

ROW, ROW, ROW YOUR BOAT

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So there was this guy, and he was flying on an airplane for the very, very first time. And he was on a red eye from Los Angeles to New York. And he got on, and he was so excited. He wanted to see the marvels of air travel. So, the plane takes off; everything's going smoothly. And then the captain comes on over Colorado and says, "You know, it seems that one of our engines is down, but the other three are just fine. And the only thing is it's going to take us about a half an hour longer to get to New York."

So he didn't really worry about it. Everything just seemed fine. And then it went on again. And then over Illinois, the pilot came on again and said, "You know, we have lost a second engine, but don't worry about it. No emergency or anything. Those other two engines can get us there, but now we're going to be an hour late."

So he's getting a little bit concerned. He's seeing some people talking and stuff, but he doesn't say a word. And then so they go on and it's over Ohio and the pilot comes on again. And he says, "I hate to inform you, but our third engine is giving us some trouble. So I'm just going to shut it off. And I have complete confidence that we can make it on that last engine to New York, except it's going to be two hours late."

And the guy turns to a lady next to him and says, "You know what? If that last engine goes down, we could be up here all night!" [Congregants laugh]

So, sometimes we can be just like that first-time flyer. You know, clearly he did not understand how flying works. [Congregants laugh] And sometimes, when we get stuck, or feel like our lives are going nowhere, sometimes we can be confused like him, and we can forget how life works. And the fact is: life works by spiritual principles and universal laws that we are here to work with and to demonstrate and apply so we can experience the fullness and goodness of life.

Barbara Bush, speaking at Smith College, once said, "Life is supposed to be fun." And I believe absolutely life is supposed to be fun. It's meant to be joyful. It's meant to be meaningful. And the way for us to do that is to understand and apply these principles in our lives.

And, you know, when I was a kid, I used to love singing all the children's songs and the rhymes. And my favorite one, of course, was "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." It was hard not to feel good singing:

**Row, row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream
Merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream!**

Not only made me feel good, but as I got older, I realized there were instructions for living~ There are spiritual truths in this simple rhyme and song.

And so, this morning we're going to look at the deeper spiritual meaning of these songs and instructions for living to help us live our lives more fully and abundantly.

And the first one is:

Row, row, row your boat ...

You know, to row means to move or propel your boat forward with your oars. And the truth is, we all have the power to move and propel our lives forward. We all have an incredible power of control and to

make changes and to demonstrate and attract greater things in our lives. *"Row, row, row your boat"* is a reminder that we have incredible powers: mental powers, physical powers and spiritual powers to guide the boat of our lives towards the greater things that we are desiring. And those powers to move our lives forward are abundant: the power of our thoughts; the power of our words; the power of our attitude; our intentions; our imagination; our vision; our ability to transform; our hope; our faith. I mean, we've got so many ways that we can transform and improve our lives.

And sometimes when we feel stuck or feel like life's going nowhere, or we're not seeing the progress we want, we can feel powerless. But the truth is, *"Row, row, row your boat"* always reminds you that there is no time in your life when you do not have the power to make a difference; to make a change and improve ourselves.

In the Book of Genesis, it says we've been created in the image and likeness of God, and we've been given dominion and authority over all things. And it means that we are powerful, creative, spiritual beings.

"I am a powerful, creative, spiritual being."

Let's say that together: [with congregants] *"I am a powerful, creative, spiritual being."*

"I can roll, roll, roll my boat."

[With congregation]: *"I can row, row, row my boat."*

You know, I think one of the most powerful lines in Scripture is in the Book of Matthew, Chapter 21, Verse 21 to 22. And it's a passage where Jesus had just cursed the fig tree and it withered and died. And his disciples are saying, "How'd you do that?" And here's this response. It says:

"How did the fig tree wither all at once?" And Jesus answered them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen. Whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.'"

And let me read it to you one more time, and here we go. Let's start at truly:

"Truly, I say to YOU, if YOU have faith and do not doubt, YOU will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if YOU say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast to the sea,' it will happen. Whatever YOU ask in prayer, believing, YOU will receive."

