



St. Michael's Church
CHARLESTON, SC

SUNDAY, MARCH 21, 2021

JEREMIAH 31:31-34
PSALM 22: 11-21
JOHN 12:20-33

PREACHER: THE REV. AL ZADIG, JR.

HELP US LORD TO BE SO CONNECTED TO YOU THAT WE MIGHT BECOME YOUR DISCIPLES AND THE SERVANTS OF OTHERS.

TAKE OUR LIPS AND SPEAK THROUGH THEM,
OUR MINDS AND THINK THROUGH THEM,
AND TAKE OUR HEARTS, AND SET THEM ON FIRE

See if you can name this movie... It came out in 1991 with a simple plot. Three men from New York City try to find themselves by going west to join a cattle drive from New Mexico to Colorado. Billy Crystal plays Mitch, a burned out salesman who works with Curly, a larger than life cowboy leading the cattle drive. Over time, Curly becomes kind of a mentor to Mitch.. and even laughs at Mitch saying: "You city folk, you worry about details, and spend 50 weeks a year getting knots in your rope and you think two weeks up here will untie them for you. You don't get it. Do you know what the secret of life is?" Mitch replies... No, what is it? Curly replies... One thing, just one thing. You stick to that and everything else won't matter. Mitch on the edge of his seat says: "What's the one thing?" And that's when Curly... dies of a heart attack! And Mitch is left with What is that secret to life?

My friends: if only Mitch had read John 12, he would have found the answer. So let's mine John 12 to literally dig up the secret to life..
LET ME SET THE STAGE AND CONTEXT:

John 12:20, Greeks are looking for Jesus. The Greeks are like Mitch, they hunger for the newest greatest secret of life. They had heard how Jesus had brought Lazarus back from the dead and they want to know how that happened! The first guy the Greeks meet on their quest is Phillip. Now, Philip never gets as much air time as the other disciples whose names begin with P...Peter and Paul get all the attention. There's a simple reason for it. Philip spent most of his time raising four daughters! Like Tevye, in Fiddler on the Roof...I have "5" Daughters! But...Philip happens to be in the right place at the right time to hear the Spiritual hunger of the Greeks. "Philip," they say, "We wish to see Jesus. We want to know His secret!"

Philip moved by their searching hearts, tells Andrew and together they get Jesus. Jesus arrives, and immediately gives them the secret of life. A secret that is:

- Counter cultural
- Counter intuitive
- and well, just about counter everything.

Jesus begins in verse 22 by setting the framework saying: “The Hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” i-e.. I’m on a divine timeline.. The end of my earthly life is near. If you’re the Greeks, you’re like: “Something big is about to be said here..” And that’s when Jesus...in a Mic-drop moment lays down the secret:

- “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies,
- it remains alone;
- but if it dies it bears much fruit.”

What? A bit anti-climatic! “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; What does that mean? Let’s talk agriculture:

What is a grain of wheat? It’s a tiny hard shell...

- Oval shaped
- & Barely a fourth of an inch tall,
- Weighing just an ounce

Here’s how it works. Each hard shelled kernel of wheat contains an embryo like liquid called a germ. The germ is protected by that hard shell. But the germ within is ineffective and unfruitful as long as it’s preserved in the safety and security in that kernel on the wheat stalk. But when kernel is detached from the wheat stalk and falls into the ground, the kernel dies..BUT that’s when the Germ within comes to life!

THAT’S WHEN THAT OUTER SHELL OF THE SEED CRACKS OPENS AND THE GERM LIKE LIQUID COMES OUT.

Think here of a cargo plane when that big back hatch opens up... that’s the germ coming out..and out it does to produce PLANTS! Lots of THEM. When that germ ekes out that back hatch it produces eight heads with over 40 seeds per head! Hence those great wheat fields that go on forever in the Midwest! There’s a lot of dying there as the germs come to life! Verse 33 tells us Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death He was going to die for us.

TO REALLY understand the greater context of the secret, you need to rewind with me to Genesis 3:24. Adam and Eve had just disobeyed God by eating of the tree that was not to be eaten-and in doing so, sin comes into the world. Adam and Eve would be kicked out of paradise. God places an angel at the garden entrance with a flaming sword to make sure they never got back to paradise. A flaming sword barring the way back in. To get to paradise you had to survive the sword. Which is why in the Old Testament, the Jews put goats and lambs under the sword to pay the price of their sin...the blood brought life and the re-entry to paradise.

BUT..Jesus in the New Testament would be the lamb of God who would come under the sword, and like that kernel of wheat..would die, once and for all time for all the sins of the world, AND THROUGH THE RESURRECTION..billions of seeds would live eternally in paradise! Jesus takes that Sword for us on the cross! By doing so, Jesus brings all who surrender to Him, forgiveness and eternal life in back in paradise!

