

BREAK FREE

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Okay; so you ready for tonight?

So what does it take for you to be free? [Congregants yell out answers] Quit your job? [Congregants laugh] Okay. How many of you vote for quit your job? How many of you want to vote for: *"If I had all the wealth in the universe, I would feel pretty free"*? Anybody want to vote for a 20-year-old body? *"If I had a 20-year-old body, I would feel pretty free"*? Right?

And I want you to think in yourself what you think it would take for you to live a life completely free. Because some of us have a story going on about what it would take for us to truly be free.

And I want to see tonight that I think it only takes one thing. And that's the willingness to confront your limitations. Because I want us tonight to start from the place of where you feel the most stuck. Because last week we did the theme for this year on Wednesday nights, which is living an audacious life. And the ministry's theme is free to be in '23. And I believe that there's a correlation there; when you're free to be the best version of you, you can live an audacious, radically wonderful life.

But I think it often starts by acknowledging where we feel stuck or trapped or disappointed in life. Where we feel a level of despair or anger or frustration. Where we feel hopeless or overwhelmed.

Because my other question tonight is: Can being positive ever be a problem? Like, most of you know that this is a positive place, right? We believe in positive thinking. We believe in a positive life. We believe that being positive is helpful. But is it ever a problem? And I'd like to suggest tonight: It is! That it can be! That we can be so committed to everything being positive that we don't take on the things in our lives that need to be transformed. That need to be changed. That need to be lifted higher.

And if, every time, you have to be positive, how do you work on the things that need to be worked on? How do you challenge yourself to really live a free life if you just always have to be in this happy, happy, happy place of unicorns and butterflies and ... you know, like *"La la la"*? Because sometimes it's not that!

Does anybody have at least one area in your life that feels a little problematic tonight? Right? And I don't want you to run from that! See, I want you to actually allow yourself to take it on. Because we have a transformative God! Our God is transformative! But transformation only happens when you can see the issue; when you can see the problem and then allow it to be lifted higher.

The first thing -- if we read Scripture in Genesis -- that God did was transform the darkness into the light. God didn't say, *"I don't see any darkness. There's no problem here, people; let's just be positive in the darkness. If you stub you toe, aw! That's a problem. But God is greater than that, right?"* Sometimes we get so positive -- we want to be so happy -- that we don't just name a problem as a problem and allow God to transform it.

So we actually have to be able to hold our problems. We have to be able to see our problems so that we can transform them and take them higher.

If you pick any issue in your life and in the world that you're willing to look at ... Like, any problem in the world! You could take on gun violence or homelessness or alcohol. Or if you find a lump. Like, whatever problem you're willing to look at, at that moment, it has a possibility of being transformed. But if you want to walk around and say, *"No, there's not a problem; that's not an issue; that's not a concern; let's*

just not deal with that," most problems become bigger when we don't and when we're not willing to look at them.

Have you ever tried to run from a problem? How'd that work for you? Right? Because in my experience, any problem that I don't deal with tends to just keep growing until I'll pay attention to it. And some problems get huge! And we could have dealt with them when they were little things!

But we get so fearful, so concerned, so upset, that we don't look at the problem. So the problem goes, *"Well, I'll be here. You just stay in your little happy place, and be positive, and I'm just going to be over here growing."*

And there's going to be a moment when you decide that it's time to deal with it. Where you actually begin to use the power of God -- the transformative power of God -- for a greater level of good in your life.

Because I don't think it's faith that allows us to not see the problem. I think it's fear! And if we're going to live an audaciously great life, we cannot allow fear to hide the greater possibilities.

Do you know what psychological denial is? In Unity we teach spiritual denial. That's very different than a psychological denial. A psychological denial is, *"I don't have cancer; I don't have cancer; I don't have cancer,"* and the next day you die of cancer. Right? That's not really a helpful idea. Right? And a psychological denial is saying that, *"This isn't a problem; this isn't a problem; this isn't a problem."* Or, *"I don't see this problem; I don't see this problem; I don't see this problem."* And that problem just continues to expand.

