

FEAST

Week #3 of a 6-Week Easter Series, "Prepare the Way"

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So this priest buys this lawn mower at a garage sale, and he takes it home. And he starts pulling the cord to start it, and absolutely nothing happens. So he storms back to the yard sale, and he tells the guy, "You know, this lawn mower is not working; I cannot get it to start!"

And the guy says, "Well, you know, you actually have to curse to make it start."

And the priest says, "Curse? I'm a man of God! I don't curse! I can't even remember how to curse!"

And the guy said, "Just keep pulling on that cord; you'll remember!"

[Congregation laughs with Rev. Maraj]

So we're in Week #3 of our six-week Lenten series called "Prepare the Way." And it's really about emphasizing the importance of preparation as a prerequisite for success, achievement and having breakthroughs.

Basketball coaching icon Bobby Knight said that, *"Everybody's got the will to win, but everybody doesn't have the will to prepare."* To do that important behind-the-scenes work that makes all success, achievement and breakthroughs possible.

Lent is a series of spiritual preparation marking the 40 days of Jesus had of preparation through prayer and fasting -- to prepare him for his ministry and the miraculous event of Easter. Those 40 days of preparation represent a time to build a spiritual foundation upon which we can spring forth to bring a greater version of ourselves; to come closer to fulfilling our divine purpose; and to having a personal breakthrough.

In Week #1, we looked at the first practice of preparation, which was to **RETREAT**. Usually when we have some goal -- we want to do something great -- we want to go full-steam ahead. But sometimes it's important to just take a step back: to be able to reflect; to review; to reconsider; to refocus ourselves. When we retreat, it gives us the opportunity to create space and quiet. It also gives us the opportunity to connect with our breath; to connect with Spirit; to connect with our true self. And also to help us be willing: willing to let go and open ourselves to God's will.

Last week we looked at the second key practice of preparation for a breakthrough, and that was to **FAST**: to abstain from food for a certain period. It is a spiritual discipline and a spiritual practice that helps us to abstain and turn away from things that take a lot of our energy so that we could refocus that energy on Spirit. We talked about fasting from food; fasting from negativity; and fasting from clutter. Because all those things take up space, and it's to liberate that space to deepen our spiritual connection.

Today we're going to look at the next step, and that is to **FEAST**.

So there was this young warrior, and he was having some intense and frightening dreams. And so he went to one of the tribal elders, and he explained he was having these dreams about these two dogs. And they were very powerful dogs. And there was a lot of tension between them. And it looked like they were going to have a fight, but he always wakes up before. So he went to the elder to say, *"So which one of the two dogs will win?"* And then the elder pauses and confidently says, *"The one that's win will be the one you feed the most."*

So let's suppose those dogs are thoughts. What are the thoughts that you feed the most in your life? That's important, because our thoughts and beliefs, our actions and reactions ... the ones that we feed the most influence us the most in our lives; in our relationships and our career; and our level of happiness. And the level of fulfillment in our lives.

And so, especially when life is working well or isn't clicking or moving or progressing as quickly as you'd like, what are the thoughts that you feed yourself? Do you feed yourself more fear or lack or worry or unworthiness or hopelessness? Or do you feed yourself thoughts of hope and optimism and possibility? Of health and happiness?

To feed is to ingest -- to fill; to take into our bodies -- but also to feed our hearts. To feed our minds. To feed our consciousness, because it is our consciousness that outpictures in our lives.

Today I'm going to use both the words "feed" and "feast." We know what "feed" is already. But what I like about "feast": it is a large meal and experience in a spirit of joyful celebration. In a spirit of recognizing and acknowledging how wonderful and magnificent something is. Like a wedding feast; a birthday feast. I'm talking about a spiritual feast.

Fasting is making room, but feasting is about filling ourselves with the good that will lead us to a greater breakthrough.

The words of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 4, Chapter 8, kind of capture what I'm talking about. It says:

"Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is anything worthy of praise, these are the things to think about."

These are the things to fill yourself with! These are the things to feed and feast on!

So this morning I want to talk about three things that we can feast on that are an important part of our preparation to having a breakthrough.

