

Surrender, Surrender, But Don't Give Yourself Away
Rev. Dr. Matthew Johnson
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"For the space of a few breaths,"
writes Kaky McTigue,
"my deductive linear mind had been shocked into silence.
Startled awake."
It should not take, she says,
a duck in the living room
for us to come alive to wonder.

But sometimes it does, doesn't it?
It takes something to shock us awake,
to get us to stop the motion from one moment to the
next.

In another set of words, McTigue writes, "We come,
in particular, to worship
so that we might rest for a moment on the forming edge
of our lives,
and 'resist the headlong tumble into the next moment.'"

I love that phrase.
The headlong tumble into the next moment.

I am starting my thirteenth year of ministry -
my eighth here in Rockford.
My youngest child started Kindergarten.
And I've got a year and half to 40.

Where did the time go?
And I speak with you all, and I know
that this doesn't stop.

The headlong tumble into the next moment.
So we don't come to some point in our lives,
and have only that question left:
where did the time go?

You don't need a duck in the living room to have these
moments of waking up, of attention.
But it often takes something -
some surprise.
Something to catch you off guard.
Something that we might call . . . well, we might call
grace.

I don't mean grace as in "unmerited salvation from a
vengeful deity"
or anything like that.
I mean the grace of the moment,
the beauty and wonder and awe that reminds you that
life is a gift,
a wonder and a blessing.
Unearned - maybe unwanted! - blessing.
Holiness in disguise.

One of the orthodox ideas about grace is that it is offered only to some people, and they have no choice but to accept it.

I don't believe that, and the rejection of this idea is core to Universalism. Instead, our faith tradition affirmed, hundreds of years ago, that grace - unearned blessing, love - was offered to everyone.

No exceptions.

And that our task, then, was to open our hearts to it, to let it in.

That choice was up to us.

We could let it in or not.

But there was this confusion:

because we all have this experience, we're not thinking about wonder or beauty, and we get surprised.

We glance up at the stars, a beautiful piece of music catches us, or maybe we're just going along and – boom - something happens.

We feel the transcendence, the awe, the trembling and mystery, the connection, the peace –

whatever words we might use, we feel this power.

We didn't expect it.

So there is the affirmative act of cultivating experiences
of wonder, of grace.

That's another sermon.

This one is about what to do when you're not cultivating
it,

but there it is anyway.

The dream you can't shake, the singular moment, the
tugging conscience,

the longing for a better life.

What do you do when grace, wonder, and the fullness of
life presents itself to you,

without warning, without an opt-out clause?

What do you do?

Surrender, surrender, but don't give yourself away.

Surrender, surrender, but don't give yourself away.

I've been wanting to preach on this lyric since I got to
town -

it's Cheap Trick, Rockford's band, how can I not?

And when I saw that the theme for October was Letting
Go,

I thought, we're making this happen.

Like most of rock and roll, this song is about love and
drugs.

I mean, right?

That's what it is about.

The teenager, from whose perspective the song is told,
is warned about both things:

love and drugs -
be careful.

You never know what you'll catch.

But he discovers that — shock — his parents were young
once! and — shock! — they still, sometimes,
roll on the couch, rolling numbers, goodness sake,
they even got his Kiss records out.

Some days, none of us feel as old as our children think
we are.

So be careful, but don't forget to live.

Surrender, surrender, but don't give yourself away.

We can be too careful sometimes.

The experience of wonder and awe is disorienting -
we might have to change our life,
so there are decent reasons why we might choose some
caution.

But often, we are trying to be respectable.

We think that the path of wisdom is sober, reflective,
rational, and based in facts.

And there are subjects where such sobriety is well-
placed.

But, thank god, we have poets and musicians, artists and fools.

I have wasted my days and nights in the company of steady wise neighbours.

Much knowing has turned my hair grey, and much watching has made my sight dim.

Instead, says Tagore,

I swear to surrender this moment all claims to the ranks of the decent.

I let go my pride of learning and judgment of right and of wrong.

I'll get drunk and go to the dogs.

Let go. Let go of your price of learning and judgement of right and of wrong.

What might it mean to surrender this moment to the claims of being decent?

To just listen to your heart?

To just let go and live a little?

To stop needing to have answers to your questions?

To just . . . be?

What it might mean to surrender to the experience of joy?

To just have fun?

To stop clinging to the branch, holding on past time, and instead,

to let go and soar,

to dance into the waiting wind?

What might it mean, when the spirit says do, to - well, do?

To dance when it says dance,

To sing when it says sing?

To surrender to the feeling, to stop caring what other people think so much?

Two weeks ago, I talked about how one of the sure signs of anxiety

was a lack of playfulness;

that you can tell that a person is anxious, or system is, when they don't know how to play.

When they are serious all the time.

Play! Laugh.

Did you know that the endorphins from laughing will add 120 years to your life?

That's not technically true, but whatever.

It still feels great, doesn't it?

Surrender . . . give yourself over to the experience of life itself.

I think this is particularly important when we talk about experiences of divinity.

When the spirit says do.

I mean, sure, all the caveats: how do we know what's divinity and what's delusion?

Don't let your sense of wonder legitimize domination or harm to others,

and so forth,

but I'm not even talking about anything that big.

Just, you know, be willing to shout "yes" at the moon every once in a while.

