

NOT NEGOTIABLE: Surrender

The two tone barrels out there on 7th street remind us that it's construction season again. And if it's construction season, it's time to break out the zipper, as in the zipper merge. You know the meaning of the term even if you're not familiar with the words themselves. A zipper merge is a traffic pattern in which drivers entering a roadway do so in alternating fashion. So the driver at the head of the line waiting to get on the bridge or the interstate, or whatever, goes. A driver who's already on the road follows. Then comes the next driver waiting to enter the road, then another driver already on the road. It's called a zipper merge. They work really well if drivers cooperate....which happens occasionally.

But for a moment think about the drivers already on the road, and to make the road busy, let's say a shift has just ended at a Deere plant, so lots of people are trying to cross the 74 bridge. If they wanted to - if the drivers already on the road had some unspoken agreement between them - they could bunch up really tight - bumper to bumper, and not let anyone in. They could do that. But they don't. You don't, do you? You, we let the next car in, don't we?

An even simpler moment. You enter a business that doesn't have an automatic door. You look behind you and see someone coming a few steps from the entrance. You hold the door for that person, don't you? Please tell me you hold the door for that person. We all do, don't we?... But we don't have to. We could, were we of the necessary mind, pull the door open just far enough to let ourselves in, then yank the thing shut. We could force the people behind us to start the door opening process from scratch. But we don't.

In our household, as hard as this is to believe, I make the bed in the morning. I could make just my half of the bed. Tighten up the corners and square up the lines on the top layer, but just on my half. But I don't.

Also in our household, Shari does the laundry. She could just wash her stuff. She could leave my stuff in the hamper (or on the floor, where I usually leave it). She could, but she doesn't.

Those are small examples of an enormous principle called surrender. Surrender is giving up personal pleasure, personal convenience, personal satisfaction, for the benefit of others. Letting drivers onto the bridge is a small sacrifice - a few seconds at most - but it's surrender. Holding a door for someone is a surrender of time, of a bit of extra effort. Not much. Don't be expecting a thank you note from the people for whom you hold a door. But it is a surrender of sorts.

If you are or have been married, you know about surrender. Mutual surrender is fundamental to a successful relationship. Try making any relationship work when one person does all the giving. Might work for awhile, but before long the one who always gives will tire of it, or exhibit resentment for it. If you've spent time in workplaces, you know that surrender is crucial for a productive environment. If people who share a space or a mission objective don't give up something for the good of the whole, you end up with a bunch of isolated employees, each in it for him or herself. And long term, that can't possibly work.

The point of all that is to point out that today's subject - surrender - is not new to us. We know about it. Even if we've never heard a sermon or read a Bible verse about it. We know about surrender because we surrender all day long, and so do the people around us. Given all the familiarity we have with the idea of surrender, you might think today's sermon would be easy, a comfortable fit with whatever else we believe. But biblical surrender just doesn't work that way.

Luke 14.33.... Ah, now we know why biblical surrender doesn't settle as comfortably as our daily surrender. Biblical surrender asks that we give up everything. And if you don't want to read those words literally, you can read them to hear Jesus say, you cannot be my disciple unless you give up more than you're naturally willing to give up. That's the true meaning of the text. Jesus doesn't want his followers walking around naked, bereft of clothes or possessions. He wants them to give up more than they're comfortable, to depend on him more than they normally would.

We get a better picture of it in Mark 8.34-37.... If you want to be my follower you must give up your way. What's that mean? If you want to be my follower you must give up control, you must become the follower, not the leader of your life. You must surrender control of the basic direction and the specific decisions of your life. You must give up the reins of your life to me. You don't have to give up your house or your boat or your camera (I put that last one in there for myself) You just have to give up control.

As in, who is lord of your life? Who decides what matters to you? Who decides the big picture direction of your life? Jesus says it needs to be him.

Why does this surrender stuff matter? Because it's a not negotiable. In our current sermon series we're highlighting some of the attitudes and attributes and actions that we followers of Jesus must have. We may not include them in our lives, at least not always, but they set in spiritual stone. Some examples from the last few weeks: Worship. Living for the kingdom. Grace and faith.

Today it's surrender. Today's it's our having the heart and the practice of giving up personal preferences, personal ambition, personal comfort or convenience for the driver trying to get on the bridge, for the person behind us as we enter a building, for our spouses or children or neighbors or friends.

Surrender is an attitude that says, I don't come first. Sometimes you do, because your needs are greater than mine. Sometimes veterans do, so we hold fundraisers such as May Day Mariachi, as we did last Tuesday. Sometimes little girls in the Dominican Republic do, so our adult Sunday groups surrender some money each month to Compassion International to sponsor a girl named Mayeli. All the time Jesus comes first - his teachings, his guidance, his commands, his direction, his leading, his provision.

For Jesus followers, surrender means I don't come first, you don't come first, it means we're willing to sacrifice time, money, control. Why would we do that? Why not bunch together on the bridge or slam the door on the people behind us? It's really simple. 1 John 3.16.... Jesus surrendered his life for us. So, we, as his followers, surrender our lives to each other, to our workplaces, to our community, to our kids and grandkids. Because he gave it all up for us, we surrender to him and to each other.

And in the process we discover that the only life that means anything long term, the only life that brings lasting satisfaction is a life of surrender. Selfishness is like a sugar rush. It produces brief spikes in energy, focus, and pleasure - but then blood sugar plummets and we're left feeling flush and empty. I know that to be true because I ate one of the may day mariachi cookies as I wrote this sermon. Tasted great going down. An hour later, it was like sludge in my brain. And how did I clear the sludge? I ate another cookie, of course.

Surrender, sacrifice, others first, and Jesus as Lord is the ONLY life that satisfies long term. Surely Jesus knew that when he told us we had to give up everything if we wanted to follow him.

How will you live a life of surrender in the coming week? Whom will you serve, put first, whom will you put before yourself? Surrender is not negotiable if we want to follow Jesus, but don't think of it as a command, a rule, or demand from heaven. To think that way just puts another weight around your spirit to carry around, and nobody wants to carry around spiritual weight. Think of surrender as what it is - a pathway to peace of mind and lasting satisfaction.

You and I can have life and have it abundantly; Jesus said so. You know you want it! You know you want more - not more stuff, but more peace, more confidence, more connection, more life. As followers of Jesus, we don't get that kind of more by working harder or buying more stuff or exerting our power and influence. Praise God, we get more by giving up, by surrendering to Jesus. Try it this week.