

Surrender to Love 26th April 2020

Rev Karen Ross

Welcome:

Call to Worship:

"It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; ²to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night...⁴For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy."

In other words, remember what the Lord has done...and let us thank and praise our God as we sing for joy.

Song: "How Great Thou Art", words and music by Stuart Wesley Keene Hine,
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Prayer:

God of power and love – as we pause and look at creation we are amazed at its strength, beauty, intricacy, uniqueness, its majesty and its fragility. How great you are! Yet all of your creation pales into insignificance when compared with Your creativity, your majesty, your beauty, and your strength. Lord, when we take the time to gaze upon you, our hearts are filled with joy, and all our fears, doubts, troubles, and our concerns fade away.

Thank you for the beauty of this day. Thank for the opportunities in this season. Thank you for the friendships we have. Thank you for the safety and wellbeing of our families. And Lord, thank you for the most precious gift of them all, your only Son, Jesus – who lived, died and rose from the dead to reveal your love to us, and restore us to your love. We gratefully receive all you have done for us in Christ and we faithfully cherish the gift of your Holy Spirit in our life.

Today we confess not only our gratitude and praise, but also our need for ongoing cleansing and washing through your forgiveness. We acknowledge that at times we have been ungrateful and unloving; and therefore, we have ignored or judged or criticized others. In the silence we confess this before you... and we ask that you forgive us and give us what we need to grow through our weaknesses to become more complete and whole disciples of Jesus. Lord, we want to be more able to reach out in love, make disciples and experience fullness of life in Christ, so fill us with your Holy Spirit and renew, restore, and empower us again. Amen.

God is present to forgive, heal and make new all who call upon His name – so I declare to you, our sins are forgiven, hallelujah!

Peace: 😊

Notices: Communion next week; mid-week reflections; face book posts; Church Council update (Trevor).

Video of the Stewarts:

Prayer on Intercession: ANZAC's

God of power and love, we come before you today and declare the greatness of your power and your love over our entire earth. As we celebrated ANZAC day yesterday, we are mindful of and grateful for the many men and women who have served our nation in the armed forces. We also recognize that Australian men and women haven't just served our nation, but have also served other nations in the armed forces; and we know that there are men and women who are currently

deployed overseas in various places serving on our behalf. Father, we declare your empowering presence upon all those who serve in the Australian Air Force, Navy and Army. We ask that you give them comfort, peace and strength. Through your love and power, renew their body, soul and spirit, and enable them to serve with integrity and strength.

We pray for the men and women who have returned from deployment overseas; and for those who were exposed to challenging, painful and horrifying situations. Lord, through your love and power cleanse, heal and restore them. Provide, social, psychological and financial resources to assist in their integration and recovery. And through the power of your Holy Spirit bring light and life into their families so that joy, peace and love will be manifest in their homes.

Lord, even though the world is changing so fast, we know that the human heart still carries pride and greed, and with each generation there emerges a new reason for war and terror. Lord, this world is desperate for you to move in power to change hearts, renew lives and restore brokenness. Holy Spirit, touch the hearts of all people throughout the world, draw us to you, teach us your ways and set our hearts and minds towards the things of your kingdom.

For our own church community – we ask that you give your peace to those who are troubled, healing to those who are sick, joy to those who are lonely and comfort to those who grieve. And continue to prompt us to make contact with others so that we all may find companionship in this season of isolation. Amen.

Sermon:

- Two concepts for us to consider over the next few weeks: 1. surrender and 2. love.
- The concept of surrender can be challenging for us to grasp.
- Some may consider surrender too close to submission – which has a negative connotation...doing what you're told.
- Others associate it with co-dependency or abdicating personal power – as though we are holding up the white flag and giving in to one who has greater power than us.
- Consequently, the notion of surrendering to anything or anyone is somewhat questionable.
- However, despite the unpopularity of the notion, surrender plays a crucial role in the spiritual journey and is embraced by all religions and spiritual traditions – be it Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam...all world religions put great value in surrender.
- A biblical understanding of surrender is far from being a sign of weakness, or giving in, in fact, it is the absolute opposite,
- Biblical surrender has 2 key components that makes it a very powerful and empowering position.
- 1. **When we choose to surrender to God, it is an act of the will; it is a choice that we make. Nobody can make us surrender, it is something we choose to do.**
- Not to be confused with compliancy – where we follow directions/orders out of fear for the consequences. (Covid 19 isolation)
- A biblical understanding of surrender involves personal choice, that's why it's empowering – because we actually want to surrender, and we're not doing so because we've been told we had to.
- **Jesus gives us the perfect example of surrender in His dialogue about being the Good Shepherd:**

"For this reason, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again." (John 10:17-18)

- Jesus chose to lay down His life for us, He was not forced or coerced. He didn't surrender because He feared the consequence of disobedience.
- Jesus wanted to surrender to the will of God. It was both a powerful and empowering position.

2. **Only surrender to something bigger than us is sufficiently strong enough to free us from the prison of our self-interest.**

- Otherwise we are simply caught up in our own world and we don't grow, we don't change, we stagnate.