The first one is **to FEAST ON GOD**.

So how many people here ever had a time where you didn't feel close to God? When you felt you'd lost your faith? You felt a little distant and disconnected? Anybody? You know, I find it amazing how we, as human beings -- when things don't go well -- how quickly we turn to fear and worry and doubt. How quickly we turn to think, *"Oh, man; it's horrible, and this is never going to work out."* It's amazing how quickly sometimes we forget God; forget how much good is in our lives and how blessed we are.

Sometimes we quickly turn to what I call "awful-izing." It's like, *"Oh, it's awful! It's terrible! It's horrible! It's hopeless! We feel powerless; we feel helpless."* We sometimes take a situation that isn't working well and we think it's bad, and we think it's going to get even worse.

It's amazing how we sometimes forget God: the very Source and Creator in whose image and likeness we have all been made; the God who blesses us; the Intelligence that made this incredible world and universe. It is amazing how quickly we forget!

But this is not uncommon with human beings. The Children of Israel forgot constantly! Even though God reassured, even though God demonstrated and released them from slavery and into the Promised Land, at every turn they all started moaning and whining and complaining and feeling like God had forgotten them and left them alone.

There's a line I learned in Unity very early and it was, *"If you feel distant from God, who moved?"* [Congregation laughs] And the fact is: God doesn't move! God is always and ever present with us. The fullness; the goodness; and the allness of God is in this moment and every now moment.

That's why Paul said, *"It is in God that we live and move and have our very being."* Eric Butterworth says that asking a human being where God is like asking a fish where water is! It is in you and it is all around us ... and yet, it is amazing how we forget.

So what we need to do is to begin to feast and feed ourselves and nourish ourselves on the truth on the presence and power of God in our lives. This distance and disconnect we feel isn't about miles; it's not about a physical space. The distance is within us. Because the truth is: God's spirit and presence is already here. It's just awaiting us awakening to that and opening to that reality of the presence and power of God that is always right here and right now.

I love in Genesis 28, Verse 16. It says:

"Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.' And he was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place? This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'"

So what he's saying is: I was in the house of the Lord and I knew it not. We are standing on holy ground and sometimes we know it not. We are amazing children of God, and sometimes we know it not. We are always in the presence of God. The question is: Are we present to that presence?

Jesus always feasted on God. He meditated and prayed four or five times a day every single day ... filling his heart, filling his mind with the truth of God's presence. And the Bible really shows us the way to feast on God.

Jesus said, *"Seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness."* In Jeremiah it says, *"If you seek me, you will find me if you seek me with all your heart."* Psalm 37 says, *"Delight yourself in the Lord."* And then in Philippians it says, *"Rejoice in the Lord always."*

So the way to feast -- to celebrate this incredible Spirit -- is to always seek God first; to seek God with all your heart; and to delight yourself and rejoice in the presence and the power of God.

So I ask you: How much time a day do you spend delighting yourself in God? Rejoicing in God? Feeding your mind with truth of the presence and Spirit of God that is all around us? It is amazing how sometimes we forget that so quickly.

One of my favorite Buddhist sayings is: *"It doesn't matter how many times you forget; it's how many times you remember."* We shouldn't feel bad that we forget; we shouldn't get mad that we are distracted by life and certain things. What we need to do is keep coming back to center. Keep getting back to God. Keep raising our awareness and be aware that that Spirit and Presence is always with us.

Paul said, *"Pray without ceasing."* Just keep coming back to God. Keep feeling that sense of connection. Because that is the Source that makes all things possible. It is the Source that created us. And it is the path -- and only path -- to a life of happiness, joy and fulfillment.

The second thing we need to feast on is to **FEAST ON LOVE**. We all know the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. And the second is to love one another. We'll talk about loving ourselves next week, but right now we just want to talk about loving others.

Now, it's much easier to love people we love. But even people we love are hard to love sometimes! [Congregation laughs] And the question is: How do we love people we don't love? How do we love people we don't like? How do we love people we don't agree with? How do we love people who are different from us? How do we love people who hurt us? How do we love people who have different political views? How do we love people that we don't know? How do we love people across the world? How do we love Canadians? [Congregation laughs] I mean, how do we love people?

