

MAKING THE CONNECTION

Week #1 of 1 2-Week Series on Connection

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So, it is hard to believe that it's mid-April already, isn't it? I mean, wasn't it just Christmas? [Congregants laugh] I think it was just Christmas. And now, as I said in the riveting announcements that I made, it's almost Easter. We're 10 days away from Easter; from another really beautiful, sacred and holy holiday.

And I love Easter actually. I love everything about Easter! I love the exterior trappings of it with women in their finest and men actually wearing ties to church. Well, some of you guys do that ... not all of you, but some of you do. And women who are bold in their hats. And, you know, chocolate Easter eggs; you can't beat that! And going out to brunch with friends. And whatever all that means and whatever all those activities are.

But I also, more importantly, love our beautiful metaphysical teachings for the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. I just think that is such an empowering, amazingly beautiful way to look at that experience.

And so, I love to prepare for Easter. I'm not going to give an Easter sermon here. I'm not going to steal Rev. Richard's thunder in 10 days. But I want us to get prepared. I want us to get prepared for Easter tonight and next week.

But I have to start with a little story that I really wasn't planning to tell, but it just dropped in as I was driving here. And I went, *"Oh, I've got to tell him that little story."* So, as the minister of a church, there are certain things you have to deal with. And one of them -- and Steve is going to just appreciate this very much -- one of them is that somebody is always unhappy with the music. Always. There's always someone ... am I not right about that? Someone is always unhappy. And there are those who are deliriously happy, but there is somebody who's unhappy, right?

So, this particular situation ... the service was over. The minister's standing at the back, greeting people. This one congregant comes through and says, *"You know, I swear, I am so sick of the music here. You just rotate like two groups of songs. And every time I come, it's either one group or the other group of songs, and I'm fed up with it. Could you get some new songs?"*

And the minister looked at him very kindly and said, *"Well, sir, if you'd come more often than Easter and Christmas, we would have other songs."* [Congregants laugh] Ba-da-doong; ba-da-ding!

Because that's the other thing I like about Easter -- a full sanctuary, right? I really do like that.

All right, so we are going to prepare for Easter tonight and next week by looking at some statements that Jesus -- who we like to call in new thought "the master teacher" -- taught us. And tonight, I've got some bad news, but I also have some good news.

So first, the bad news. And this all relates ... I guess I should tell you what the topic is before I get to that. The topic for tonight and next week is about making a connection: making a connection with the God of our being. Making a holy connection with our sacred self.

Okay, now I'm ready to give you the bad news. The bad news is: many of us have a fear of making that deep connection, because we don't like what we think we're going to find. And I say this with some authority, and I'll tell you why in a minute. But here's what I mean by that. I don't think everyone believes that they are inherently amazing; that they are divine love and light; that they are perfectly

designed for their unique purpose; that they are infinitely worth; and/or that they are eternally valued, valuable, embraced, and cherished by the Spirit that dwells within them simply because of who they are.

I don't think a lot of people think that. And why do I say that? Why can I say that with some authority? Because I've been at this ministry game for over 25 years. And you have no idea how many times I have heard those very words. It breaks my heart every time I hear them. And they're followed by, *"But you know, I can know all those things about Sally, or Fred, or John, or you. I mean, yeah, come on, I can know those things about you, but they're not true about me. And if you looked really deep at me, you would see that they're not true about me."*

Hmmm. We have an inherent belief -- many, not everybody, but I've seen it enough to know that it happens a lot -- an inherent belief that we're bad; that we're intrinsically a mistake; that we're eternally flawed; that we're fundamentally broken; and we're permanently unworthy.

Now, I'm not trying to be a "Debbie Downer" here, I promise. And I will shift this in a second, but I just wanted to call this out. I want to talk about it. I want to bring it to the light. I don't want it to be sitting under the surface as I say what I want to say to you tonight, and you sit there thinking, *"Well, that's true of everybody else, but not of me."*

So that's the bad news. Here's the good news. Are you ready for it? Thank goodness, right? *"Finally! I thought she'd never get to it!"* So, listen up.

Every one of those beliefs that you may be harboring are lies. They were lies that were said to you, or mirrored to you, or given as examples or because of your experiences. I understand all that. And this is not about blaming anybody! But I want you to know every thought that you have that you are less than amazing is a lie that you, my friends, might believe.

And so, tonight I want us to say, *"No more!"* to believing that lie. No more! I am going to begin tonight -- or to deepen tonight -- into a beautiful commandment that Jesus gave us. (You know, Moses did not have the corner on commandments.) He gave us a commandment, and his commandment was a profound statement of truth, wrapped up in an imperative. I love that word: wrapped up in an imperative.

So, I want to give you the whole Scripture, because it's just so that you get the whole context of it. This appears in Mark:

"Jesus said, 'The first of all the commandments is, 'Hear, O Lord of Israel, our God is one God, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your might. This is the first commandment.

And the second commandment is like it, namely this: you must love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.'"

So first, love God. Yes; absolutely, 100%! But that's not tonight's sermon. Second is: love thyself as thy neighbor. No greater commandments are those two. But I want to focus on that second one tonight.

And what is profound about that commandment -- love thy neighbor as thyself -- is something that I think we often miss. We miss the *"as thyself"* part. We look at the *"love thy neighbor."* And absolutely yes! Rightly so! We've interpreted that Scripture as we need to be caring and kind and compassionate to others in the world. We -- yes! Of course!

But we miss the *"as thyself."* But those two words establish the whole thing. They establish a deep spiritual significance that says self-love is the foundation of any love we can possibly give out to the world. Let me say that again so you get it; you hear it.

Self-love is the foundation of any spiritual love we can possibly give out.

