowing this was meant to be...something shimmered here while colleagues of mine on the south shore were asking me “you are going to drive all the way up there to fill in for someone on sabbatical”....surrender...and om case you don’t know Will and I had never met before that day at coffee....

So, what does this passage mean for us today? What does it mean to us at this new place...at this threshold of being together for 6 weeks? At this threshold of a new church programming year? Maybe it reminds us today that we are not in

charge. I don't know maybe someone out there needs to be reminded of that today. Maybe I do. So, if you are a professor, teacher, lawyer, CEO, writer.... if run a household full time.... if you work in an office setting.... if you chair a committee here...if you are retired.... if you are on staff here.... we...we are not in charge here...neither here nor in our personal lives....believe it or not....we aren't....God, the Divine Creator....Jesus, the Christ....and the Spirit are in the driver's seat here....in this place we will seek to be about the Gospel....and live in Gospel ways together....and seek to surrender....

I pray we will keep on in this life asking ourselves if we are following the Gospel....if we are walking in the way of love...praying about decisions....and not moving quicker than the Spirit....I pray in my 6 weeks here that we will linger together around tables....listen to each other....break bread together...may we seek to hear the Divine stirrings in all of those around us....metaphorically may we put our own agendas on the floor... try our best to be more about others and less about our own selves may we laugh together and know of great joy within these walls...over the next few weeks together...

We won't do it perfectly in this life.... we won't walk on water.... we won't always remember.... but I hope we try.... may we remember we ALL belong to the Divine ... so let us imagine Jesus talking to First Church today through the lens of today's text: "folks at First Church, anyone who intends to

come with me has to let me lead Jesus says. You're not in the driver's seat; *I* am Jesus says. Follow me, folks at First Church and I'll show you how. Surrender is the way, the Gospel way...the Jesus way, to finding yourself, your true self. To finding freedom. To setting your own soul free." O Creator God this day...help us to be about the gospel of love...not just within these walls but out in the world. If we all did that.... our churches would be that.... the Light in the darkness...hope in the midst of fear and uncertainty...the Gospel...surrender.... freedom.... truly living life to the full. Let us celebrate our new church year together this day! Let us celebrate this beloved church community! I am grateful to be among you for awhile ~ I am certain I will be better for having lingered here. Blessings in this life always. Amen!