

WHY LET GO?

Week #23 of an ongoing series on "Unity's Foundational Teachings"

Wednesday, June 26, 2024

Rev. Richard Rogers

So when you die ... We're going to start on a happy note. [Congregants laugh] When you die, how much of your stuff are you going to take with you?

It's a multiple choice. Some? None? Everything? How many want to vote for you think you found a way to take some? None? How many of you want to take everything with you? [Congregants laugh] Right? [Laughs]

Historically, the richer you were, the more you tried to take it with you. If you look at every great temple and shrine around the world, it often was created by very rich people in the idea that they wanted to take whatever they had -- at least some of it -- with them to the other side. So their golden chariot; their servants; whatever they thought was their most valuable possessions, they would try to take it with them. [Laughs] And in some cultures, they would throw money into the -- down toward the casket as it was being lowered -- as the idea to bribe your way out of hell. [Congregants laugh] Right?

So I want you to see tonight this idea that I'm not going to take anything with me.

Because to our ego, that's kind of a violation: this idea that you're not going to take anything with you. That all your stuff is going to stay right here and you're going to step into the other side. How many of you believe that? That everything stays and you go forward?

Now, what about your emotional stuff? Does that go with you or does that stay here? It's not physical. It's definitely energy. Does your emotional stuff stay here? Or does it go with you? How many are hoping and praying it stays here? [Congregants laugh]

See, tonight I want to talk about what I think is one of the most fundamentally important spiritual attributes. And that, for most of us, this is part of our growing edge. And the question tonight is: How much are you holding on to your stuff? Mentally, emotionally, spiritually, how much are you holding on? And how much are you letting go so that you can be free.

Now, it seems to me that, when we come into this life experience, we are about collecting stuff. And if you've ever been around a two-year-old or a three-year-old when they learn about the word "Mine!" ... Like, it's kind of a cute phase when they learn the word "Mine!", because there's a point in their evolution where everything is, "Mine!" "Mine! Mine! Mine!" And they run around: "This is mine!" You know, you take your kid to a birthday party, and they go, "Mine! And I'm not sharing it!" And, you know, it's an interesting thing! And when they're two or three, we think it's kind of cute ... unless they embarrass us in public, and then it's not at all, right?

But there's this evolutionary step where we all declare what is "Mine." And what's interesting is: as we get older, I think we just get more sophisticated in how we declare, "This is mine." Right? That we actually have all of our stuff.

And one of the things I think is amazing, right? Is that the average American now has somewhere around 20 cubic feet of storage outside their home, because we have more stuff than even fits in our life anymore. So we have to go off-site. Right? [Laughs] We have to go off-site! Right? And there's a whole industry that was created because of the mass amount of stuff that we've had. Right?

And when it's our stuff, it's treasure. When it's other people's stuff, it's, you know ... unless they're selling it, it's not so much treasure.

You know, we had to help my mom when she was downsizing in her life. She went through several phases of letting go of her stuff, from a home that they had been in for over 50 years. And, you know, my dad was ... I'm not exactly sure what the definition of "hoarder" is, but he had a garage that was full. Right? And we had to kind of downsize all that stuff.

And every time we took a step in that process, it was tough for her. Because it was her treasure! It was her life! It was the things that were important to her that she had gathered through a lifetime of memories and family and friends.

And so, we have this image of life and what it means to live successfully and be prosperous. And then we have Jesus' model of this seamless robe. That he only had one possession: it was a seamless robe. That he had minimized his life down to one thing. And that was it.

So, when you look at your life, [laughs] where are you in the spectrum? Are you down to one outfit that is a fabulously fabulous, fabulous outfit? Or do you have more than enough in your home and in your life for five or six families to provide for?

And I want us just to see that. Because part of what we're learning to do is to learn to let go. And I want you to see that, in our culture, letting go is not something that is wildly practiced. Holding on is wildly practiced. You know, we hold on to lots of stuff.

So, I think we have to ask ourselves, then: What is the purpose of life? Is it to learn lessons? Is it to create stuff? Is it to have experiences? Because if we are successful by how much stuff we have at the end, is that really how we're going to measure this life experience? You know, we've all seen the bumper sticker, "*He who has the most toys wins.*" He's still going to be dead. Right? And so, the idea is: I'm not sure that's the model anymore.

So, where are you in your life in this process of holding on and letting go? Can you see areas in your life where maybe you're holding on to more than is necessary, more than you truly need? And can you see an opportunity to let go of, not only our stuff, but our emotional and mental and all that stuff that we hold on to? And who would you be if you let it go?

You know, I want you to think for a minute, and imagine yourself carrying several big boxes, okay? Maybe you're coming from the car to the house, and you have several big boxes. And they're not really that heavy, but they're kind of awkward. And you're trying to carry several big boxes into the house, and you're kind of juggling them all. And you've got it balanced just right, and if you don't trip over anything - or if the dog doesn't get you -- you're going to actually make it into the house with all these big boxes. And you're going to be very proud of yourself that you were able to carry all these big boxes. And, "*Look how amazing I am that I could carry all these big boxes!*" Right? See that image.