"I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

- Here, Jesus is talking about making a choice to enter into a relationship with Him and remain in relationship with Him – which means letting go of the old ways and taking up the new.
- Without relationship with Jesus, we can become self-serving.
- In relationship with Jesus, we choose to let go self-interest, and we choose to take up Christ's interest.
- Letting go of self-interest and taking up Christ's interest produces fruitfulness.
- Therefore, biblical surrender is both an empowering and powerful choice – because it is something we want and choose; and Biblical surrender frees us from the prison of self-interest and enables us to grow.

Love:

- Now the concept of love is a little bit easier for us to understand.
- Despite the trivializing influence of romantic and sentimental views of love in Western culture, love is the strongest force in the universe.
- Gravity may hold planets in orbit and nuclear force may hold the atom together, but only love has the power to transform people.
- Only love can soften a hard heart. Only love can renew trust after it has been shattered. Only love can inspire acts of genuine self-sacrifice. Only love can free us from the terrorizing effects of fear.
- There is nothing more important in life than learning to love and be loved.
- Nat King Cole 1952, "The greatest thing you'll ever learn is to love and be loved in return".
- **Jesus elevated love as the goal of spiritual transformation:**

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."
(Matthew 23:37-40)

- Paul also acknowledges and elevates love as the highest expression of one's faith:

"And now faith, hope, and love abide, and the greatest of these is love." (1 Corinthians 13:13)

- There we have it, Nat King Cole, Jesus and Paul, all agree that love is the highest and greatest achievement.
- Unfortunately, the love we receive from others is often defined by their brokenness.
- And the love we give to others is usually contaminated by our self-preoccupation.
- We long for perfect, unconditional love, but become discouraged when we don't receive it.
- Thus, we often become content with a pale imitation.
- And sometimes, the thought that God loves us unconditionally and passionately is difficult to comprehend and even more difficult to receive.
- So, when we put these two notions of surrender and love together – we have the call to **surrender to love.**
- And to surrender to love means that we want to and therefore, we make the choice to believe, receive and enter into God's perfect love for us.
- Regardless of what our previous experiences of love have been; regardless of what we have come to believe about God based on our life experience; the truth is that when God thinks of you, love swells in God's heart and a smile comes to his face.
- God bursts with love for humanity.

- Love is not something God does for us or to us. Love is the very essence, nature and character of who God is.
- God's love is never compromised by anger. With God, the presence of anger does not mean the absence of love.
- Love is God's character, not simply an emotion that God has.
- Some Christians are preoccupied with sin, and think they honour God by 'not sinning' or perhaps, they think they are honouring God by pointing out others' sins.
- We miss the point when we simply try to do what Jesus tells us to, or if we simply follow a particular way of life.
- Having a theology of God's love is one thing, but having a real, transforming experience of God's love changes everything.
- **The good news: Jesus came to reveal the love of the Father, and Jesus came to restore us to the love of the Father.**
- So that we might have a genuine encounter with God's love and experience God's love for us and in us.

Parable of the prodigal:

- In this parable, the Father's love for his 2 sons reflects the Father's character, not the children's behaviour.
- Our behaviour, whether responsible or irresponsible, is beside the point. Responsible behaviour does not increase the Father's love, nor does irresponsible behaviour decrease it.
- The original listeners of this parable were not melted into tears by this story but rather they were shocked, offended, and even infuriated.
- Jesus's purpose for this parable is not to warm our hearts but to shatter the hearer's perspective of God's love.
- Through this parable Jesus challenges what nearly everyone has ever thought about God, sin, and salvation.
- Up until then everyone thought that it must be earned by good behaviour.
- This story shatters that understanding.
- This story does reveal the destructive self-centeredness of the younger brother, and it also condemns in the strongest terms, the elder brother's moralistic life.
- Jesus is saying that both the irreligious and the religious are spiritually lost – that's pretty confronting!
- Both of these life-paths are dead ends.
- Every thought the human race has had about how to connect to God has been wrong up until then.
- Jesus, through His act of surrender, became a love offering to us from God – better than the most expensive engagement ring!
- In other words, Jesus reveals to us the Father's perfect, unconditional, unending, immeasurable love.
- And Jesus restores us to the Father's perfect, unconditional, unending, immeasurable love:

"God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:9-10)

- God loved us long before we loved Him.
- It was His love, not ours that compelled Him to surrender Himself and die for us.
- Today, we are invited to either for the first time, or maybe again, to simply surrender to God's love and let the perfect, unconditional, unending, immeasurable love of God transform our fears, sorrows and uncertainties.
- Let God's love enliven your soul, sooth your troubled thoughts, heal your broken past.
- Let God's love lift you out of the miry clay, draw you close to Himself and put a new song in your heart.

- Now is the time to surrender to God's amazing love.

Prayer:

Holy and loving God, nothing can separate us from your love – not height, nor depth, nor angels or demons, not principalities nor powers, not sickness or sin, not even death can separate us from your love because Jesus, you came to reveal the Father's love, and restore us to the Father's love both now and for eternity.

Thank you Lord! Today, I receive your love and not only that, but I surrender to your love. I choose to let your love into the deepest parts of my life – my fears, doubts, uncertainties, my hurts, my pain and my disappointments. Come Holy Spirit with your breath of life and transform the darkness in me. Cause the light of your love to radiate and permeate all that I am and all I have – my past, my present and my future. I give my entire life to you. Hallelujah, amen.

Song: "Amazing Love", words and music by Graham Kendrick,
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Benediction: Go as the much and deeply loved people of God. Let God's love enliven and transform you. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, go in peace to love and to serve!