

**“Building Towers, Waging Wars”**  
**Luke 14:25-33**  
**Sunday, September 5, 2010**  
**United Methodist Church of Yucaipa**  
**Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching**

**Scripture. Prayer. Comments.**

**Opening.**

I will focus mainly on the story Jesus tells about a king going to war. I would like to read those three verses to you again, in the New Jerusalem Bible translation.

Jesus said to the people: “...what king marching to war against another king would not first sit down and consider whether with ten thousand men he could stand up to the other who was advancing against him with twenty thousand? If not, then while the other king was still a long way off, he would send envoys to sue for peace. So in the same way, none of you can be my disciple without giving up all that he owns.”

On his journey to Jerusalem and to the cross, Jesus tells this story about two kings. One king has an army about half the size of the other king’s army. Jesus suggests that it might be wise for the weaker king to negotiate a peace settlement.

The peace settlement Jesus describes doesn’t sound all that great. The weaker king will be “giving up all that he owns.” Wow. That does not sound good.

This leads me to the first point I want to make about this passage: One of the reasons we don’t fully surrender to Jesus is because **surrender means I’m a loser.**

**I. Surrender Means I’m a Loser**

In the world, when one side surrenders to another side in a battle, there is a loser and a winner. We do not like being on the losing side. Well, I don’t like losing, anyway. I don’t know about you.

In sports, the losers feel dejected. My husband, Roy, is a Cub's fan. 'Nuff said.

I love being the winner in games. Once a week Roy & I & Josh & Chris go out for pizza, and we play UNO. I just love winning at UNO.

It's ridiculous. It's just a game. But there's something fun about being a winner.

The theme of Jesus' parable addresses a more deadly game, the game of war. To be the loser in a war is to lose everything; even, possibly, your life and the lives of everyone you know and love.

In the world of work – this is such a down time in our economy, so many people out of work. It's a great feeling to land the job you want. It's a horrible feeling to be turned down or, worse yet, to be fired from the job you have. To lose one's job is, perhaps, one of the most loser feelings of all the loser feelings.

When I saw the movie, "Up in the Air," it was one of the most gut-wrenching movies I'd seen in a while. With this being Labor Day weekend – a celebration of workers – it's even more gut-wrenching.

The movie is a comedy, in some respects, but very dark. It's about a guy who flies around the country firing people. That's his job. To fire people. That's what his company does. They fire people, so their customers won't have to do it.

There's a Simpsons episode – maybe you've seen it – in which Homer becomes known as someone who can do your break-ups for you. So, for example, if you want to break up with your girlfriend or your boyfriend, but you don't want to lower the boom yourself, you call Homer. He breaks the news to your former loved one. It's over. No chance here. We're done. And you avoid the wrath of the lover scorned.

"Up in the Air" is like that, only hiring someone to fire people for you.

At the end of the movie, there are interviews with people who have been fired. These are real people who have actually been fired, from real life jobs. There is so much anguish there. You can see them trying to make sense of it all. Their entire sense of self is called into question. They are clearly fighting against that feeling of being losers.

I have some family members who are no longer practicing Christians. I won't say which ones, because you may meet them sometime.

I often wonder why this is. I pray, and I hope for the lost sheep to return to the fold. Maybe you have some loved ones like that, too – friends and relatives that you pray for.

In thinking about today's scripture passage, I begin to have some ideas about why some of my relatives avoid the church.

I think one of the big reasons is that some of them are too successful. They have successful careers. They are well-educated. They live in the best parts of town. Their children go to the best schools. In short, they live privileged lives.

Now, I don't mean to put them down. They are good, decent people. They give back to their communities. They are kind to animals. They love their children. They obey traffic laws. There are many good people who are just like them.

Why should they surrender to Jesus? Why should they surrender to anyone? They are in charge of their very successful lives. To surrender would be to admit that they are losers, that they need help, that they do not have everything under control.

Which leads to my next point: **surrender means losing control.**

## **II. Surrender means losing control.**

Here's the image I would like us to think about, in terms of maintaining control in the spiritual battle:

Picture your heart as your kingdom. You are under siege. You gather everyone and everything you value into your castle. The walls are fortified. There is a moat around your castle. There are alligators in your moat. The drawbridge has been pulled up, and you are huddled inside, defended against...