Now, when you're carrying all those big boxes, how open are you to receive more? It's like, "*No!*" You'd complain if somebody gave you, "*Well, let's just put one more box on top.*" You think, "*No; no! I've got all the boxes I can handle. I can't hold any more. I can't carry anymore. I've got everything I need!*" Right?

And what I want you to see is: I think there's this inverted relationship. That the more we hold on to our stuff, it actually limits us to receive the goodness that God still wants to give us. And that we're so busy holding on to all of our stuff that we don't have room anymore for God to surprise us and bless us and provide that which would actually satisfy our soul today, because we're trying to manage all this stuff from yesterday.

You know, when the Israelites were on the way to the Promised Land, the manna would fall from heaven every day. And they could only gather the manna for that day ... unless it was the Sabbath, and then they could gather it for two days. But the idea was that, every day they had to trust God for the

supply for that day, and they had to be willing to receive it that day. That they couldn't hold on. There was no such thing as leftovers. There was no such thing as "to go" containers. Right? You only got taken care of -- you only got blessed -- in that moment.

And I want you to see that, for many of us, living that level of life where we depend on God in the moment to provide what we need in the moment is a very scary operation. We don't want to have to depend on God! We don't have to depend on God for our retirement; for our needs. We want to make sure that everything is fully locked and loaded so that we never are vulnerable.

And what if, tonight, we actually looked at: What are the things that we are carrying that aren't really helpful? What are the thoughts? What are the beliefs? What are the ideas? What is the stuff that we're carrying in our life? Because, literally, even if it's your junk drawer, and you don't think you're carrying it, your soul is carrying it! Because everything that you claim ownership of is part of your energy. It is part of your experience. Everything! Everything is part of your experience.

So the question that becomes: What would you rather have? Everything in your junk drawer or your junk closet, or the room you can't go into? Or your heart's desire? If you can't have both. If you looked at everything in your life and asked yourself just one question: *"What would I rather have? This or my heart's desire, if I can't have both?"*

And I want you to see how much of the stuff we don't think has a cost involved in it. We don't realize the energy that it takes for our soul to carry all this useless stuff that we carry with us. And it's not helping. It's not making you free. It's not making you bright. It's not making you happy. It's just stuff.

So, what are five reasons to let go?

I believe the first reason to let go is because we can't change the past. And as we let go of the past. And the past keeps us from focusing on the now moment. So, the first reason is: **when we let go of the past, we are actually set free.**

Two: **letting go actually creates space to be blessed in this moment.**

Three: **letting go builds trust in God.** When we let go, it works out that we actually are building our faith.

Four: **we will experience a new sense of freedom** when we no longer have to drag yesterday with us.

And I believe number five is that: **we actually appreciate life more** when we only have those things that are literally serving us in our life.

When I was a year out of college, I had figured out a way to get a year's salary in debt. Not my finest hour, right? I had a new job. I had a new car. I had a new stereo. I had a great apartment. And I was a year's salary in debt. And it seemed like it happened so fast, right? I mean, people would just let me sign my name for the first time in my life! They'd give you these little plastic things. [Congregants laugh] They're magic! They're magic, right? And you could give them ... and it was almost like having an experience of a miracle. They'd give you those little plastic things, and you could go lay it down at a table or a counter, and they would just give you stuff! It was fabulous! Until they actually expected you to pay for it 30 days later! [Congregants laugh]

I thought that was rude, right? This is my miracle! There shouldn't be a penalty 30 days later. It's my miracle!

One of the things I began to do ... There were three things that really changed my life. But one of the things I began to do was the Mastermind steps. And if you know what the Mastermind steps; they are based on the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. And they are eight steps that were created by Rev. Jack

Boland, a minister at Detroit. And step number four said, *"I now decide to change. I decide to surrender my ego, my will, to the Higher Power, the Mastermind, and to consciously accept the higher nature."* And I asked to be changed at depth. And in that moment, there was something that happened to me -- week after week asking to be changed at depth -- that I began to say to myself, *"I let go. I let go of my hopes. I let go of my dreams. I let go of my fears. I let go of my insecurities. I let go of my drama."* And, every week as we would go through these steps, I would literally let go of, not just what I thought were the problems, but also what I thought were my strengths, my weaknesses, my hopes, my dreams ... everything.

And the more that I would let go, the more I watched my soul learn to fly.

Within two years, I had applied to graduate school. Within two more years, I actually left graduate school to go into ministry. And I believe that it was that weekly activity of letting go that changed me at depth. That I couldn't be the old person if -- week after week after week -- I was making a conscious decision to let go.

