

March 1, 2020

Give Up!
Give Up Control!
Matthew 4:1-11

Opening words: How many times have you been asked the question, "What are you giving up for Lent?" It's a good question. Many in our area do give up something for Lent because it is a Roman Catholic tradition. The idea of giving up something for Lent is based on Matthew 16:24, "*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.*" So, giving up something for Lent is about self-denial. It's not a second chance at your broken New Year's resolution. Giving up something for Lent should be done prayerfully, so we can wholly renew ourselves in Christ. Giving up something for Lent is not a bad thing but a good thing. There are certain things that are holding us back spiritually that need to be eliminated.

This is sermon number two in this year's Lenten sermon series, *Give Up!* In the next few weeks, we are going to look at some things we need to give up. Over that period, we are going to look at darkness, arrogance, enemies, greed, popularity and death. Today, we look at giving up control. Our reading is traditional for the first Sunday of Lent, Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus' temptations. Let me call this message *Give Up Control!*

Matthew 4:1-11 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'"

⁷ Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'^[d]"

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

John and Charlotte Henderson, 106 and 105 respectively, live at the Longhorn Village Retirement Community in Austin, Texas. They originally met at the University of Texas as students in 1934. On December 15, 1939, they married. On December 15, 2019,

they celebrated their eightieth wedding anniversary. That makes them, according to the Guinness World Record, the oldest living married couple in the world. In marriage, couples submit to one another. Submission is a way of saying, I love you. William P. Young (born 1955) is a Canadian author. He wrote *The Shack*. He once said, "*Submission is not about authority and it is not about obedience; it is all about relationships of love and respect.*" If it is true in marriage, then it is true in the Christian faith. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

We find ourselves today in the fourth chapter of Matthew. The scene is a familiar one. Just prior to our reading Jesus has been baptized and his earthly ministry is about to begin. Yet, there is still one thing that must happen. Jesus must have a showdown with Satan. According to the text, Jesus is led into the wilderness to be tempted. He is not just tempted once but is tempted three times. It is an unfair test because Jesus has been fasting for forty days, and in that weakened state, Satan challenges Jesus to use his power to change the stones on the ground into bread but Jesus will not be tempted by selfishness. Then Satan challenges Jesus to jump off the top of the holy temple, causing the multitude to follow him, but Jesus will not be tempted by popularity. Lastly, Satan takes Jesus to the top of a high mountain and offers him all the world's wealth, if he worships him. But Jesus will not be tempted by materialism. In the end, Satan loses, and Jesus was attended to by the angels. If you use your scarified imagination you can imagine the scene.

As you imagine the scene, don't get caught in the details, but instead, look at the scene at one time. Jesus is at a fork in the road. Is he going to submit to God's will or is going follow another route? Remember, Jesus was fully human, and this is a pivotal moment in his life. However, it isn't just Jesus's story, it's also our story too. Each one of us stands at the same fork in the road. Are you going to submit to God's will, or are you going to take another route? You know it's true. We know what God wants us to do, but we choose the other road. Far too often we follow the ways of this world. This is worth remembering. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, you have no other option but to submit to God's will. If that makes you think say, "**Amen!**"

In 2013, Kathryn and I traveled to Boston, Massachusetts. We went over Memorial Day weekend to celebrate our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. It was a great trip. We flew into Logan International Airport and rented a car. We stayed in Marblehead and took the subway, The T, into the city. We saw all the sites. We visited the capital, walked the Freedom Trail, went to the homes of Betsy Ross and Paul Revere, and went whale watching. We travel to Quincey and toured Peacefield, the home of two presidents, John Adams and John Quincey Adams. The Indians were in town that weekend and we got to see them play two games at Fenway Park. The Tribe won the first game easily, but they lost the second badly. In every Revolutionary site we visited, there were banners with the same slogan. It read: WE WILL HAVE NO LORD TO RULE OVER US! We love our independence but our independent spirit, which created a great nation, is damaging to our Christian discipleship. In my experience, Americans have a hard time

submitting to anyone, including God. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, you have no other option but to submit to God.

