

CHILDLIKE SOUL

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Okay; you guys ready? So when you think of a childlike soul, what quality comes to mind? [Repeats answers congregants shout out] Innocence? Joy? Playfulness? Honesty? Anybody else? Faith? Kindness?

So I want to talk about this childlike soul. Because I said in the beginning, there's something powerful when we embrace this Christ child image. Because for most of us, as we grow up -- and as we move through life -- we get bumped. And when we get bumped by life, sometimes we get cranky about it. And when we lead life from our crankiness, we're not really standing in the greatest sense of power and strength that we have.

And so, as we move into this Christmas season, I want you to really call forth -- to really open a space -- for that childlike soul: that innocence, that purity, that love, that joy that is truly within every one of us.

How many of you know your internal cranky self? [Congregation laughs] Right? You ever witness your internal cranky self when it gets out ahead of you, and you can't quite get your arms on it? And it's coming out of your mouth, and you're not maybe the best version of yourself. Right?

But there's always that inner childlike Christ that is honest and whole and complete and playful. And we need to kind of remember that, as well.

One of the things that I think about being a dad is: I was not expecting to love being a dad as much as I did. I don't know about anyone else, but the idea of being a dad kind of scared me. It's like: What if I don't like them? [Congregation laughs] Right? What if I just don't like them? What if I just don't like them as people? What if I don't like ... And then they popped out, and they got me! Like from the first second, they got me! And especially when they were little. Junior high, high school ... a little harder. [Congregation laughs] But when they were little, they were just adorable. Like, you could just You could just feel the presence of God within them.

And one of my favorite things about being a dad was carrying them when they were fast asleep. You remember that if you're a parent? When they were fast asleep and they had this level of limpness. They were completely dead weight. If you tried to get them out of the car and get them into the house, they felt like they were 500 pounds. And they felt completely safe.

And I want you to just remember what it was like to sleep when you knew you were completely safe. That you didn't have to sleep with one eye open. You didn't have to sleep worrying about who's going to get you. There was a time when all of us would sleep from this place of the deepest level of peace. We would just be out. And we were gone. And we knew that we were completely safe.

See, I want to talk about peace tonight. Because I want us to remember that childlike soul knew peace. Before it got scared; before it got wounded; before it started having to look over its shoulder, that place in you knew a complete level of peace. And that peace was just profound!

And one of the aspects of Advent -- of this Christmas season -- is peace. And we celebrate peace. And the world seems like it is getting more and more anxious, more and more fearful, more and more concerned. Where our anxiety level as a world is going up. And yet, there's this promise that, if we live a spiritual life, we will know peace. Because our peace is a part of our connection to God.

And as we awaken spiritually -- as we do our spiritual work -- there's a part of us that moves back into that childlike sense of peace, knowing that it's all going to work out.

Norman Vincnet Peale said it this way: *"The life of inner peace, being harmonious and without stress, is the easiest type of existence."*

And from our wounded place, that doesn't seem true. From our wounded place, we had to protect ourselves. We have to stay safe. And we have to sleep with one eye open, because we don't know who's going to get us, and we're not going to let anybody get us anymore. And we're going to be on guard. And we throw peace out the door, because our ego is in charge, and we've been threatened; we've been scared. And so we're going to be in charge.

The Dalai Lama says things like, *"Do not the behavior of others destroy your inner peace."*

And Ralph Waldo Emerson says, *"Nobody can bring you peace but yourself."*

And I want you to see the journey that we have to take to get back to peace. And how much I believe that's part of the Christmas story. The Christmas story is inviting us back into God; back into peace; back into a level of life that I think our soul misses when we're feeling afraid and anxious.

And from our ego's point of view, it makes total sense to be afraid with all that's going on in the world. Like you'd have to be braindead to be at peace! But I don't think that's true. I think the more that we come to know God -- truly know God -- the more that we know peace.

And I believe that peace is one of those things that, even though we sing every Sunday morning, *"Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me,"* I believe that peace is one of those things that we can't go directly at. And what I mean by that is: peace is really a byproduct of living your spiritual life. And I believe that there are four paths to peace -- or four aspects of peace. That, as we understand these four aspects and we move in the direction of any one of these four aspects, I believe that the prize is a higher level of peace.

And I believe those four aspects ... The first one I believe is FAITH. The second one I think is SURRENDER. The third is PRAYER. And the fourth and final is LOVE.

So FAITH is that believing more in God and myself and life that is greater than all the stories, all the drama, all the pain. And one of the things that's interesting to me is when people say they believe in God, and yet they are fearful. And I really want you to see: I think that's an absolute contradiction. Because if you really believe in God -- if that is real for you -- then how do we become fearful? If we believe that there's a presence and power at work in our life that is for us -- that only wants good for us - - then how do we allow ourselves to get fearful? It's actually a lack of faith that allows us to be fearful.