It wasn't just the stuff in my life. It was letting go of the old aspects of me that weren't working anymore. The old ideas, the old beliefs, the old fears, the old insecurities. It was letting go of the old dream so that I could have a greater dream. And over and over again, when I realized that the reason that I could be transformed so quickly -- and actually opened the door to ministry that I had been resisting since high school -- was that every week I would practice letting go.

And I believe that, for many of us, this skill -- this spiritual skill -- of letting go will actually set us free. That we think life is about gathering: gathering what we want, gathering what we need. Gathering, storing, holding so that we feel safe and secure.

And what if the real purpose of life is learning to let go at a deep, profound level so that we may truly know the glory of God? So that we may be blessed in greater and greater ways?

And what if your spiritual next step is letting go of everything that is no longer serving you? Old ideas, old images, old beliefs, old wants, old stories, old disappointments. And in letting go of everything, your soul actually learns to fly.

See, I have this deep sense. When I look back through the course of my life, I can see the times when I was holding on. And I can see the times when I was letting go. And those times when I was letting go, I can actually see the spiritual difference from the mindset of holding on. That we have a God-given right to hold on to anything! We have a God-given right to be as miserable as we need to be! But in the act of letting go, we actually set ourselves free.

From Steve Maraboli: *"The truth is, unless you let go, unless you forgive yourself, unless you forgive the situation, unless you realize that the situation is over, you could not move forward."*

Ann Landers said this: *"Some people believe that holding on and hanging in there are signs of great strength. However, there are many times when it takes much more strength to know when it's time to let go and let it be over."*

I really want to challenge you tonight. Have you developed the skill of letting go? Or are we still in the condition of mind and holding on?

Like, it's okay. But there's going to be a point when you realize that your soul already has enough. Where you literally already have enough! And you can actually practice letting go over and over again, and watch your soul soar. And experience a level of life that is actually greater, not because you're holding on, but because now you're free to receive all the good that God has for you!

So what thought, what belief, what fear, what disappointment are you still holding on to? How much stuff is in your life that is actually clogging the flow of the Divine into your experience? And would you be willing to let go of everything so that you can actually know the glory of God in greater ways than ever before?

Matthew 11:28: *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."* Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest! *"Take my yoke upon you. Learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

Now, my path of ministry has really developed that, when I believe that I'm doing the ministry -- Richard the ego; Richard the personality -- I am not having any fun. When I believe that this is a God thing -- right? -- and I just show up to do my part of this God thing, then ministry for me is just a hoot. Right?

It's like people say, *"Well, you have all these people. Doesn't it overwhelm you that all these people are listening to you?"* It's like, *"Well, yes, if they ... Yes! That would be terribly overwhelming if I didn't think what I was given was from God. If I didn't believe that what I say isn't just Richard ... God, who would want to listen to him?"* I wouldn't listen to him, right? But I believe that God uses me. And it's a God thing.

And tonight, I want you to be willing to let go of everything in your life. *"God, I give you all -- everything in my life: my hopes, my dreams, my fears, my insecurities, all that I am, all that I hope to be. I give you ... And I hold nothing back from you, God. I give it all to you. I clear the space. No more junk in my life. No more junky thoughts, no more junky emotions, no more junky stuff. I want to be clean and in the flow of the Divine."*

You know, the meditation we did this evening ... I truly believe that life is supposed to just flow through us. That the Divine is supposed to just flow through us. And that, when we allow life just to flow through us, we live with grace and ease. And when life backs up on us -- when we start gathering and start holding on to anything: to painful situations, to wants, to needs, to desires, whatever we're holding on to -- the more we hold on, the more we actually block the flow of the Divine in our life.

And tonight, would you be willing -- just willing -- to let go of anything that is blocking the flow of God's good in your life? If your arms -- if your soul -- is so full already with yesterday's manna, with yesterday's good, with yesterday's stories, with yesterday's drama, that God can't bless you in this moment, I think we have a problem. Because we are so full of yesterday that we don't have room for the grace and the ease of today.

So what are you holding on to? And, tonight, would you be willing to lay it down? *"God, I give you everything. I give you everything that I am, everything that I hope to be. I give you my hopes and my dreams, my fears, and my insecurities. I give you what's working in my life and I give you what's not working in my life. I give you my darkest wounds, my greatest shame, and my hopes and dreams for a greater possibility. I give it all to you. I clear out all the mental, emotional, and spiritual areas in my life. I clean out all the inner cupboards and cabinets and junk drawers."*

I'm going to say that right once before this evening's out!

And as I let go, I truly learn what grace and ease is all about.

"Come to me all who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. For my way is easy and my path is light."

Will you pray with me?

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God. That, tonight, we just let go. We just clean it out. We let it flow. Wherever we have been stuck; wherever we've been hoarding; wherever we have been fearful; wherever we have been backed up, tonight we let it flow. And we allow the glory of God to lead us with grace and ease. Grace and ease.

In the name and through the power of the living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

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