Defended against what?

I can imagine Jesus laughing as he tells this parable. “What king in his right mind would go to battle against another king twice as strong? You must be CRAZY!” Surrender, you fool! Turn over everything you’ve got, because you’re going to lose it all, anyway. The war is already decided, and you are not the winner.

Surrender means losing control.

I was at a retreat not too long ago, in which a speaker was talking about how she avoids surrendering to Jesus. She said she was embarrassed to even say it. She watches a TV show – I can’t remember the name of it. It’s not one I watch. Some housewives reality show. For me, it might be “Without a Trace.” I love that show. Or maybe “Final Fantasy.” I love to play Final Fantasy.

So, this woman said it’s so ridiculous, but she would avoid time with Jesus, avoid listening to Jesus, avoid surrendering her life to Jesus, by watching hours of her favorite TV show.

We’ll do anything to avoid surrender – name your favorite addiction. Because surrender means losing control.

We can be losers, in the best sense of the word, if we lose ourselves to Jesus. To lose control is a good thing, if we turn over the controls to him.

I am reminded of the veteran pilot who was such a hero in the news. The one who landed the failing jetliner in a river outside of New York City. I think it was New York. To lose control is OK, if we turn over the controls to someone who is more experienced than we are. Someone who is trustworthy. Someone we can entrust our lives to.

I wouldn't have wanted to be flying that plane when the engines failed. With me in control, the plane would have crashed. Everyone would have died, including me.

But that veteran pilot knew what he was doing. With him in control, everyone made it to safety.

Jesus is the veteran pilot of our souls, isn't he? Why would we want to wrest the controls from him, just to crash our lives into the dirt? Why not turn the controls over to him? He knows what he's doing. We don't.

This leads me to my final point: **surrender is the only path that makes sense.**

### **III. Surrender is the Only Path That Makes Sense**

Jesus is the enemy in this story – in this parable that he, himself told to the people. Jesus is the enemy in this story because Jesus comes into the world as an enemy of the world.

He assails our hearts with the onslaught of his love, relentless in his pursuit of us. He is jealous for us. He is passionate for us. He wants each one of us to be his, to belong to him, to enter the sheepfold of his church, to become members of his body. He wants each one of us to run to him and to be hidden, safe and protected, under the shadow of his wing, in the folds of his robes, in the secret mystery of his heart.

In this parable Jesus lays out reality for the people. He makes it clear that, once they have sat down and looked at the strength of their own armies – which are in league with the

world and the Evil One -- they will see that they are no match against the power and glory of the God of all creation. They will quickly send envoys to sue for peace.

The crazy thing is to sit hidden away in the castles of our hearts -- moats filled with alligators, drawbridge drawn up -- hiding and plotting and planning on how to avoid the sovereign of the universe. It's the stupidest thing I have ever heard of.

And we all do it.

As Christians, we try to combat our ignorance. We do our best to turn over pieces of our life to Jesus. We try and try and try, and work and work and work.

### **Closing.**

Here's the thing: Trying won't get us there.

It is a change of heart that is accomplished by God. It is the grace of God.

At the same time -- paradoxically -- there is one thing we can do. You may have guessed what it is...

Surrender.

Let down the drawbridge. Stop making excuses. Let go of pride. Accept the support and fellowship of other believers. Open our hearts. Let some tears flow. Become like little children.

Surrender.

Surrender to Jesus the Christ, who has already won the battle against sin and death, through his suffering and death on the cross and through his glorious resurrection. He counted the cost, and decided that you were worth it, that I was worth it. We are of infinite worth to Him.

To be a loser in this world is to win everything in His kingdom. To lose control is the only way to gain control of our lives, through Him. To die is the only way to live in Him.

You may remember the chorus of that old hymn: “I surrender all, I surrender all. All to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all.”

Jesus is our Warrior-King. He will guide us in the building of His kingdom; He will lead us into victory against evil and poverty and suffering.

As we come to His table this morning, may we come with surrendered hearts.

Amen.