But the more we believe in God; the more we believe that the power of God is within us; the more that we trust that power, the more it leads us into higher and higher levels or deeper and deeper levels into faith.

From John 14: *"For truly I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will you do, because I go to the Father."*

See, I really want to test to see if there's a willingness to have a greater level of faith if you know that faith will lead to a greater level of peace. I believe that we can practice having a statement of faith. And your statement of faith can be: What do you want to hold on to? What do you want to believe in? *"I want to believe in peace. I want to believe in love. I want to believe in God."*

And then your statement of faith: you can come back to that over and over again. And so that, over and over again, when life challenges us ... Has everybody had a challenge in the last month or year? [Congregation laughs] Right?

So the idea is not to remove the challenges, but it's to have a faith that is bigger than the ups and downs.

From 1 John, beginning with Verse 2: *"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet various trials, for you know the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete and lacking in nothing."*

So every time we're anxious, and literally I mean every time we're anxious, I want you to move the focus off of the thing that you're anxious about and simply shift it into a belief, and tell yourself, *"Oh; I believe in God!"*

Will you say that with me? [With congregation:] *"I believe in God."*

Now, that seems so simplistic, right? Like, *"Well, Richard .. Yeah, but will it really work?"*

Well, let's try it! Does anybody have something that you're currently worried about in your life? And if you don't, borrow one of your neighbor's. They'll be willing to share. And every time that fear comes up, I want you to begin to tell yourself one more time: *"Oh; I believe in God!"*

One more time: [with congregation] *"I believe in God!"*

And I want you to just let them sit right next to each other. Right? And let yourself feel which one feels better. Does it feel better for you to worry and be anxious and afraid about anything? Or does it feel better when you say, *"I believe in God"?*

And part of our spiritual journey is mastering our mind. Because our mind likes to go all over the place! And we can actually direct our mind to where and to focus on what we choose to focus on.

"I believe in God!"

Together: [with congregation] *"I believe in God."*

So that every time we're anxious ... Because I believe in our life, in our experience, that when challenges arise in our life -- and they're going to! -- I believe that that's to deepen and broaden our faith. It's not to take us out.

"Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, because you know the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete and lacking in nothing."

Every time we choose God over our fears, the byproduct is peace. Every time we choose our fears over God, the byproduct is anxiety.

And so every time you're in any level of anxiety, at some level you're believing more in your fears than in God. And who's responsible for what you believe? I am! No; YOU are! [Congregation laughs]

"I'm going to give you a list of all your beliefs and, from this point on, these are the only things you believe in." How many of you have ever been to a church like that? Right? Where they told you what you believe when you walked in the door, and your only response is, *"Oh! I do!"* Right? And that was your commitment. Your commitment was to believe whatever they told you to believe.

But unfortunately, in my experience, it doesn't work that way! You actually have to be mature enough to decide what you want to believe! And you get to decide from moment to moment to moment what you want to believe.

So you get to believe in things that scare you or you get to believe in God! It's just hard to believe in two separate things that are diametrically opposed at the same time.

"I believe in God."

Together: [with congregation] *"I believe in God."*

Feel that! Does that feel easier or harder? It's actually easier! It's actually less stress to believe in God instead of believing in your fears.

Now, faith is one. Do you remember what two was? **SURRENDER**. And we love this one, right? We love to surrender! We love the whole idea of surrender. We love that it connotes a sense of weakness or failure or giving up. I mean, we love the idea of surrender, right? But surrender is a part of our spiritual experience. And we're going to decide which direction we go.

I don't know if you've read the book; I love this book! It's *The Surrender Experiment* by Michael Singer. Anybody read that book? It is a fabulous book. Fabulous, fabulous, fabulous book! And he talks about his life journey into surrender and all the things that he had to go through. And this is one of the quotes from the book: *"My formula for success was very simple: Do whatever is put in front of me with all your heart and soul without regard for personal results. Do the work as though it was given to you by the universe itself -- because it was."*

Another one: *"I am so grateful that surrender taught me to willingly participate in life's dance with a quiet mind and an open heart."*

"Each of us actually believes that things should be the way we want them to be, instead of being the natural result of all the forces of creation."

How many of you can think of at least one thing in your life that you have been unwilling to surrender to God? That you've been unwilling to surrender to the way it is. I'm telling you, if you want help with this one, go read that book! Because the whole idea is that your soul is at its best when you let go. When you actually believe that there's a power and presence at work in your life who's bringing one thing after another into your life only to bless you. And the more that we believe that; the more that we get into the flow of life; the more we get aligned with God, everything in our life begins to work out.