A lady got upset at that until she found out I am a Canadian, so I can say that! But anyway ...
[Congregation laughs]

And so if you really want to have a breakthrough, one of the things we need to do is to open our hearts to love all people. To love all of humanity. Whether we know people or not, is our heart open wide enough to see and be aware that we are here to love all people? We're all children of God! We're all brothers and sisters! We're all part of the same human family! And we need to take that love and expand it and express it, even in our thoughts and interactions and our awareness.

In our Master Mind prayer -- the visualization thing we do -- we get focused on what our personal vision is. But a part of this seven-step process is to bless everyone else who has a desire, and to bless everyone in this country. To bless everyone in this world and this planet. If we want to bring greater joy and happiness, and have a true breakthrough, we need a consciousness of oneness: to know that we are all one.

You know the word "Namaste," everybody? In Sanskrit, the word means, *"The divine in me honors the divine in you."* And that's the way we can love people we don't sometimes like or agree with. Because even if we disagree with them, we have to hold at that higher level that they're as much a child of God as I am! That they, too, deserve God's love. And even though we may not see eye to eye, the divine in us can honor the divine in them.

Jesus was amazing at loving people -- enemies, people that persecuted him -- to the point that he said, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* So even though what they were doing was not kind, his heart was so open that he loved all of humanity. He loved all people. And it's such an important thing!

Because the truth is: Everybody's struggling. Everybody hurts. Everybody has desires. Everybody wants love. Everybody makes mistakes. And everybody messes up. And everyone is loved! Everyone is a blessing! Everyone is a child of God! And so it's important for us to have a level of compassion.

You know, I used to attend some Buddhist classes on Monday night. And one of the things: I heard a definition of "compassion" that I love. And it is, *"The desire for the well-being of all living things, without exception."* And I know a lot of us have some "exceptions." [Congregation laughs] But that's where that level and consciousness of love ... If we really want to have a breakthrough. To open our hearts so fully to love everyone. And to honor the divine in them. And to know they're doing the best they can. And even though we don't agree, we are still children of God. Still all worthy of God's love.

And if something is stuck in us, what we need to do is pray the words of Psalm 51 that say, *"Create in me a clean heart, O Lord."* To think of anybody that's outside of our hearts right now; to bring them in and say, "Create in me a clean heart, O Lord." And to just bless them with peace and love and abundance. Because the more we can open to that level of love and that level of consciousness and oneness, the more we will have breakthroughs ... not just in our lives, but in our relationships, our communities, our country and our world.

Anybody see the movie, "The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and The Horse"? Apparently I'm the only one! [Congregation laughs] But it just won the Oscar for the Animated Short Film. It's 36 minutes. It's about a little boy who's lost, and he meets a mole, and then a fox, and then a horse. And they're trying to find him a home. And they develop a cool relationship in this process.

When it's just the boy and the mole at the very beginning, the mole says to the boy, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" And the little boy says, "Kind." [Congregation: "Awww."] Long pause. Then the mole says, *"Nothing beats kindness. It sits quietly behind all things."* Long pause.

And so my question for all of us is: How much of a priority is kindness in your life? I think if we all want to have a breakthrough, a part of how we love and how we show up in this world has to be about being kinder. I think we underestimate the power of kindness: a kind word; a kind gesture; a kind smile. Could you imagine how much different our world would be if we were all just a bit kinder to one another? We would transform it in an amazing way.

So my question for you is: Where in your life can you be kinder? In your relationship? With your friends? With your family? In your work? To strangers? And maybe to yourself?

The fact is: If we really want a level of breakthrough that we talk about at a spiritual level and all areas of our lives and relationships, we need to feast on love. And that must feature compassion and kindness.

The last thing we going to talk about feasting on is to **FEAST ON GROWING**.

In the Talmud it says this: *"Every blade of grass has its angel that bends over it and whispers, 'Grow! Grow!'"* You know, life is an unfolding process. Every one of us is evolving. Everyone is growing and maturing and learning and expanding. And that is a beautiful and wonderful thing.

