

The readings:

Jeremiah 29: 11-14 11 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

Psalms 37: 23-24

23 The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord,  
And He delights in his way.

24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down;  
For the Lord upholds him with His hand.

Morena koutou te whanau

Thank you for inviting me into your living rooms this morning. It is a pleasure for me to present this morning a hymn that is both very simple but also very profound.

"All to Jesus I Surrender" has quite possibly one of the simplest of all hymn tunes written by Winfield Scott Weedon in 1896. The official "hymn book" arrangement uses only 3 chords and is quite repetitive and dare I say it, a rather boring arrangement. But it is this simplicity that has allowed musicians over the years to present this hymn in many different styles and with much improvisation and luscious arrangements. If you google the hymn you will find it presented in many different styles including acapella, country, gospel, and jazz. If, like me, you are rather fond of jazz arrangements, I will include a link in the comments to a rather delicious jazz version of the hymn by a Korean artist Yohan Kim – an amazing musician who extracts every ounce of jazz possibility from this otherwise simple tune.

The words of "All to Jesus I Surrender" were written by Judson Van de Venter at a pivotal point in his life, trying to decide whether he would fulfil God's calling on his life to become an evangelist – whether he would "surrender all" – or follow his passion to become a recognised artist.

There have been many times where I have been at a pivotal point in my life where I had to seek God's plan for life and make a decision whether or not to follow that plan.

I have always had a strong sense of God leading me on life's journey. When Margi and I were married, it was that verse from Jeremiah that we had on the front cover of our order of service. Little did we know back then how important it would become for us to have the assurance that not only does he have a plan, it is a plan for good and not for evil.

Talking about plans...

Let me introduce you to my friend Tom, or more formally, "Tom Tom". Tom is an app that sits on my phone and has been a wonderful thing in my life. Tom can tell me the most efficient way to get from where I am now to any other place I want to go to.

You see, Tom knows more than I do. Tom knows what the traffic is like on all the different possible routes that take me where I want to go and plots the fastest route. Tom knows if there has been an accident and whether a road I normally travel on has been closed because of road works.

Tom also takes the stress away. I have discovered that men and women have very different views on the best way of getting from A to B. Tom has saved many an argument when we can simply agree "lets go whichever way Tom thinks is best". And most often Tom is right.

Sometimes Tom takes me weird and unusual ways – ways I would not have thought of going before, and you land up saying to yourself "actually, that was a really cool way of getting there". Sometimes I have no idea where I am, but Tom faithfully tells me to "turn left in 100 metres" or "take the third exit on the roundabout".

But the best thing about Tom is when I am in a world of my own (a state my wife often accused me of being in) and I blithely go right past that turn to the left that if had been paying attention to Tom, he would have reminded me of, Tom faithfully goes "recalculating" and lo and behold, a new route is plotted that still gets me to my destination even if I am now hopelessly lost.

And then there are the times when I say to Tom "O come on, that's a silly way to get there, I know better" only to discover as I turn the corner on *my* route that there is an accident and a huge traffic jam, and yes, Tom was right, again.

Now you may not realise that the first satellite navigation system was invented some 4,000 years ago. We read about it in the passage from Exodus this morning. God gave the people of Israel a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night that would lead them to the promised land. You may wonder, of, course, why it still took the Israelites 40 years to get there right? My wife suggests that it was because Moses was a man and so wouldn't stop and ask for directions!

So what is my point?

God has a great plan for my life. He has a particular destination in mind of where He wants me to go and knows the best way to get there. When I am prepared to trust Him and let Him direct me, I get to the places He wants me to go by the best possible route.

And just like when listening to Tom, sometimes I say "O come on, I know a much better way to get there" exercise my free will to do just as I please, and then turn the corner only to find the road block or the accident or the snarl-up that I could not have foreseen. And my God faithfully goes "recalculating" and plots the next best route to get to the destination.