Michael A. Milton (born 1958) is the founder and president of an organization called *Faith for Living* in Fredericksburg, Virginia. He says that many reject the idea of submitting because they don't understand it. He says that their understanding is shallow and innocent. In other words, it is immature. He says that there are four great myths clouding our understanding of submission. This is his list:

Myth #1 – Submission to God is a loss of freedom! Many believe that if you submit to God, they will lose their freedom. This is the flaw in that thinking. We have no real freedom. The Bible says it clearly, we are all in bondage to sin, to the bondage of our own flesh, to the whims of our evil spiritual opponent, and to a world which is alienating itself from God. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, you have no other option but to submit to God. You must submit every area of your life. By submitting to God, you will experience a new freedom. Myth #1 is WRONG!

Myth #2 – Submission to God is a loss of identity! Many believe that if you submit to God, you will lose your identity. Your Christian faith does not make you a robot. Within the life of the church, there are many personalities and many identities. God wired each one of us differently to address the world's needs in a different way. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, you have no other option but to submit to God. By submitting to God, you will forge a new identity. Myth #2 is WRONG!

Myth #3 – Submission to God is a loss of purpose! Many believe that if you submit to God, you will lose your purpose. In the scripture lesson for today, Jesus turned down the wealth of this world. Jesus knew there was more to life than collecting possessions. Jesus had a narrow purpose for his life and so do you. Let me warn you, discovering your purpose will consume your life. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) once said, "*When Christ call a man, he bids him come and die.*" By submitting to God, you will discover a new purpose. Myth #3 is WRONG!

Myth #4 – Submission to God is a loss of joy! Many believe that if you submit to God, you will lose your joy. Our hearts hunger for truth. That is why we have turned everything in life into a party. C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) was right. He once said, "*We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what it meant by the offer of a holiday by the sea. We are far too easily pleased.*" By submitting to God, you will experience a deeper joy. Myth #4 is WRONG!

So, there we are with Jesus at the fork in the road. Each one of us must make our own choice, but one thing is clear, in the wilderness, Jesus made it clear where he was

going to go. He submitted to God and reject the ways of this world. What road are you going to take? If that makes you think say, **"Amen!"**

In my home these days, there is only one topic discussed. It's not spring training, the coronavirus, or the upcoming presidential election. It's the wedding! If you haven't heard, mine and Kathryn's daughter, Anna is getting married on May 30 of this year. We couldn't be happier. Jeff is a great guy, who comes from a wonderful family. No detail has been overlooked for this wedding. Her first, of two, bridal showers, is next week. (I helped make some of the favors.) Her wedding dress has been purchased and she has gone to her first fitting. The bride maids have ordered their dresses and the men have ordered their suits. The church has been reserved, including the musicians and the officiant. The reception hall, DJ, photographer have all been arranged. Mine and Kathryn's extended families have all made their plane reservations, so they can be here on Anna's big day. The invitations have been ordered. The limo has been reserved. I have been asked my opinion on one or two things, but nobody seems to care about what I think. I really don't care. All I care about is that Anna is happy. All I have ever wanted for her is to find someone who loves her as much as I love her. (That would not be easy) I'm confident in saying, Jeff does. Marriage is the perfect model of submission. Couples submit to on another because they are in love.

I have a friend who just graduated. She is now a nurse practitioner. The other day I went to her party to celebrate her accomplishment. I sat at the end of the table with a guy who was alone. He was a mess, overweight and drunk. We started talking and Anna's wedding came up. He told me I'm never getting married. That was good since no one wanted to marry him. He said he liked his freedom and he wasn't going to be accountable to anyone. He thought submission was following the rules. We know submission is a form of love. How deep is your love for God? When we submit to God, we find a different kind of freedom, forge a new identity, find a new purpose and experience a deeper joy. Our independent spirit created a great nation, but it is damaging our spiritual health. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, you have no other option but to submit to God's will because you are in love. Do you remember the quote from William P. Young? He once said, *"Submission is not about authority and it is not about obedience; it is all about relationships of love and respect."* And all of God people said, **"Amen!"**