Say a prayer, even if you're not sure about the physics of it.

Say amen in church.

Go ahead, let's practice.

Say amen in church. (Amen.)

One more time. (AMEN!)

Now we're talking.

It feels good, right?

Oh, maybe a little silly, a little dangerous, but good.

Because life is a gift -

oh, sure, it is serious and tragic sometimes, true.

No doubt.

But it's also a great gift.

A wonder.

And this world is full of moments that can provoke in us
a yes, a prayer, an amen.

So go ahead and surrender.

Don't be so respectable all the time.

Respectability is a way of distancing ourselves from
experience.

We think we're all suave and detached. The father of
liberal theology, Friedrich Schleiermacher,
called people who held this attitude "cultured despisers."

That's a great phrase.

I know some cultured despisers.

Sometimes I'm one.

Too much distance, too much critique, too much
respectability.

Don't be a cultured despiser.

Surrender! Surrender to those moments of awe and
wonder,

to love and hope and possibility.

Lay aside your cynicism, and the worry about past and
future,

resist the headlong tumble into the next moment.

If you are feeling that unearned, unexpected grace,
that surprising blessing,

just let it come.

Let the feeling wash over you,
say amen, say Ashe, say thank you.

Sing out loud.

Give a great big hug to someone.

Laugh.

Tell someone that you love them.

Say yes.

Let go of the branch and soar in the waiting wind.

When the spirit says do, do.

Surrender!

But don't give yourself away.

This is the second part of the gospel of the day:

surrender, but don't give yourself away.

You never know what you might catch.

Surrender is having a fun night out with your friends.

Giving yourself away is falling into addiction.

Surrender is letting the feeling of love fill your being.

Giving yourself away is determining your self-worth based
on whether or not they love you back.

Surrender is standing in the woods and breathing in the
joy of life.

Giving yourself away is forgetting to pick up the
grandkids after school.

Surrender is, when the spirit says do, do.

Giving yourself away is deciding that your experience of faith is the only one that counts.

Surrender is singing with gusto and confidence, even if you are an amateur.

Giving yourself away is not listening the melody being created by those around you.

Surrender is letting the spirit of life guide your days, be your roots and wings.

Giving yourself away is thinking that every passing impulse is the work of the spirit.

Look, no illusions.

This is tricky.

We all know folks - maybe ourselves - who err on the side of caution.

Who waste our days and nights in the company of wise neighbors,

but never seem to live.

And we all know folks - maybe ourselves - who err on the side of abandon.

Who give themselves away to self-destruction, exclusion, or the whims of the moment.

Finding this balance is the work of millennia of religious and philosophical study,

of the mystics and the rationalists,

the explorers and the thinkers,

human beings keep working this question,

keep trying to find the balance.

I don't think there's a single answer.
You figure it out as you go -
you try, re-try, adjust, keep at it.

Thankfully, you don't have to do it yourself!
This is part of the purpose of religious community -
to share with one another those moments of surprise,
of unearned and unexpected grace,
to hear other people's stories and learn from them,
to share our own and see if it makes any sense,
to help us keep hold of ourselves while we still find ways
to surrender to the mystery and the beauty of life.
This is why we do this together, and not just by
ourselves.

The call to surrender, but don't give yourself away,
in the end, this is the call to a deeper authenticity.

I invite you to surrender pretension and respectability,
to surrender your clinging to social role or status,
surrender your grip on your desire to control the world,
surrender your concern for things that are not worthy of
your love and faith.

Surrender those things so you can be more fully your
best self.

Let go of distractions and work on learning to be you.
Let go of temptations and addictions,
let go of plans and jealousies,

let go of hesitation and fear.
Be yourself.

Let go of everything else so you can hold onto this:
that you are holy and sacred and a child of the stars,
of the universe.

Let go of your blinders and see the whole world.

It is a call to deeper authenticity,
and a call to deeper relationship.

Because not only are you holy and sacred and a child of
the stars,

but so is every other human being,

in every corner, known and forgotten, of the world.

It is a call to surrender your preconceived notions about
others,

to let go of your cultured despair,
your judgement,

and meet one another at a more human level,
at a more holy level.

To hear each other into being and see each other into
beauty.

To let go of what stands between us,

and be present to the world in all its glory, pain, and
wonder.

If you walk out of here with that chorus stuck in your
head -

surrender, surrender, but don't give yourself away,

remember that it's not just about love or intoxication or rock and roll.

There is a lesson here,
for how we might live our lives;
how we might open our hearts to surprising grace;
how we might open our minds to new ideas;
how we might open ourselves to one another.
Don't forget who you are,
and don't hang on to illusions, or pretenses of power.
Let go of privilege and false comfort.
Come into the life of risk;
join the already blowing wind, and soar,
laugh, cry, dance;
when the spirit says do, do;
remember yourself at your best,
but don't cling to the self-perception, the mask, that we
sometimes wear.

You are blessing.
Don't give that away.
Soar in the wind.
Let the moment come.
Don't rush headlong.
Wake up to wonder.
Accept the blessings of surprising grace.
Share those blessings with one another and with the
world.

May this be our calling, our hope, and our prayer.

And let the church say Amen. (Amen.)

Come on. (AMEN.)

One more time. (AMEN!)

One more time. (AMEN!!!)

Doesn't that feel good?

Let's sing.