Now, do you think it's a coincidence that Jesus used the word "you" six times in that small passage? Or do you think he was trying to emphasize to every one of us how powerful we are? We have the power to wither. We have the power to remove mountains. We have the power to attract good into our lives. It's saying you have the power to row: to move your life in any direction you want. No matter how stuck you might feel; no matter how limited you might feel in a moment.

The truth is: that power is always within you. The question is: Are you going to use it? Are you going to row?

Now, I want you to think of an area in your life that may not be working as well as you'd like. And ask yourself the question: What is something I can do to move my boat to a better place? What is a higher thought and a more positive thought I can hold about the outcome and where that situation is going? What is the best and most effective thing I can do to create something greater? What is something I need to let go of that will open a space to bring forth something greater into my life?

To row means that you have the power. Now:

... your boat.

Your boat. How many people have someone in your life that you know that you can roll their boat better than they can row the boat for themselves? [Congregants laugh] Anybody have one of those? And how many people have someone in your life who's trying to roll your boat, and always telling you how to live your life?

You know, sometimes these things ... You know, we always want to row other people's boat and people want row roll our boats. And the fact is: these are not healthy and not helpful. They are done sometimes out of, we think, love ... but sometimes it's out of control. And sometimes it is out of co-dependency. But it is not the healthiest thing for us to try and row other people's boats.

You know, let me give you some of the reasons. The first one is because it weakens them. To do and try and live someone's life for them, and to always be guiding them, begins to have them believe and affirm that they're not capable. And it perpetuates co-dependency. It perpetuates unhealthy patterns in our lives and in our relationships.

You know, the best way to do it is to set boundaries and specifically to be willing to help our loved ones by listening with compassion, with support and encouragement. And here's the greatest way: is to pray for them for their highest and best.

Often, when we pray for people we love, we pray, *"God, make them do this; make them stop doing that."* We've got the plan figured out; we're just praying! But we don't know what their soul's journey is, and that's not our job. Our job is to just love them and pray for whatever is for the highest and best of their souls and their lives. And the second thing we could do for them is to trust that the Spirit of God in them will awaken and guide them to do what they need to do as they need to do it.

Another thing that's not healthy about trying to row somebody else's boat is that it drains our energy -- our life energy -- and it helps us avoid the responsibility of taking care of our own lives; dealing with our own stuff. You know, working on our own relationship or our future, or our goals and our dreams. To row your boat means take charge of your life; of your mind; of your goals; of your intentions or your emotions; or areas that need healing.

Another thing about rowing your boat is: don't compare your boat to other people's boat. *"Look at it. That guy's got such a nicer, bigger boat than I. A more expensive boat."* It's so important: love your boat! That's the message: you've got to love your boat! That boat was made especially for you, and you should love your boat. Don't be comparing it to other people's and thinking about other folks.

So the first one: *"Row, row, row your boat."* It means you have the power to row; to move your life forward. And make sure you row your boat. not try and row someone elses. And don't let anybody row your boat, either.

The second thing:

Gently down the stream ...

How many people have ever had a time in your life where you feel like you were just ... everything ... you were just swimming upstream? Like, you were just going against the current? Nothing's kind of working for you? Anybody ever feel stuff like that?

Anytime we feel like we're stuck, we're powerless, things aren't going anywhere -- it feels like life's working against us -- it's because there's a deeper belief that we have that life is against us. That people are against us. That God is against me ... or at least God ain't giving me what I want!

And we have this belief, and so we start acting in ways that are aggressive, and manipulative, and all kinds of different ways to try and get our way. Because deep down, we're thinking that, *"Life isn't for me; life is against me."* And it has us feeling a sense of tension; instead of gently down the stream, we go tensely down the stream. Like, we get so tense all the time; we're always stressed. We're always maxed, and looking out, and being defensive. And sometimes we get so conditioned to being so tense, we don't know how to live any other way. "Gently" is a distant possibility.

Everybody, take a deep breath right now. And as you exhale slowly, just feel your shoulders come down to your body. Just relax into your chair. Again: slow, deep breath in. And as you exhale, feel, again, your shoulders relaxing even more. And one last time: slow, deep breath in. And feel your neck, your shoulders, everything just relax and melt into your chair.

And so, how many people would say you feel a little bit more relaxed now than you did before that? And here's my question: Why were you tense sitting in church? [Congregants laugh] I want you to think about it. You're in church! We did a long meditation! We just did that!

