

Sermons at Union Congregational Church

Preached by The Reverend Gail L. Miller, Pastor

February 14, 2016

First Sunday in Lent

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

Luke 4:1-13

Giving Up Control

During Lent, people of all stripes of Christian, and even some non Christians, will participate in the tradition of GIVING UP SOMETHING FOR LENT.

Often it will be the giving up of a bad habit, likely having something to do with a healthier lifestyle - giving up processed sugars or alcohol.

Sometimes it entails taking ON a better habit: walking every day, drinking more water, going to the gym.

And there are plenty of other “good habit” routines on offer this time of year:

Have you seen the 40 days, 40 items to declutter your home.

In college and my twenty’s I often gave up swearing.

For Christians, however, this practice is intended to make space in our lives for more of God. Or to take on something that will bring us closer to God - to pray more, to read a daily devotional.

This year, I thought we might consider giving up things that go a little deeper than healthy eating habits - things that I believe truly are walls that separate us from God, or that keep Him at a distance.

These “giving ups” are attitudes and have more to do with ways of engaging the world around us or relating to the people in our lives. And we are starting BIG - by giving up CONTROL.

I read something online this week - one of those “click bait” lists:

19 Things Every 19 Year Old Needs To Hear

11. You are in control.

Why let someone else take charge of your feelings and have you conform to their standards? It's your life. You set your own rules. We ourselves choose to live the way we live, so push the boundaries and focus on improving yourself. Do things that make you feel the way you should feel, even if you are afraid to do so. No one but yourself can create your destiny so make it worthwhile.

Maybe there are some things in our life we CAN control...but I get uncomfortable with notions of creating our own destiny and setting our own rules. And much of the reality of daily life works against the wisdom of “You Are In Control.”

Many simple common everyday things are out of our control.

There’s the day that the coffeemaker breaks...

Or when the garbage sack breaks open on the stairs to the basement when you’re running out the door.... late...

Or any time the car breaks down...

All reminders that we are not always in control.

Or how about...

When you have to wait in a LONG line at the post office and then you have to play catch up for the rest of the day trying not to be late;

Or your friend doesn’t quite respond with the sympathy you hoped for and it gnaws at you all day, and you end up snapping at your family at dinner.

And, of course there are also situations where surprises come our way that make the day better... but the point is - we're NOT IN CONTROL

And then there are big things:

Health - maybe you know someone who eats healthily, exercises faithfully and still is bombarded with cancer after cancer.

Or think about your job - so much depends on those around us, and the economy.

Or how about relationships - have you ever been in love with the "wrong" person. Try controlling that!

So if the message today is about giving up control - maybe we're already there! Or maybe not - maybe we're only halfway there...

Because while it might be true that we're really not in control, how many of us still TRY to maintain control over what goes on around us; or live AS IF we're in control, when it's really chaos underneath and inside.

This is where we can learn a little something from Adam and Eve

Go ahead...aren't you just a little curious about what it's like to be God?

all powerful, all knowing and in control?

Of course I am - give me a bite of that apricot....

And then... *Well, because you didn't obey me - your life will be an endless loop of desire for more....*

Jesus' temptation is a time when he too was shown what it would be like, "if only..."

you won't be hungry, if you only turn these stones into bread

you will be most powerful, if you only worship someone other than your Father God.

you will be invincible, if only you take the leap!

Bread, power, safety. But it just might well have been youth, beauty, and wealth; or confidence, fame, and security.

On one level, we experience specific temptations very concretely; but on another they are really all the same, because they seek to shift our allegiance, trust, and confidence away from God, and toward some substitute that promises a more secure identity.

Any and all of the temptations we face are really just one big temptation to shift our allegiance away from God - to ... not God.

Since it's inevitable that we are NOT in control, then something or someONE else is. And if someONE else is going to be in control of ME, then I guess I'd like it to be the ONE who acts in love, not just toward me but toward all of humanity; the ONE who lovingly fashioned the world, the mountains and oceans, trees and fields, and who breathes life into His beloved children, and who loves them enough to give them freedom and choice.

Maybe the only thing we DO have control over is who controls us. Maybe our goal should not be to make the right decision, but to have the right disposition: humble - in worship before Christ. Because anything less than that makes it all about us, instead of Him.

Giving up control, really is about trusting God more. It's acknowledging that God is God and we are not!

I learned about this in a new way when I was in graduate school. We often discussed the different ways that we know God and talk about God, sometimes calling into question different images and words as their meanings and connotations have shifted and changed through the years. One such of these was referring to Jesus as Master.

Some did NOT want to call Jesus "Master," out of a concern for that word's association with slavery and the master-slave relationship and the abuses of the Africans kidnapped into it. However it was my black friend, Stefan, who explained to me that for him and his friends, Jesus as his Master was a life giving relationship. Because, in his words, "if Jesus is my Master, then that white man in the big house over there is NOT my master."

When we trust God, when we allow Him to control us, when we give Him and His Word authority over us, we give others less room for interfering in our lives, where it really matters - in our hearts. That's where it will start - in our hearts.

So let's give up control - and we do this in two ways:

1. admit we're not in control
2. trust in God by worrying less about the decision before us, and focusing more on our disposition.

That, my friends, will strengthen and deepen our relationship with our true Master. So let's give up control, and give it to Him. Amen.