

Mine
“Let go.”
Jeremiah 31:31-34; John 12:20-33
Fifth in the Lenten series, “Open Hearts”

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March 29, 2009
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Clutching

There’s a story in one of Henri Nouwen’s books on prayer about an elderly woman who was in extreme distress when she was brought to a psychiatric center: She was wildly frantic, swinging at everything in sight, and upsetting everyone around her so much that the doctors had to take everything away from her. But there was one small coin which she gripped in her fist and would not give up. In fact, it took two people to pry open the fist that was clenched around the coin. It was as though she would lose her very self if she let go of the coin: she would have nothing more and be nothing more. That was her fear. And yet, it was clear that she couldn’t begin to be helped until she let go.

Man, it’s hard to let go. A weeping woman clad in a Mother Hubbard sobs uncontrollably while she’s interviewed in front of her tornado-wrecked house: one glance at the picture tells you how hard it is to let go.

A month-or-so ago I received my pension report and compared my balance to what I had in September of ’07. It may be a LONG time before I retire! To make light of it I told Laura that the good news was that at one time we had enough to lose as much as we had. But I thought of what we had and the time and effort over the years to build up to what we had and felt myself wanting to grasp tighter to what was left; as if that would help. It’s hard to let go.

Even still after three-and-a half years I think of my father who was gone so suddenly after what was supposed to be a routine surgery, and there’s a part of me that wants to bring him back.

It’s all-so-common to take these things – people in your life, a treasure like a classic car or an heirloom ring, doing things the way they have always been done at work or at home or in church – take them each, and grasp on to them for dear life like coins in the hand. Hold them fast, whatever they are, and see if anyone can pry your fingers apart to make you let go.

Isn't that what most of us do with life, itself? Who would put themselves at risk, even if losing life would mean gaining something precious for the rest?

From Preservation to Fulfillment

Jesus would. This morning we join his story at the beginning of the end. The years of Jesus' work have come to bear fruit when a group of Greeks come to Philip, perhaps because he's the disciple with the Greek name; and they say they want to see Jesus, which probably means they want to believe in him.² After the years of healing and teaching his own people about the things that make for peace, Israel can no longer contain him. News has leaked out to the world; and the world, sick with injustice and war, has had enough of the way things have been. It *yearns* for Jesus with his message that God's time for healing and hope has come. So, here come the Greeks.

That means, though, that the moment has come for Jesus' work to be fulfilled: the beginning of the end. Throughout his story as John tells it, Jesus has been saying it isn't his time, until now. When his mother wanted him to act at the wedding at Cana, he said, "My time has not come."³ Before, when some wanted to arrest him, no one laid a hand on him *because "his hour had not yet come."*⁴ Another time, his claim of having a special relationship with God enraged the teachers; they accused him of blasphemy, but no one stopped him, "*because his hour had not yet come.*"⁵

Now a few Greeks come to believe in him and his hour *has* come. It's the fulfillment of prophets' dream: nations are now coming to Zion for Christ's sake. Jesus has now become the Savior of the World.

It might be a surprise, then, that Jesus actually has a decision to make. But here he is, so very human, having to decide whether he is going to see the work through to the end *or not*.

Or not: in other words he knows what lies ahead of him if he sees this through to the end. He knows that the powers that be will give him an ultimatum. They'll say to him, in effect, that he doesn't fit their idea of a savior and he's crossed the lines that they keep by their rules. So, like a bully who challenges another kid in school over something that was said and demands, "Take it back," the powers that be are telling Jesus to take back everything he's said and done.

He has a choice. Jesus is no deity who's fallen out of the sky making an impersonal appearance on earth only to be taken up, unharmed, once he's done. He's a man who

loves the people he's become attached to, loves the breeze coming off the big lake and the waves that move their fishing boats like a neatly choreographed troupe of dancers. He loves the way the sun shines warm upon his shoulders in the early morning when the air is still sweet and cool. He loves the mountains on the landscape and the taste of a good leg of lamb. Jesus loves life.

How could he not?

So he has a choice. Does he clench this life in his fist like a coin to hold onto for dear life? Or, does he let go?

The rules say that he should hang on. To do otherwise would be suicide, forbidden by the law. To tell Greeks, outsiders, to come along and believe in him would break rules that said Jews should ever-remain separate from the rest. Squeeze harder or give up? The rules say to squeeze tighter.

But the prophet Jeremiah said that there would come a day that God's law would be written on the heart. Then, you could rely on your relationship with God rather than look in some code to see what's permissible and what is not. Then, you could see clearly what God is after and make your decisions and act accordingly.

So Jesus, with all the compulsion you or I would have to hang onto life, considers the choice.

If he takes it all back, the world would be just the same as it's always been. In fact, whatever scares you to death would still have its sway. There would be no way out of sin; the power of evil would be insurmountable; and death would indeed have the last word. There'd still be something insurmountable standing between you and God.

And everything Jesus said and did would be for nothing.

But if he lets go: it would be freedom, the arms of God would open wide for you and me, there'd be forgiveness of sin and everything that works to keep you apart from the Source and Power of love and life would be overcome. If he let go, it would be salvation. Take it back...or pour him self out?

Guess what Jesus does for you.

Jesus had said, "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." It might sound like he's saying you aren't supposed to enjoy yourself; but that isn't so. What he's saying is, "let go." Understand that a world of injustice and greed is not what you want to hang on to. There's another world available right here and right now you want that has injustice, love binding people together in mutual servant-hood and care. It's where the value of one's life is not measured by material wealth. This is creation as God intended it to be. This is freedom from the tyranny of death and sin. This is the choice Jesus leads you and me to make with him.

Stop grasping and clutching onto jobs and status, relationships and life. And let go so you don't crush the good things that are given. Let go so you can enjoy the people and the things you are given in life. Let go: this is eternal life. And it starts now.

Let Go

My sister had a poster on the wall of her room in college; and I remember what it said, even still. It had a picture of a little girl blowing the seeds of a dandelion to the breeze; and the poster had this popular saying: "If you love something very much, let it go. Then, if it comes back to you, it's yours forever."

Whether that's right or not, how can you love something you've got in a choke hold? May Jesus lead you to the place where you can open your hands...to live.

References

- [1] Henri Nouwen, *With Open Hands*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press. © 1972. p 19.
- [2] Brown, Raymond. *The Gospel According to John I-XII*. New York: Doubleday. Anchor Bible Series. 1968. p 470.
- [4] John 2:4
- [5] John 7:30