And the point I'm trying to make is: we are so conditioned to be tense all the time. That learning to relax is a difficult and challenging thing.

Steven Lane Taylor wrote a book called *Row, Row, Row Your Boat: A Guide for Living Life in the Divine Flow*. And here's what he says:

"Whether you are aware of it or not, there is an underlying current in your life: a divine flow that is continuously guiding you towards the effortless fulfillment of your heart's desires. The challenge is learning how to recognize and cooperate with that flow."

So the question for all of us is: Can you -- or are you willing to -- trust that the Universe is absolutely supporting you? That there is a divine flow in your life that is moving in your favor? That is ever wanting to support you and bring greater good to you? Are you willing to trust it enough that you let go of the tension? Let go of the death grip that we have sometimes on life? And are you willing to surrender to that divine flow? Are you willing to believe that letting go is one of the greatest things you can do for opening up your life to the greater possibilities of good and peace and joy and love and all that you could ever desire?

"Gently down the stream." Could you get to that place of surrendering and absolutely knowing that the divine flow is there for you, always working for you? I believe ... And you can call it the grace of God; you can call it divine flow ... but absolutely that the Universe and God and Spirit are always moving things towards your favor.

I could say -- while I believe in the power of our thoughts and our intentions -- I would absolutely say that my life is better than the totality of the thoughts that I think. Anybody else agree with that? Right, because that is: the grace of God is always moving our lives in its favor. And the more we can let go and relax; trust It; and let go, the more It can lift us. It can support us and It can help guide us to greater things.

The thing is: we've got to meditate and do relaxation daily. As I just proved, we're always tensely moving down the stream. That the way to go gently down the stream is to make sure we're meditating regularly: that we're doing the little breathwork -- even those three breaths that we took! -- throughout the day is an important thing. Because that is what begins to open us to living a freer and fuller life.

In the Book of Zachariah it says, *"Not by might; not by power; but by my Spirit, says the Lord."*

Somebody sent me a card and it says this. It says, *"Good morning! This is God! I will be handling your problems today. I will not need your help."* [Congregants laugh] *"So relax and have a nice day."*

[Congregants laugh] Don't you think that that would be something good for all of us? [Congregants whoop and applaud]

So here's the cool thing: *"Row, row, row your boat"* means that you are powerful and you have the responsibility and the resources to live your life. And the next one is: the greatest thing you can do is to surrender to the divine flow.

We always think, *"Oh, the power; the power! I've got to use it in all these aggressive ways and go for it!"* But actually, one of the greatest things you can do to use your power is actually to let go and to surrender. And let that High Power move through our lives and guide. And then it takes our actions and lifts it to a higher and more effective place.

Third line:

Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily ...

Merrily means a cheerful manner or a joyful way. Cheerful manner; a joyful way. You know, it is important. I mean, it's emphasizing the importance of our mindset and our attitude about how we live our lives and how we show up ... what a difference it makes.

If you look at the Bible, the word "cheerful" -- it shows the importance and the impact of being cheerful has on the quality of our lives and our experiences. Let me read you a couple lines about what it says in Scripture.

It says, *"A happy heart makes a tearful face."* *"A cheerful heart has a continual feast."* *"A cheerful look brings joy to the heart of another."* And then, finally, *"A happy heart does good like a medicine."*

Being cheerful -- being joyful -- in our lives is a hugely beneficial thing for all of us. And studies show -- and what Scripture says -- is that the more cheerful we are, then the more productive we are; the more we get along with others; the more our minds open for solutions and inspiration and ideas. And the more cheerful we are, it actually helps get us through the difficult and tough times. And that it helps us grow and become stronger through the challenges of our lives. We tend to be more optimistic; more positive; more hopeful by just being cheerful.

You know, when it says God loves a cheerful giver ... that when you do something with joyfulness -- when you do it cheerfully -- it makes a huge difference on that activity and the actions we're taking. Can you imagine that, whatever actions we take without joyfulness, but then doing it with cheerfulness and joyfulness, the incredible difference it makes for us? It's huge.