So when I'm on the road, the best option is always when I say "All to Tom Tom, I surrender – I will ever love and trust him."

And in life I need to constantly sing "All to Jesus, I surrender, All to Him I freely give".

Jesus Himself prays that famous prayer "not my will, but Thine". He Himself surrendered His will to his Father".

Sometimes I am not paying attention. I am not listening to His voice and I blithely ignore the instructions, and turn right when He was gently suggesting that I turn left. And again my God faithfully goes "recalculating" and once more plots the next best route to get to the destination.

Sometimes I am taken by surprise by my friend Tom and I go by a route I was least expecting and the route turns out to be a joy – seeing new sights and having new experiences I was not expecting. And so with God, He so often takes us down pathways we were not expecting, and when we trust Him and follow his directions we find unexpected joy and delight in new places and new experiences.

Sometimes there are tragedies, accidents, and road closures. We encounter things along the journey that are not planned, not on the map, not on the ideal route, and which are truly tragic. No

one, including God, plans a route for us that includes tragedy. But because we live in a fallen world, we can and do experience events that derail us from our planned route and which at the time seem to be insurmountable.

I remember distinctly the time when the doctors announced to us that our daughter Emily had Down syndrome. I remember crying out in grief for all that we had lost – the plans we had made for our daughter and for our life now seemed impossible and lost forever. But I also remember in my tears encountering a supernatural assurance that whilst we had indeed lost a great deal, that God was right there weeping with me. A real sense of "recalculating" – that a new plan, a new set of dreams, and new destination was being laid down and that if I surrendered all, He would be right there beside me on this new journey by a different route. A route that could still be filled with joy and with amazing adventures and new sights that we would not have otherwise experienced.

Where are you in your preparedness to trust that God has a good plan for your life, regardless of the circumstances in which you currently find yourself?

The writer of the hymn "All to Jesus I surrender" expresses this so beautifully:

*All to Jesus I surrender,  
All to Him I freely give;  
I will ever love and trust Him,  
In His presence daily live.  
I surrender all, I surrender all;  
All to Thee, my blessed Saviour,  
I surrender all.*

When we find ourselves down that one way road marked "No exit", or we are down a road that seems to be filled with tragedy and heartbreak, are we able to surrender, to stop and listen to the Holy Spirit prompting us and guiding us and telling us when to turn left and when to turn right.

For me personally, the essence of Christianity is the preparedness to surrender – seeking out God's plan and purposes for my life instead of my own. Surrendering to His plan, His way, His call on my life. To say "Jesus is Lord of my life". Living every day in His presence.

As the hymn writer expresses so well, in surrender I would then know through His Holy Spirit, that I belong to Him:

*All to Jesus I surrender,  
Make me, Saviour, wholly Thine;  
Let me feel Thy Holy Spirit,  
Truly know that Thou art mine.*

So next time you're in your car and using Google Maps or Tom Tom or whatever system you have for navigating and you take wrong turn and you see "Recalculating", use it as a reminder that God has a great plan for your life and if we are prepared to surrender to His plan instead of ours, we will be taken along a journey that is full of life, interesting places, and joy, even when there are tragedies and road blocks along the way, and even when we turn left when we should have turned right.

I've heard it said that if you want to hear God laugh, tell Him your plans!

If you are in a place today where you feel the need to surrender your plans and take on God's plan, I would like to pray with you now that you will hear the Holy Spirit's "recalculating" and that you will be able to sing the wonderful third verse of this hymn:

*All to Jesus I surrender,  
Lord, I give myself to Thee;  
Fill me with Thy love and power,  
Let Thy blessing fall on me*

*Father I bring to you the needs of those listening today who feel the need to surrender to your will and your plans for their life. Meet with them and given them your assurance that you have a good plan for their life and that if they trust you and live daily in your presence, that you will fill them with your love and power and that your blessing will be on them. Amen.*

Vineyard: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7x2lpLSfq8>

(Jazz version to add to comments): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kRqMHGuEqY>