In Unity, when we talk about denial from a spiritual point of view, we say, *"That issue, that problem, that challenge cannot keep me from good."* And that's a very different mindset. Because in that situation, you actually look at the problem and say, *"That problem, that challenge, that need, that issue cannot keep me from the goodness of God."* And in that way, it actually moves the power off of the situation and places it back on you and God.

And it's a very different thing from, *"I don't have a problem; I don't have an issue,"* and you're struggling with the problem. You're struggling with the issue. And you may say it's not a problem, but the people around you know it is! And the more you say it's not a problem, the more they go, [whispers] *"Yes, it is. It's a problem."* And it's like, *"Nope! I don't see it!"*

And tonight, I want you to have the faith to be able to see the problems and the challenges in your life, and to know that your God is transformative.

"My God is transformative."

Will you say that with me? {With congregation}: *"My God is transformative."*

One more time like we actually mean it! [With congregation]: *"My God is transformative."*

And I want you to see if you could actually look at a problem or a situation or a challenge in your life, and say to that problem, say to that challenge, say to that issue in your life, *"My God, is transformative!"*

Together: [with congregation] *"My God is transformative!"*

And I want you to feel the transformation that begins to happen. When we actually move from the denial into a place of taking our power back, everything in our life begins to change. That it's okay if you have an issue. Like, I want you to hear that! It really is okay if there's an issue in your life. Because I believe that issue is in your life to empower you into a greater experience of God. It's not here to take you out! It's here to empower you to your next level of spiritual mastery.

But if you don't see it, or if you're running from it, we never get the blessing. We never get the good. We never get the opportunity to stand in a greater way.

You know, one of the things that has had a significant spiritual impact in a way that has transformed millions and millions of lives is the "Twelve Steps." And the first step in the "Twelve-Step" process is to admit that you are powerless over alcohol, and that our lives have become unmanageable.

And I want you to see the need for this! Because if you don't think you're an alcoholic, that can be problematic. Because you never deal with it! But the moment you actually name it, see it, call it for what it is, then the second step is: *"Now I have come to believe in a Power greater than myself that restores me to sanity."*

And I want you to see that those two steps of acknowledgement -- of acknowledging the problem, but then acknowledging the power of God -- is in every level of our life our path! Our path is that you have to acknowledge the problem, and then acknowledge that God is greater than the problem, whatever the problem is!

"I have an issue here, but my God is bigger!" We don't run from it; we just acknowledge it.

"My God is transformative!"

Will you say that with me? *[With congregation]: "My God is transformative!"*

And that's the ultimate truth! That whatever is going on -- whatever the problem is -- it is meant to empower you to a greater level of good, not to take you out. And Jesus, I believe, is the archetypal idea of the enlightened man or woman who demonstrated the transformative power of God.

Like, do you see that, if you read Scripture, that Jesus had issues that were before him? Like, he had stuff in his life! Like, not everybody was happy with him. Not everybody thought he was wonderful. Not everybody was, like, on his team. And he kept doing his work and doing his work and transforming one situation after another.

And, in fact, I think one of the most powerful things that he did for his disciples was to empower them to do the work that he did. And one of the final acts -- it was actually the final act that he gave his disciples -- is something we call the Last Supper. You know, Jesus' twelve that were with him from the beginning had been living and eating with him. They'd been watching him do his miracles. He sent them out in the world to do the works that he had done. But his final act with him, he did this ... Reading from Matthew 26:26:

"Now that they were eating and Jesus took bread, and he blessed it, and he broke it, and he gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body. And then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. And I tell you I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it anew with you in the Father's kingdom.'"

And I think this is so powerful! Because for most of us, we don't always notice the level of spiritual transformation that we are undergoing. You know, spiritual transformation is one of those slow, gradual things that happens in our lives. That we awaken a little bit every day. We see greater possibilities. We build our faith. We open our hearts a little bit a day. And we just keep expanding into that. And sometimes we don't notice the amount of spiritual transformation that we are undergoing.