But sometimes we can get a little comfortable and complacent. Sometimes we can get a little bit lazy and rigid. Sometimes we don't want to learn; we can get in a rut and we can get stagnant. And then we wonder, *"Why isn't my life getting any better?"*

But the truth is: A part of life is to grow. It is to change, to transform, and it is to stretch. And sometimes it's uncomfortable. But it makes us feel alive and fulfilled, and it brings forth the best in us. It brings forth our greatness and our beauty. And it is the thing that will demonstrate and maximize our divine potential.

In the Book of Luke it says, *"Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature."* Jesus didn't just show up and be Jesus. Jesus grew in wisdom and stature. Michael Jordan just didn't become the icon of basketball; he grew into that! Jeff Bezos grew. Elon Musk grew. Oprah Winfrey ... everybody grows into it. It is a growing, unfolding process, and we need to feast and embrace it, and not run from difficult or challenging things that test us. Because it is in that growth that we become more; we express more.

How many people like the Eagles? Any Eagles fans in the house? I saw an interview with Don Henley. And Don Henley said that 30 or 40 years later, they're playing their songs better than when they were actually hits. Because they have matured and they have learned, and they connect with the notes and play the notes at a level of awareness and consciousness that they never have before. Why? Because they're learning! We continue to evolve and grow! And when we do it consciously, life gets even better.

Eric Butterworth in his book, *Discover the Power Within You*, says that heaven -- the word "heaven" -- comes from a root Greek word that means "expanding." That the experience of heaven is when we expand our capacity to love. When we expand in our capacity to have compassion or when we expand our faith or expand our joy. Or expand our ability to be more honest. To expand the level of authenticity with which we live. When we expand our ability to be more giving and serving and caring towards other people. That we are here to expand into the fullness of the divine beings that we are.

Back to that movie for a second. The little boy asks the mole and the horse this question: *"What is the bravest thing you ever said?"* And the horse said, *"Help."* [Congregation murmurs] Because he thought that it was about giving up. He'd had the expectation, *"That's weak. I don't need anybody's help."* But the bravest thing he said he ever did was say, *"Help."* And he realized it wasn't giving up; it was showing, in fact, that he wasn't giving up. But he was willing to be vulnerable enough and brave enough to say, *"Help."*

And then the mole said, "I want to say, 'I love you all,' but I get scared and that's difficult. So I say, 'I'm glad we're all here.'" [Congregation murmurs] Sometimes we are afraid to say, "I love you."

So what is the bravest thing you ever said? And what is the bravest thing you want to say to someone in your life? In what way is life calling you to grow? To expand? To stretch? In what way is life calling you to become more and express more? In what way is life calling you to be more open? To be more confident? To be more dynamic and expressive?

"Over every blade of grass there is an angel that whispers, 'Grow! Grow!'" And the question is: Are you willing to feast and welcome all the challenges and all the experiences in life, knowing that it is helping you and challenging you and calling forth from you to grow and express the genius and greatness that is in you?

So this guy goes to his doctor and he says, "Doc, I'm having these alternating reoccurring dreams. First I'm a teepee and then I'm a wigwam. Then I'm a teepee and I'm a wigwam. Then I'm a teepee and I'm a wigwam. Then I'm a teepee and a wigwam ... and it's driving me crazy! Doc, what's wrong with me?"

The doctor said, "It's very simple. You're too 'tents.'"

[Congregation groans, laughs and applauds] That's amazing, because they booed at the first service, so ... [Congregation and Rev. Maraj laugh] Oh, man!

So the thing is that we all want a breakthrough. We all want a better life. And it's not to get too tense about it! But it's to do the preparation work. To do the vital inner soul work that we need to do to help take us to that next spiritual level: that next level of our evolution; of our life; and of our calling.

You see, the attitudes and beliefs -- the actions and reactions -- we feed the most are the ones that will impact our lives the most. So let's feed and spiritually nourish ourselves on God: filling ourselves with God; filling ourselves with love; filling ourselves with growing. And let's do it in a joyful and celebratory way.

So the third practice for preparing for a breakthrough is to **FEAST**.

God bless you all!

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