

YOUR WORD FOR THE YEAR

Rev. Richard Rogers

Wednesday, Jan. 8, 2025

For 33 years this has been my home church. [Cries softly, trying to compose himself.] It's not a good sign. [Struggles to compose himself; congregants sigh and applaud.]

I want to start ... I want to start with a story by Katharine Hepburn:

Once when I was a teenager, my father and I were standing in line to buy tickets for the circus. Finally, there was only one family between us and the ticket counter. That family made a lasting impression on me.

They had eight children, all of them under the age of 12. From the way they were dressed, you could tell that they didn't have much money. Their clothes were clean, very clean. The children were well-behaved, standing in pairs behind their parents, holding hands. They were all so excited about the clowns and the animals and all the acts that they were about to see that night. From their excitement, you could tell that they had never been to a circus before, and this was going to be a highlight for many of them of their lives.

Their father and mother stood in front of the line with pride in their little group. The mother was holding her husband's hand, looking at him as if he was her knight in shining armor. He was smiling and enjoying his family's happiness.

The ticket lady asked them how many tickets he wanted, and he proudly responded, "I want eight children's tickets and two adult's." She announced the price. The wife let go of her husband's hand. Her head dropped, and the man's lips began to quiver.

He leaned closer and said, "How much did you say?" The lady repeated the amount. He didn't have enough money. How was he supposed to turn around and tell his eight kids that he couldn't afford to take them to the circus?

Seeing what was happening, my dad reached down in his pocket, pulled out a \$20 bill and dropped it on the ground. We weren't rich by any means. My father bent down and picked up the 20, tapped the man on the shoulder and said, "Excuse me, sir, this fell out of your pocket." The man understood what was happening. He wasn't being handed charity, but he was grateful and accepted the help despite the heartbreaking, embarrassing situation. He looked straight in my father's eyes and took my dad's hand, both his hands in his hand, and squeezed that bill tightly within him, his trembling lips and his tears streaming down his cheeks.

He said, "Thank you, sir. This really means so much to me and my family."

My father and I went back to our car and drove home. That \$20 my dad gave away was what he planned to use to get our own tickets. Although we didn't see the circus that night, we felt a joy inside that was far greater than seeing the circus. That day, I learned the value of giving. The giver is greater than the receiver. If you want to be greater than life itself, learn to give. Love is nothing to do with what you expect to get, only with what you expect to give. Give everything.

You know, for the last 30 years, I have been the man with the eight kids. And I feel like this ministry has given to me and to my family and to this place in more ways than I can count. The generosity of you that has supported me personally and built this church has been stunning to watch.

I am very grateful for each and every one of you, and it was one of the hardest decisions I have ever made to decide to move forward.

You know ... excuse me. I remember a day when my children were complaining about something they didn't have. Kids do. And something just struck something in me.

And I said, "Okay, let's go look at your room for a minute." And I said, "You know, both of you have beautiful rooms. You don't share a room; you have your own room. You have all these toys and all this stuff." And I opened the closet and I showed them all their clothes and I said, "Look at all the stuff you have."

We walked the house and I showed them our house and we ended up in the garage. And I said, "Your mom and I, we drive very nice cars." We went out back and I said, "You know, you guys have a pool and a big backyard and a play equipment to play on."

I said, "You know why we have all that stuff? The generosity of others." I said, "My whole career has been based on the generosity of others. Everything we have is because of the generosity of others." And I said, "We have been blessed."

So thank you to each and every one of you. Thank you! Thank you for your support of this ministry. Thank you for the support of my life. Thank you. I noticed. [Takes a sobbing breath] That means the world to me.



Okay. Now, the reason you came! Do you see the slide behind me? Does it say it?

"Good and only good is coming to me now."

Together: [with congregation] *"Good and only good is coming to me now."*

One more time like we mean it: [with congregation] *"Good and only good is coming to me now."*

Now, the question I have for you tonight is: Do you believe that? Do you *really*? Do you believe that, throughout this new year, that good and only good is going to come to you?