And in Jesus' final act, he demonstrated to them what he'd be offering them for the last three years. He said, *"This is my body; this is the spiritual consciousness."* And he demonstrated that as the bread. That, *"This my body; eat."* And in reality, they had been eating the spiritual food that he had been offering

them for three years. Like, they were now different, because for three years they had been eating that spiritual food that he had been offering them. And it was now integrated into who they were. That they were not actually different because they had taken that in.

And then he said, "Drink." He said, "*This is my blood; this the life force; this is the energy in which I did my ministry.*" And at the last act, they drank. That is a deep sacrament for the spiritual transformation that they had undergone.

And I want you to see that, in your life, there's that same spiritual transformation going on. That you're not spiritually who you were a week ago or a month ago or five years ago or 10 years ago. That you've become a new creation. And I want you to see that, oftentimes, the things that have empowered you the most to become the greater version of you were the challenges that were placed in front of you. That, over and over again, as you took on those challenges, you became a new creation. You became more godly! You became the best version of you!

There's a movie out on YouTube. It's called *Finding Joe*. And it's wonderful spiritual teachers teaching about Joseph Campbell. And it's for free; it's on YouTube. And they talk about the impact that Joseph Campbell had on the culture, and how he used mythology as a metaphor for teaching spiritual process. And then they showed, in all storytelling, the story of the hero or the heroine and the impact and the process that they go through. And Joseph Campbell had come up with basic elements of every story, whether it's *Star Wars* or *Harry Potter* or whatever story. No matter how ancient the myth is, there are three aspects of the story.

The first one is **THE DEPARTURE**. It's where the hero or the heroine leaves what is familiar -- the world that they know -- and they're called into an adventure. And oftentimes, that adventure is not of their asking. You know, they get called into a crisis, a problem, a challenge. There's a dragon. There's an evil monster. Whatever it is, it calls them into this adventure. And they have to be willing to take on the problem. Not once in any mythology does the hero say, "*I don't have a problem.*" Not once! The hero never says, "*I don't see the dragon! There's no dragon there!*" Right? The hero in these classic stories always acknowledges the problem, because you can't fight a dragon if you're not willing to see it!

So the first one is: There's a departure. The hero leaves to engage in the story. It's when Luke Skywalker's home is burnt, and he has to leave for this adventure. It's where Harry Potter leaves the Muggles and goes to Hogwarts to know and discover his true power. There's a story that is aligned; that invites the hero or heroine to depart from the world that they know and go have an adventure.

The second part is called **THE INITIATION**. And it's where the hero learns to navigate the unfamiliar. It's when they take on the dragon. When they engage the problem, the challenge, the opportunity ... whatever you call it. It's when the hero actually engages what is right before them. And in engaging it, they come away different. They come away greater. They come away empowered.

And then there's the third aspect. And that's when **THE HERO RETURNS**. And this is the part that I just never ... it took me a long time to get my arms around this one. Do you remember ...? Did anybody read the first Harry Potter book? You know, he leaves the world of Muggles, and you're excited for him, right? Because he's leaving all the Muggles -- all the people that don't believe in their magic or don't believe that they have magic -- and he goes into this world where everybody knows their magic. And you're so happy for him, right? He's around all of his happy friends. And he has this adventure. And then at the end of the ... this isn't really a spoiler. If you haven't read it at this point, God bless you, right? Yeah; hold your ears, right? [Congregation laughs] And then at the end of the first year, he has to go back to the Muggles! And it's like, "*How unfair is that? Nobody should have to live with Muggles!*"

How many of you have ever had to live with a Muggle? It's not fun! [Congregation laughs] Right? Muggles ... [Laughs] They're not our people! Right? And I just never thought he should ever have to go live with Muggles. But what I realized -- and what is true about that -- is that he didn't go back to the Muggles the way he was. He came back to the Muggles in a greater version of himself.

And it's sometimes when we have to go back into the life that we've known, we don't come back into the life the same way we were. We come back as a more empowered, more enlightened version of ourselves. Reading from Genesis 32:

"The same night he arose ..."

This is Jacob.

