

WHAT I LEARNED ON MY SUMMER VACATION

June 29, 2022

Rev. Richard Rogers

Alright! So I want to talk about what I learned on my summer vacation. And how many of you know that ... How many of you like to travel? Everybody? How many of you know that you're really more of a home body? [Laughs] I love that! Right? Because, like, some of us just love hitting the road. And some of us are like, "Nooooo!"

Like, when my son was little -- when Ian was little -- we used to have to sneak the suitcases out of the house. [Congregation laughs] Because as soon as he saw the suitcases, he would get sick. I mean, he just ... Like, the idea of leaving his little room; it just ... He's a Cancer boy, and he's just like -- he's staying there! And we'd have to sneak the suitcases in the car! We had to sneak them out the garage and pack them up, because he's a home body. Not any more! But he started that way.

And what I want us to look at is the role of travel -- of journeying -- as part of our spiritual life. Because truly, journeying -- and being on a spiritual journey -- has been an archetypical aspect of our spiritual life. Whether it's going to the Holy Land; whether it's going to Mecca; whether it's going to wherever the culture said ... But there was this idea that part of our spiritual understanding could only happen somehow on the road.

And I really believe that there's a spiritual lesson in this, because we know that as soon as we leave the driveway, there's a level where we lose control. How many of you love it when you lose control of your life? [Congregation laughs] And one of the things that happens when you begin to travel -- and it doesn't matter if it's by car, by plane, or whatever. How many of you have ever sat on the tarmac in a plane with all the doors closed for at least an hour? Right? We all have! Right? And no matter how upset you got, did that help the plane get in the air? No!

Like, how many of you have ever been driving, and the road is closed? Or the bridge is closed? Or the thing is closed? And you sit there waiting for it to reopen. And how much do we love that? [Congregation laughs] Right? How much do we love the fact that we don't always have control? And it seems to be heightened when we leave the house.

Travel takes us to our vulnerable place. And we like to pretend that we don't have a vulnerable place: that we're bullet-proof; that we can overcome and handle it. And what I want you to see, over and over again, is that our soul needs to be vulnerable. It needs it! Because in that experience, it reminds us that we have a God. If your ego is always calling the shots; if your ego is always in control; if your intellect can figure it out over and over and over again, it takes away the need for a personal relationship with the Divine. Because there's something about being stuck on an airplane, or being stuck in traffic, or being stuck ... that calls us deeper into an experience of God.

Germany Kent, an American broadcaster, said this: *"It is more important to go slow and gain the lessons you need along the journey than to rush through the process and arrive at your destination empty."*

How many of you can think of a time in your life where you were moving so fast that you felt empty? That you felt spent? That you felt like you didn't have it? And you might have gotten there on time -- you might have actually been ahead of schedule -- but you didn't experience the whole purpose of the journey that you were on.

You know, the last two summers we've been able to go on vacation. And for several years we hadn't been able to do that. And we've been able to go on vacation the last two years. And the last two years we went to a little lake just outside of Kansas City called Lake Waukomis. And it's a little lake; it's just adorable. We have some friends that have a home there, and they've offered their home. And it's just fabulous! It's green. Do you remember what green looks like? [Congregation laughs] It's green, and

there's trees, and there's water, and it's fabulous! Just fabulous! And we go. And you know, it's humid. And you'd hate it, because it's humid! But it's green and the trees are tall. And it's just fabulous!

And every time we go, we try to take a different route. And we don't plan out the routes. We just are willing to go on a different way. We take a couple of days to get there and a couple of days to get home. This year we stopped for the first night in Santa Fe. And you know, that's our favorite spot, right? It's just a lovely spot. And then we drove the Santa Fe Trail through Dodge City into Kansas City.

Anybody been to Dodge City? Never been there before ... Dodge City, like, it's Dodge City! Like, you kind of expect Wyatt Earp -- even now! You kind of expect Wyatt Earp to be walking down the road! I mean, we had dinner in a saloon and, you know, they still have the brick streets. And it was Dodge City, you know! We expected a hundred head of cattle to come through the middle of town, and cowboys on every corner ... It was Dodge City! It was fabulous, right? I wouldn't want to live there, but it was great to visit, right? [Congregation laughs]

And so we get there, and it's always a journey. Right? It's always a process. And we try to take smaller roads and not just always interstate. And it's good. And as we were driving through Kansas, there was this huge barn, and it said, *"Put God first in everything."* I mean, that's a lot of words! That's a lot of letters to have painted whatever it was -- eight feet, 10 feet high -- across the barn. It was a big barn! And my wife, Jill, says to me, *"That's our theme for this year. That's the message right there; we got it. Put God first in everything."*

And it's kind of a difficult situation sometimes to put God first. Because how many of you have ever had a desire that you wanted to manipulate the situation to get your needs met? You know what I mean by that? Like, have you ever had a desire that was actually bigger than your belief in God? Because there's a strange thing that happens when you have a desire that is really a longing, a wanting, a needing. When you have a desire like that, sometimes our ego steps in and says, *"No problem! We'll just manipulate the heck out of everybody or we'll do whatever it takes, and we'll get it done."*

And what I want you to begin to see is that, with a big desire, we really have to have a bigger belief in God. We have to have a bigger experience of God.

So I want you to play with me tonight, and I want you to think of a desire that you have in your life. Does everybody have a desire in their life? Right? And I want you to kind of do a little inner check. And I want you to ask yourself the question: *"Do I believe that God -- my God, a personal relationship with God -- is bigger than this desire?"* Really, like truly. Like, get to the brass tacks part of it, and see if you really believe that God is big enough -- that your God is great enough, that your God is amazing enough -- to figure that out.