How many of you have to suspend your disbelief to believe that statement? [Congregants laugh] Everybody knows that the right answer is, "Yes! *Good and only good is coming to me now! Woooo!*" Right? But how many of you have to suspend your disbelief to believe that literally everything that's going to come to you in the new year is good and only good?

See, I want us to be willing to open tonight to this experience of the new year and to tell ourselves the truth. That some of us are still carrying pain and trauma that we've held on to. And it's hard to believe that good and only good is coming to us when we're still carrying trauma, when we're still carrying pain, when we're still carrying disappointments. That for many of us, we need to do one more burning bowl.

And, this time, we need to let go of everything that has caused us to believe in anything less than good: every disappointment, every fear, every heartache, every trauma. As we let go, we open to a new level of living; to a new dimension of life; to a new possibility where God and good reign supreme.

And sometimes we do have to actually suspend our disbelief. We have to be willing to believe in a world that is greater than we've experienced, because it's only in believing in that world that we can step into that higher possibility.

"Good and only good is coming to me now."

Together: [with congregants] *"Good and only good is coming to me now."*

One more time like we believe it: [with congregants] *"Good and only good is coming to me now."*

See, doing our spiritual work is work. Like, it's not just, *"Take two affirmations and call me in the morning."* [Congregants laugh] Sometimes we have to let go of a lot of pain to move to a higher level of life.

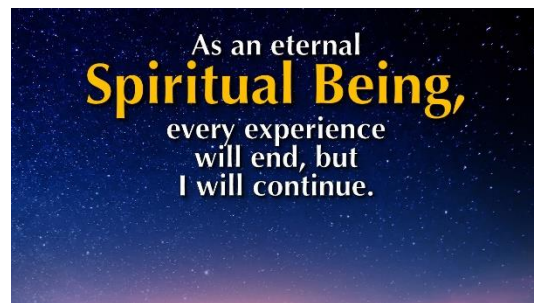
And do I believe that there's a level of life for each and every one of us where good and only good is it works? Yes! But sometimes even in the most painful situations -- in the midst of those -- there is a level of good being made manifest. And when we are willing to claim it, even in the most painful situations, we move to higher ground. And each one of us, as a spiritual being, gets to decree a thing and watch that thing be established in your life.

See, I don't know what's going to happen to you in the next 12 months. I don't! But I know from your place of spiritual mastery, as you claim the good that God has for you -- when you claim it, when you stand it, when you call it forth, and you claim that good and only good is coming to you now -- that you actually move to a higher level of being. =

And for many of us, the thing that keeps us from that level of living is the trauma of the past. Can you see the ways that the disappointments and the trauma and the upset have kept you from being wildly blessed? Because you expect life to be hard. You expect life to be disappointing. You expect life to be traumatic. And you're right!

"Good and only good comes to me now."

Together: [with congregation] *"Good and only good comes to me now."*



Last month, at some point, I posted on Facebook. Let's shoot it up there. Is it up there?

"I'm an eternal spiritual being. Every experience will end, but I will continue."

Let's say that together: [with congregation] *"As an eternal spiritual being, every experience will end, but I will continue."*

Now, how many of you: Does that sound depressing? Right? As an eternal spiritual being, every experience is going to end, but you are going to continue, because you are continuing. You are eternal. You are an expression of God. You are here forever! Eternity is a long time! [Congregants laugh] You think God's old now? [Congregants laugh]

See, if we have to make peace with being eternal. When you're eternal, everything is going to end. Every human experience is going to end. It's going to end! And you will continue, for you are eternal.

"Like, Richard that's sad."

It's the game. It's the game we all play. It's called being an eternal expression of God. That every human - every experience that you have -- is going to end at some point, and you will continue to express God in greater and greater and greater ways.

And this year, we can focus on what we're letting go of. We can focus on the pain, we can focus on the disappointment, we can focus on the fears, or we can actually turn our focus forward to receive.