"... and went across and took his wives and his two maids and his 11 children, and he crossed the ford of the Jabbok. And he took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. And Jacob was left alone."

He was left alone. So I want you to see this, right? So Jacob had all his stuff: his wives; his maids; his kids. He's got all of his stuff: all of his herds; all of his goats; all of his sheep. He's got all of his stuff. And he takes it across the river, creek, stream. He just needed quiet. No; just kidding! [Laughs with congregation]

He takes it across the river and he goes back across the river, and he sleeps by himself. He sleeps in that state. And what I want you to see is that he left everything that he had, went back across the river, and this is what happened.

"And Jacob was alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob's thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled him still. And then he said, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking.' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' And he said to him, 'What is your name?' And Jacob said, 'They call me Jacob.' Then he said, 'Your name will become Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.' And then Jacob asked him, 'Tell me, I pray, what is your name?' And then he said, 'Why does that matter to you, what my name is?' And then he blessed him. And so Jacob was called that name Peniel, saying, 'I have seen God face to face, and yet my life was preserved.' The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because his thigh had been put out."

Now, Jacob had this experience where he wrestles God; where he wrestles with an angel; where he wrestles with this person. And I want you to see that this angel -- this aspect of God -- is whatever is in your life that you would rather not have in your life. And Jacob wrestles with this condition -- this situation. And he will not let it go until what? He said, "Until you bless you!"

Like, most of us just want to wrestle with whatever's going on in our life just until we can get enough space away from it so we can make it all the way home. Right? We want to run from the problem; we want to run from the challenge. But Jacob says, "No! I am not going to let you go until you bless me!" And so the angel changes his name; changes his consciousness. Bless him and gives him a new nature.

And we think, *"Well, he still walked with a limp."* And I want you to see that as a metaphor. That whatever is in your life right now is going to change you. It's not going to change you for the worse; it's going to change you for the better. But you are going to be different. Your job is not to always be the way you are today. Your job is to be transformed. To let the transformative power of God make a difference in your life. That the problem, the challenge, the issue that is before you is here to do a holy work, not to take you out.

So tonight, would you be willing to take one of your problems this year -- one of your issues; one of your needs -- and instead of pretending it doesn't exist, would you be willing to hold it in your hand so that you can see it? So you can really see it?

And I want you to hold this problem in your left hand. And in your right hand, I want you to hold the power of God: the transformative power of God. And when we pray -- when we really pray -- those two things come together to profoundly bless us.

That tonight, God is going to do mighty things in your life. But wherever you've been the most upset, the most frustrated, the most disappointed by life, I want you to take that problem, that challenge, that issue straight on. And hold it; look at it! Don't deny that it exists! Allow yourself to see it as it is. And then take the very power of God. And when you put those two things together, that is a force that is unstoppable.

How many of you know that there's an issue or something's going on in your life that you're ready to have transformed in your life? If you don't, I've got a couple that I can lend you for awhile. [Congregation laughs] Okay? So I want you to take that problem and I literally want you to see that problem in your hand. Can you do that? I want you to take your left hand and I want you to just see that problem right there. Right in your hand. And then I want you to take your right hand. And I want you to feel the power of God in your right hand. I want you to put those two together. And I want you to feel what it feels like when you absolutely know that God in you is greater than any issue. That God in you is a force for greater good than you can even imagine.

So let us pray:

I want you to hold that problem. And I want you to hold the presence of God. And I want you to feel a level of relief, of knowing that whatever you bring into this moment -- whatever the need; whatever the situation. Whatever the condition is, as you bring that into this moment and hold it with the presence of God, it is being transformed before your eyes. That God is greater good. That problem, that challenge, that issue is absolutely here to bless you so that you can fully discover the power of God within you. That we are here to be transformed. We are here to be different; to be more powerful than we've ever been before. So tonight, we say, *"Thank you, God, for every healing. Thank you, God, for transforming my life. Thank you, God, that you are the one presence and the one power that is ultimately here for my good."* So in all things we look to good; we look to God. And in all things, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

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