And feel the difference when you kind of hedge your bets. *"Well, I believe in God as a concept; I believe in God as an idea; but really believing that God could find a way to make this happen stretches me."*

And over and over again, I want us to live in that place where we're willing to stay in the divine flow where we're willing to stay in divine order. To really believe that there's a power greater than us that can bless us; that can heal us; that we can trust. And we can allow it to be a part of our life. And whatever the desire -- what the need -- is, that we're always in this choice: Am I going to live in the flow? Am I going to live in divine order? Am I going to live in the grace of God? Or am I going to try to manipulate it?

Some of you have known me for years. And some of you know that most of my life, I was a pretty Type A personality. How many of you know that? Okay; great. I just want to make sure we're clear. Because I want to make clear you realize who's saying this lesson, right? [Congregation laughs] Right? So those of you who've known me for a long time, know that -- I think anyway -- I have softened with the years. Right? That when I was in my 30s, whew! Man, I was a bull! Man, I just made things happen, right?

And I noticed that on vacation, I think my wife likes me more. [Congregation laughs] Do you know what I mean by that? Like, the vacation version of me is actually much easier to be around than the work version of me, right? That the work version of me can get a little ... driven. [Congregation laughs] Right?

The vacation version of me is chill. Right? *"Fine; you want to do that? Fine; let's go do that. Fine; let's go do this."* You know: It's raining? *"Perfect!"* There's a tornado warning? *"Lovely!"* [Congregation laughs] *"Where's the bathroom?"* Right? The sirens are going off, and I'm trying to find the bathroom in the dark!

But there's a chill version of me. And I notice that the chill version of me actually believes in God more than the driven version of me. Like, you can think, *"Well, Richard; it's constant. You know, you believe in God or you don't believe in God."* Well, not all of me believes at the same level. Does that make sense? Like, there's parts of me -- mindsets, aspects of my personality -- that get a little driven. Because I don't believe that my needs are fully going to be met. But there's also a part of me that just trusts. Deeply, profoundly trusts.

And that's what's interesting for me. Because you would think that, on the road, I would be more anxious, because I have less control. Right? You would think that, because I'm on the road and I don't always know how it's all going to work out, that I would want to control it more. But I actually control it less! There's something that happens where I just know it's all going to be taken care of.

And I want us to begin to play in that realm, even if it's just going to the grocery store. I want you to play with me with this idea of: If you put God first in everything, are you having more fun? Right? If you put God first in all the little details -- in all the little errands -- are you having more fun than when you're trying to make life happen? I believe it's more fun to live in the flow -- to have a dynamic relationship with God -- than us trying to control and manipulate and make things happen.

And your homework ... are you ready for your homework? Your homework tonight is to see if there's an area in your life that it's time for you to turn over to God, and really allow God to be in charge of that area. And it could be a healing; it could be your finances; it could be your work; it could be your relationship. But an area in your life where you'd be willing to turn it over and see what happens next.

There's this quote from Kierkegaard that says this: *"To dare is to lose one's footing momentarily. To not dare is to lose oneself."*

Like, I want you ... I'm asking and inviting you to go into a vulnerable place -- a place where you want to be in control; where you want to be in charge; where you want to make it happen -- and actually decide to dare enough to let God just work it out. Because you can't really develop your faith if your ego's always doing it.

The way that you develop your faith is to turn it over -- to trust; to let go -- and to see if it works out anyway. Because you know your ego can do it; you know your ego can make it happen. But what if you just don't? What if you just don't?

Here we go! Proverbs 3:5-6: *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your path."* Okay?

Let me just clarify this. There is not ever in life a time when your path is straight. Is that true? Have you ever had a straight path? Life doesn't work like that! So while I 100% believe in this Scripture, what I want you to begin to see is that, if life was a straight path, you actually wouldn't need God. Your intellect -- your personality -- could do it just fine. If you had a straight path, anybody can go on a trip. If you know you're going on a trip and it's like New Mexico, where you're going to drive like a hundred miles in a straight line and there's never a bend, you don't really need a relationship with God. Because your ego can do that all by yourself.

But for most of us, our life has not been a straight path. And because it hasn't been a straight path, we actually need the Infinite. We need God. We need to be blessed. We need help. We need ... We need it! And it's 100% available to us if we're willing to ask for it.

So what would it look like in your life right now if you put God first in everything? And maybe you're already doing that. But I know, for me, it's a challenge every day to surrender to that. To say, "*Okay; in this situation, how do I put God first? And in this situation, how do I put God first?*"

Because for me, my tendency is just to jump in and do it. And there's this gap. And in that gap there's this moment to ask for something better. And if remember that there's this moment -- this gap -- we can actually invite God; we can actually turn it over; we can actually awaken to a greater possibility instead of just launching in with our personality. And that's what I'm interested in.

I'm interested in all of us. It doesn't matter what's going on in your life. No matter where you are in life; no matter what the situation: going to the grocery store, whatever it is. Going to buy gas; whatever it is. I want there to be this moment where you invite the Infinite -- when you invite the flow; when you invite God -- into that experience to see if your life doesn't get better.

Because you can do it without it. You can. But there's been week after week, day after day, month after month, where you've been living by your ego. But there's a moment where you just get curious about: Is there a greater possibility? Is there more? And that's what I want. I want you to turn over the big deals and the little deals. The big moments and the little moments. I want you to turn over and just see if there's another level of life for you. Would you be willing?

Let's pray.

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God right here, right now. And I want you to just turn it over. I want you to imagine all the good that God has for you. And we just say thank you, God. God, I give you my life today. My ups and my downs, my rights and my lefts; I give it all to you. So in the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.