You know, January is named after the God, Janus. And the thing that was unique about Janus was that she had two faces, right? And the idea is one face could look backwards and one face could look forward. And many of us have lived in that place where part of us is looking forward and part of us is looking back thinking, *"Those were the good old days and those were the blessings."*

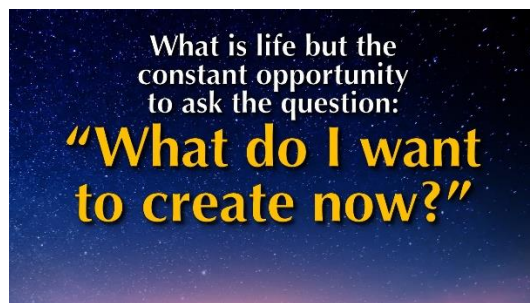
But everything is going to end. And to the degree that you allow yourself to have good endings is to the degree that you allow your life to move forward so that you can be wildly blessed.

You know, it's hard to be eternal. But that's who you are! Our humanity doesn't always like it. Our humanity wants to kind of keep all the people that we love right here: right here, right with us all the time. But as an eternal spiritual being, we have to be just as good with endings as we are in new beginnings.

Jesus said it this way: *"Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."* And then he asks this question in John 11:26: *"Do you believe this? Whoever lives and believes in me will never die."*

Now, do you think people died? Even Jesus' followers who believed in him, did any of them die? Yes! So when we look at that Scripture, is it whack-a-doodle? Like, what do we do with that? Because the reality is that there are endings! But not as a spiritual being. As a spiritual being, we are eternal! And believing in our eternal nature actually sets us free to have great endings and great new beginnings and to move forward at higher and higher levels of life.

Can all of us see at least one thing from our past that we are holding on to that is actually keeping us from moving into 2025 in the highest and best way? Because we're allowing the past to define us and not allowing the glory of God in this moment -- in this new year -- to be the thing that we are open and receptive to receive.



Sometimes I throw things on Facebook and I have no idea that they're connected. So that [previous] quote I posted six weeks ago or so. This one I just posted last Friday ... I think Thursday or Friday: *"What is life but the constant opportunity to ask the question: 'What do I want to create now?'"*

Will you read that with me? [With congregants] *"What is life but the constant opportunity to ask the question:*

'What do I want to create now?'"

As an eternal spiritual being, that literally is the only question! It's really not important what you created *yesterday*. It's what do you want to create *right now*?

So, when you're looking at this brand new year, maybe you're saying to yourself, *"You know, I've known so much abundance last year that I want to create a little poverty this year so I can really appreciate what abundance feels like."* [Congregants laugh]

Or maybe you're looking at this brand new year and you think, *"You know, I knew so much health in 2024, I want to create just like one really scary health crisis to see if I can really demonstrate and overcome and heal that so I can really appreciate the joy of good health."* [Congregants laugh] Right?

And as an eternal spiritual being, you get to create whatever you want! But what I want you to see today is: Don't look backwards. Look forward! What is the life that you want to create for you? For your family? For the world? What is the good that you're about this year? And let's be about it! Let's do it!

So tonight, I'm going to invite you -- if you want to stay -- you're going to pick a word. Now, don't throw the word back at me. [Congregants laugh] Don't cuss me out; don't be upset. You know, if you don't like your word, take it up with God, all right?

Now, if you get the same word three years in a row, you might want to take that word a little bit deeper this year, and really wonder what the real spiritual meaning is for it. Because apparently the last two years, you haven't gotten it! True?

So we're going to pray; we're going to bless the offering. Jamie's got another song for us. And then I'm going to come up and I've got a stone for each one of you. And you don't have to stay for it. You can ... If it's not important, you can go home. But I've got a stone for each one of you.

And you're going to reach in the bag. And you don't get to, like, peek in or look at it and throw it back until you find a good one. [Congregants laugh] You reach your hand in the bag, you pull out a stone, and then you can have whatever moment you want to have.

But the reality is: I believe that what you pick is a message from your Creator ... is a divine blessing. That God has a word for you for this new year that will make this new year more meaningful, more powerful, more possible. And I want you to hold to that.

Are you willing? Okay.

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