Jesus is that kernel of wheat. That single Seed of the Lord falling to earth...dying on the cross. Out of His death, comes RESURRECTION; a harvest is produced of a multitude of believer. As I preach, right now...there are an estimated 2.3 billion Christian seeds walking on earth...that's just now! Which is what Jesus means in verse 32...If I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself!...2.3 billion seeds!

Curly...Jesus... What is that secret? Surrender. In response to what Jesus did for us, The secret of life..like that seed, is to die to sin, surrender to Jesus who breathes new life in us..like that germ emanating out of the seed, comes the breath of the Holy Spirit! Imagine your life, that hard shell cracking as you die to

- Selfishness
- Pride
- And sin,
- asking Jesus in, and through the cracks of the seed
- the Holy Spirit ekes out, changing you forever.

SIN replaced by love, joy, peace, patience..and growth in Christ. The Secret is SURRENDER! Jesus, die to what is not of you, help me hate in here what is not of you that I may truly live! Oh Bruce Springsteen, one of my favorite rockers had it all wrong in his 1984 hit song “No surrender” with those lyrics:

We made a promise we swore we'd always remember
No retreat, baby, no surrender

Bruce, you're wrong! In the Gospel the secret IS SURRENDER!

- Lord I surrender every sin
- Lord I surrender to the fact I'm not my own Savior
- Lord I surrender to the fact there is no other way to defeat that sword to enter eternal paradise than BY surrendering to you!
- Lord I surrender not out of A DEAD duty
 - But in response to your act of profound Love on the cross,
 - you coming under the sword for me!

My friends, if you want to really live, if you really want to love your life, surrender and follow me-says Jesus.

But My friends, there's more. Verse 28 is for everyone who is unsure. The real fireworks begin as God the Father yells down from heaven... I HAVE GLORIFIED YOU AND I WILL GLORIFY YOU AGAIN. Meaning: “I have affirmed you Jesus by the miracles which you have already performed, and will continue to affirm you by other miracles yet to be performed. In other words, God is saying this is true! This is my Son, listen to Him!

The heads of the Greeks are exploding!

- Jesus, surrender as the secret of life?
- God thundering approval from heaven?

And The fireworks continue-verse 31... Jesus said, Trust my message to be true! When you do, you will make Satan powerless in your life. Satan will have no control over you. The secret to life? Surrender.

It was that German Lutheran Dietrich Boenhoffer who said it this way: Who is pure of heart? Only those who have surrendered their hearts completely to Jesus that He may reign in them alone.

As we pray: Jesus as I surrender my sins, crack that outer shell.

- I surrender my:
 - Inability to forgive
 - My inability to repent
- My fears, my inhibitions
- My anxieties

I Surrender:

- Surrender my heart
- My big and little decisions
- I surrender it all...

Lead me to where you want me to be.

It was that 18th Century, Welsh Preacher Christmas Evans, standing at 7 feet tall, who would always preach: I would rather burn out, than rust out!

Surrender-forgiven and free for eternity!

Finally this morning let me give you an image of what this surrender looks like. If you open your bulletin to page 2, you will see two images there. For those online, you will see these images on the screen. Here's the story behind them. Bruce Larson was a Christian Psychologist in Manhattan and tells how he helped people struggling to surrender. Bruce would walk them from his office down to the RCA Building on Fifth Avenue, across the street from St.Patrick's Cathedral. At the entrance of that building is a gigantic statue of Atlas, complete with all his muscles straining, holding the world on his shoulders, barely standing under the burden. It's that image on the left. Larsen would point to Atlas and say: "That's one way to live, living under the crushing weight of the world." Then they would walk across Fifth Avenue right into Saint Patrick's Cathedral. There behind the high altar is a small statue of the boy Jesus, eight or nine years old, and with no effort Jesus is holding the world in one hand. Breaking the silence again, Larsen would say: "You have a choice. You can carry the world on your shoulder, or, 'I surrender, Lord; here's my life. I give you my world, the whole world.'"

So my dear friends... Which image describes your life now? ...are you on the left or the right? If you are a no Surrender Atlas, you'll never grow in faith and will never experience eternity with Christ. Can you offer yourself completely to the one who came under the sword and died to give you eternal life? I'm going to ask you to kneel as I pray that prayer of surrender over us...

Lord, thank you for taking the Sword for me..
Forgive me of all my sins..
I surrender to your plans no matter where it leads.
While I haven't always been so willing,
I'm making and renewing my vow of surrender to you Lord.
With all my heart, take me and use me as only you can...
may your will be done in your way Lord Jesus. Amen.