And my favorite one is: *"Count it all joy, brethren, when you face trials of any kinds. For the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance finish its work in you so that you may be whole, complete and lacking in nothing."* And what it is saying is: that, even through the trials and challenges, be as cheerful and optimistic and positive as possible, because that's going to help us not only get through it, but actually help us become greater and better because of it.

You know, Jim Carrey has his fingerprints on the Chinese Theater in Hollywood. And anybody who gets that is allowed to do a little quote. And you know what his quote is? *"Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily."* Isn't that cool? That's his quote, because he thinks that life has been so blessed; that he feels so blessed and honored to be living.

He was a poor comedian. A Canadian guy, as well. And he was struggling, and he was able to rise to great things. But even as he rose to great things, he felt like he kept learning and understanding. And here's one of the things he said. He said, *"I wish everyone could get rich and famous and have everything they ever dreamed of so they can realize that's not the answer."* And so what he's saying is: to live "merrily,

merrily, merrily, merrily” is not about the money and the fame; that it’s about how we feel in here. [Points to chest] It’s about how we choose to show up in the good times and the not so good times. In the highs and the lows. That it’s a powerful thing. Being cheerful is a hugely impactful thing on the quality of our lives.

We need to be cheerful like this old guy: *This elderly man was walking out of a dance club with a beautiful young woman on his arm. And his doctor -- his heart doctor -- sees him. He says, “Mr. Jones, what are you doing?”*

He said, “Hey, doc! I'm taking your advice.”

He said, “Advice? What advice?”

He said, “You know; you told me to get a hot mama and be cheerful.” [Congregants laugh]

The doctor said, “No; no! I said you have a heart murmur and be careful!” [Congregants laugh]

And so ... Ohhh ... [Laughs] Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily! [Congregants laugh] Alright.

So the last one is:

Life is but a dream.

Do you know that Lewis Carroll, who wrote *Alice in Wonderland*, has a poem called “Life is But a Dream”? William Shakespeare has a quote in one of his plays that says, “*Life is only a dream.*” And gleaning from both of them, you know, there's a lot that can be unpacked about this idea of life is but a dream.

You know, one of them is that life is an illusion: a lot of it is just made up in our head. It's not real. And that could be true. But one of the things that's also true is that life -- even as an illusion -- is there to help us awaken spiritually and to know the truth of who we are.

“Life is But a Dream,” according to Lewis Carroll, is that life is filled with things that are logical, and filled with things that are illogical. And it's okay to not understand them all. That you can still experience life. It's a dream, but you don't have to understand it all.

The third one about “*Life is but a dream*” is that it's fleeting. It doesn't last forever. Our souls are eternal, but our bodies have a limited shelf life. We are not going to be here forever. And the truth is, that makes us think about: How do I want to spend the time? What is most real for me? What is the most important thing? What are the ways that I want to invest the time that I have had and the time that I have left?

And so, it kind of behooves us to make sure we're making this dream as sweet as it can be and not allowing it to be a nightmare. And that's by thinking about how we want to live this life.

Let me ask you a question: If you could give advice to your 25-year-old self -- and if you're too young, make it your 20-year-old self -- what advice would you give yourself back then about how to live your life? One of mine would be: don't get so concerned about what other people think. Just live your life. Another one could be: don't worry so much about the future or regret the past. Take more time to be present to the moment. And maybe another one would be: learn to let go of stuff that no longer serves us, and not carry the weight of those things around us all the time.

We have this precious gift called life. And so, it’s important for us to take time to figure out how we want to live it. “*Life is but a dream.*”

Again, life is a precious and crazy gift. It ain't perfect, and it is not easy. But we do not need to be struggling with it all the time. We need to just follow the incredible principles in this song! “*Row, row, row your boat*” -- to know that you have the power. You have the power to change and do great things,

but you've got to focus on your boat. *"Gently down the stream"* -- to trust that the Universe is supporting you. That there is a divine flow and the grace of God, and are you willing to surrender to it? To allow it to lift and bless your life in great ways. And then, *"Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily"* -- your attitude and your joyfulness and your light affects every aspect of our lives. And it has us experience of the true inner joy of living. And finally, *"Life is but a dream"* -- it might be an illusion, but it is there to help us awaken. And let's make it a great dream!

And those are the lessons from *"Row, Row, Row Your Boat."* God bless you.

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