Anybody read Byron Katie? *Loving What Is?* Byron Katie: *"A thought is harmless unless we believe it."* Right? And I want you to think about that! Because the moment you believe that life should be different than it is, that's the moment it creates stress and anxiety. If everything is brought into your life by an active presence -- a divine universal presence that is for you -- then we surrender to it! We just allow it to unfold!

Byron Katie says, *"I'm a lover of what is, not because I'm a spiritual person, but because it hurts when I argue with reality."*

Has anybody had that experience? When you're arguing that life should be different than it is, and how much stress and anxiety that causes, instead of just saying, *"Okay, I'm going to get right with what is, and what is brought to me was meant for me."*

And it could be no other way! That everything in your life is here for your highest good. So that you can practice being more than the events of life.

So first thing I want is for you to deepen your faith. The second thing I want is for you to surrender. The third that I want is to deepen your **PRAYER LIFE**.

And really what I mean by that is, through prayer and meditation, learn how to quiet your mind. When we've learned how to quiet our mind, we stop arguing with reality. That when we just learn to breathe and meditate and come back to our center -- come back to our Source -- everything gets easier. And peace is a natural part of this process.

And then the fourth area is **LOVE**. In the presence of pure love, we are deeply at peace. And for many of us, we've never been filled with enough love to be at peace. You know, when we're walking around from a place of emptiness, it's hard for us to be at peace. And when we turn our full focus to God -- fully focus on God -- and when we feel God's infinite love for us, it fills us up so that we are actually filled to overflowing. That, in the presence of God -- and as we go into this spiritual journey; as we open our minds and our hearts -- we actually get filled all the way. That we can actually feel God's infinite love for us.

And that's part of our spiritual journey! Our spiritual journey isn't just to think about God, but it's to open the door to allow God to fill our soul. Jesus said the most important thing was to love the Lord, your God, with all your mind, your heart, your soul.

And the question is: Why? Does God need you to love God? No! You have free will. But to the degree that you love God is to the degree that you feel God's infinite love for you. And that's what we all need! We need to feel infinitely loved. Because you can't know that you're precious until you feel that love. And the moment you feel God's overflowing love for you, you know that you are God's beloved. You can't do that in your head. It has to be a real feeling, where you feel infinite love.

So if there's times when you're not feeling fully loved, I'm going to invite you to take that into prayer and turn that toward God. And open your heart and your soul and love God with all that you are so that you can feel God's infinite love for you.

We're trying to go without and it doesn't work! We actually have to feel God's love for us. Because the moment we feel God's love for us, God moves from being a concept to an experience. And the experience is better!

Do you want to talk about going on a roller coaster, or do you want to do on a roller coaster? Or ... maybe that's a bad analogy, right? [Congregation laughs] Do you want to talk about kissing or be kissed? Maybe that's a bad experience! [Congregation laughs] Right? But the experience ... Can I get an "Amen" that the experience is better than the conversation? [Congregation: "Yes!"] Like, if the kiss isn't better than talking about the kiss, you are kissing the wrong person! [Congregation laughs] Can I get an "Amen" for that one? [Congregation: "Amen!"]

Right? Because the experience should be better than talking about it. You know, nobody cares when you move the nose out of the way! Right? [Congregation laughs] You just get the nose out of the way and there they are! Right? It's fabulous!

And that's what I want for God, right? I want you to get all your thoughts and thinking out of the way and experience the presence of God.

What if I promised you that peace was possible in your lifetime? Not out there, but in here [points to heart]. You can live a life of free of anxiety because you know God. And every time we're anxious, you need to move the focus off of the fear and on to God.

Will you pray with me?

I want you to take a deep breath. And I want you to put your full heart and soul into an experience of God. That you just let God love you. That no matter where you've been; no matter what you've done; whatever mistakes you've made, that you just let God love you with an infinite, unconditional love. That peace is possible. That you don't have to be anxious; you don't have to worry. You can truly know God in this moment! That you can breathe in that infinite Spirit and presence and power of God and know God!

Thank you, God, for peace. Thank you, God, for the power to believe that we are truly one: one in spirit; one in love; one in God. And that we can let go of all the drama and the judgements and the stories and

all those things that scare us. All those things that keep our ego so busy. And we can just feel God tonight.

The Christ was born in innocence and purity and wholeness. And those of us who do our spiritual work get to come back to peace: a peace that's greater than anything in the world. So thank you, God, for peace. And thank you, God, for loving us so much that we are never alone. And so it is. Amen.

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