

Reflection  
March 23, 2025  
Isiah 55:1-9  
Luke 13: 1-9  
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Title: Let go and let God

Prayer: God, give us the courage to walk with you, to surrender to you, to turn to you, listen to you, wait for you, and trust you. Amen.

Some folks may say that I like to be in control. Like my friend Tracy, who showed up to my basement apartment decades ago to help me move, only to find that by 8:30am I already had all my boxes packed, sealed and sitting on a big piece of sheet plastic on the front lawn, divided by weight and awkwardness to carry.

But, if I was always in control then I never would have become a minister or joined the military – two of the most fulfilling paths in my life – and both thanks to God’s nudge; voice; counsel or flat-out kick in the pants that finally made me get onto God’s path for my life.

I would wager we all have examples of when it’s really important to us that we feel a sense of control; and other examples of when we have surrendered control to God.

I don’t want to take the topic of laying down our burden of control lightly because there are very good reasons why some of us hold on tightly to control. We may have experienced a traumatic event that reaped havoc in our lives; we may have childhood experiences of having our control taken from us; we may have challenges with anxiety or we may be modelling behaviour we’ve learned over time and have yet to be introduced to new behaviour.

There are some serious and good reasons why we hold onto control.

Then there are reasons we hold onto control that we could work on with God’s help.

Maybe our tendency to control is because we live with too much uncertainty; we feel insecure; are fearful of the unexpected. Maybe we are impatient or stuck in some perfectionist tendency with expectations of ourselves and others that are way too high.

For some of us we may be addicted to control – addicted to what it may offer us like a sense of power or dominance, being the one with all the information, the ability to manipulate or impress others.

Then we add to all this God’s plan and our plans. God’s way and our ways.

Sometimes these are not aligned.

In our very human plans we want things to happen when we want them to happen. We think we know what's best and what's right. We believe it's all on our shoulders to figure "it" out.

We are so quick to forget there is a God – an eternal, mainstay of a God who knows more and is more than us; who is working in ways we will never fully know.

Just the discipline of trying to surrender to God's will – failing and trying and failing again; moving the needle of deep trust ever so slightly with each attempt – is enough to make changes in us and in the world.

In the Isaiah passage we learn of the descendants of those exiled being invited back to the land of their ancestors. There is no cost, there is no price. There is goodness for the taking and an invitation to re-enter into a relationship with God in such a way that nourishes the body and soul, nourishes the generations and establishes a way of life that is of God, with God once again.

The people are asked to 'seek' the Lord, to 'return' to the Lord. They are reminded that God is greater than they can ever truly know.

In this passage the Hebrew word "shub" is translated as return. It means a kind of repentance. It involves turning back, retracing one's steps in order to get back to where we went off track and get back on God's path again.

In the Luke passage Jesus is also speaking to us about repentance and seeking out God's way.

At the start of the passage, Jesus gives us two examples – one in which people die because of someone's wilful action, and one in which people die completely by accident. Neither group deserved their fate any more than the other; and neither group knew it was coming. So Jesus says it doesn't matter what's going on, at all times and in all ways repent. Make it an ongoing affair. Deepen your closeness and trust in God more and more with each moment – who knows how many moments we have.

Here the Greek word Metanoia is used for repentance ... to change ones' mind. To have a new way of thinking.

In the context of our Lenten theme that might mean changing our thoughts from "I am in control" or "I'm the only one who can fix, stop, change, or control this" to "God, thank goodness you are here, help me turn my focus to you, help me follow your lead."

Jesus then talks about the gardener who asks the land owner for one more year and a little more tending to see what might happen with the fig tree. This is like our theme time this morning. Us humans can only do so much – we can plant the seed, we can water it, we can put it in a sunny spot ... and for reasons that aren't ours to know one plant may grow and one may not. Or one may just take a little longer to germinate.

We do our part and trust God with the rest. It may not work out the way we wanted – heck I wanted to be the goof ball character in musicals for a living and ended up in the military.

It may not work out the way we wanted, but it will work out. I can't say for sure, but this life I believe God chose for me feels like the path I'm meant to be on; and feels like a path that makes way more sense in God's mind than it does in mine.

So as we explore laying down our burden of control, what might we be needing to repent?

Maybe...

- That we have a tendency to trust ourselves and our own abilities more than God
- That we have a time frame and an expectation of when and how things "should" happen
- That we'll only surrender when we have some proof of God's plan
- Maybe we need to repent our pride – you know, our ability to believe that we're okay, we don't do anything wrong, we don't need to retrace our steps because we've never walked off God's path ... it's everyone else who's the problem.

When I was researching what we can and can't control in our lives it didn't take long to come up with a dozen or so entries on both sides. Like we can control how often we choose to check social media; or we can control how vulnerable we will be in a conversation with someone else. And on the slip side, we can't control what other people think of us, or events that have already happened.

But, laying down the burden of control is about more than knowing what is and isn't in our control. It's about truly believing there is a God that yearns for creation's greatest good; deeply trusting that God is active in our lives. It's about letting go of our tight grip because we know we are not in this alone.

Does laying down the burden of control mean we just throw up our hands and say "okay, God, have at it. I'll just sit here while you take care of everything. I surrender."

No.

Laying down our burden of control means understanding that it's not all on our shoulders: our thoughts are not God's thoughts; and as Isaiah points out God's ways are greater than our ways.

Surrendering or repenting means making space to be able to hear and feel God nudging us in God's direction; and then when we feel it, follow it.

Since the Isaiah passage talks about delighting ourselves in rich food, let's use food production as an example of where the control lies.

The Isaiah passage invites the people into abundance from a place of scarcity. "Delight in rich food" "everyone who thirsts come to the waters."

Food sustainability organizations tell us there is more than enough food produced in the world to feed everyone on the planet, and yet somehow around 800 million people experience hunger every year because of food distribution and food waste.

If we're going to live from a place where we believe God's ways are greater than our ways, then we're going to live from a place where we believe everyone has a right to be fed.

So, now we have a sense of God's way – that everyone has a right to be fed. Now, we do whatever we can – whatever is within our control – to bring about God's desire for creation. We can influence food distribution justice, get educated about food waste, and change our own practices of food purchase and consumption.

That's not taking control, that's helping move the needle from the human experience of poverty and scarcity to the God experience of abundance and flourishing.

We're lucky – us worshipping together right now.

We're lucky – whether it's hanging on by a thread or deeply rooted – us here right now means there's some kind of faith going on inside us. We believe something about this idea of a power that is LOVE far greater than us.

And that means that we are able to grasp the concept that we don't have to be in control. That "it's" not up to just us.

This is good news.

And, so how do we start to lay down our burden of control? Whether we carry it out of necessity, addiction or ignorance. How do we start to lay it down?

Maybe by praying. Maybe every morning this week before we open our eyes we pray. Pray that our steps be guided back onto God's path; that we get help retracing our steps until we find the point where we veered off in the first place. We pray for a release of all the worries – and there are many these days – that make us desperately cling to control thinking there is no other way. We pray for patience to live out our day on God's time, not our time.

And, we thank God that it's not all on our shoulders.

Amen.