Does that make sense to your brain? Three people nodded their heads. Excellent! [Congregants laugh] I love it! Thank you for being with me.

So Jesus' words challenge us to consider: How do we truly love ourselves? How do we give care, compassion, kindness, grace, forgiveness, acceptance to ourselves just like we might give to someone else?

The phrase "*as thyself*" is not an incidental phrase in that commandment. It is an essential phrase in that commandment. How we see ourselves sets the tone for how we treat others, and how others and the world see us and treat us.

So, what does it mean to love yourself? Does it mean being arrogant? Does it mean being egotistical? Does it mean being self-serving? Does it mean ignoring areas where we could grow? Of course not! It doesn't mean any of that.

I love this idea: self-love is not an act of ego, but an act of divine remembrance. Self-love is not an act of ego, but an act of divine remembrance.

It means understanding that we are worthy of love -- self-love included -- not because of what we do, but because of who we are.

And whenever we do something wrong -- whenever we make a mistake, whenever we err -- that does not change one iota (that's a great word) ... It does not change one iota our worthiness -- our worthiness of that love.

So, I said we're worthy of this love simply because of who we are. Well, who are we? This is not going to come as a big surprise, the words I'm about to say. You've been coming to a Unity church, some of you, for the last 34 minutes, and others of you for a very long time. But this isn't going to come as a surprise. But I want you to really hear it tonight. I want you to open your heart, open your ears, open your mind, open your very being to hear this in a new way and to take it in, okay? Yeah? You ready? You open?

Take a breath.

You are a spark of the Divine.

Let's say that as an affirmation: [with congregants] "*I am the spark of the Divine.*"

One more time: [with congregants] "*I am a spark of the Divine.*"

"I have a sacred connection to the Source of all life.

[With congregants]: "*I have a sacred connection to the Source of all life.*"

So, I used to do something at my center (when I had a center). Ah. We would stand and we would affirm things in what science has shown. There was a great TED talk on this: that science has shown that, when we stand in a power stance -- which is like this [spreads arms out and upward] -- and say something like ... I've got one model; my model is over here ... and we speak something, it just really comes into our very beingness.

So, if you want to play and if you want to bring those two statements into your very beingness, I invite you to stand up. And I invite you to put your arms out -- just don't whack your neighbor; that's all I ask. No neighbor whacking. Oh, look at all of you. I mean, I just feel the power in the room. [To soloist:] Come on, Scott. Let's go; up! Yeah, thank you! You are not exempt from this, my friend!

All right, here we go: "*I am a spark of the Divine!*"

[Congregants]: *"I am a spark of the Divine!"*

"I have a sacred connection to the Source of all life!"

[Congregants]: *"I have a sacred connection to the Source of all life!"*

Just take a pause to feel that. Feel that in your mind; in your heart; and in your body. This is the truth of who you are!

You may go ahead and sit down.

So, Jesus had another important statement that talks about who we are. And he was speaking of himself in that moment, but he wasn't just speaking of himself. It's a very simple phrase. He said, *"The Father and I are one."* The Father and I are one.

And we believe in our beautiful metaphysical New Thought/Unity teachings that that was a statement he was making for all humanity; all creation, in fact. That all creation is made out of and from the One, and therefore we are the One in human expression and form.

So this statement isn't just about him; it's about the universal Oneness of all life with God.

And I love this quote from Charles Fillmore, the co-founder of Unity. In his book, *Talks on Truth*, he said, *"We cannot separate Jesus from God, or tell where he leaves off and God begins in him. To say that Jesus was a man as we are men (or women) is not true, because he had dropped that personal consciousness by which we separate ourselves from God."*

All right? That's why Jesus was different: because he had dropped that personal belief system that said he was separate from God. He was consciously one with the absolute principle of Being. It's a capital B, meaning God. He had no consciousness separate from that Being. He was that Being for all intents and purposes. That they may be one, even as we are one, was his prayer.

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This could only mean that we are not separate from God. We are expressions of God with the same infinite wisdom and love and power and creativity and amazingness and uniqueness that is of the Divine.

When we can really embrace this -- I mean really, really get this -- we can stop identifying ourselves with our past, and our struggles, and our experiences, and our mistakes, and our foibles, and whatever the human condition has brought to us or we have expressed. When we realize who we are, we can stop defining ourselves by those things.

Maya Angelou -- beloved, beloved poet; beloved poet -- didn't have an easy life growing up. I don't know how many of you know about her history. But she had deep trauma as a child, which led her to stop speaking for nearly five years. She didn't say a word for nearly five years. She carried shame; she carried pain; and she believed for a long time that she had no voice, and that her very existence did not matter.

Isn't that hard to believe, actually, that the person who helped millions of people -- with her incredible words and her incredible light -- felt that way about herself? But she did. But it was through the power of words and literature and mentoring and letting go -- shedding the judgment of others, shedding the pain of the past, shedding her self-judgment -- that she was able to cultivate love within herself. And she became a living testament to self-love, built through forgiveness, healing and self-acceptance. And, again, as I said, she went on to be a massive influence in our world, helping millions with her words.

So, again, I ask: Tonight, could we quit giving lip service to this idea?

Because I'm not giving you any new ideas tonight. This is an idea we talk about every single service we're here. We talk about our oneness with God. But could we quit, tonight, giving lip service to it, and

actually embrace it? Or embrace it at a deeper level? And know that -- despite our humanness, our mistakes, our flaws, our fears, our beliefs that we're inherently bad and that every little thing we do wrong proves that -- could we let that go here tonight?

I'm going to ask you actually to, like, shed that tonight. And when you walk out of these doors, you are not going to take it with you. Ha; that's an assignment, isn't it?

Rev. Richard Rogers, who spent many years here as the Wednesday night minister, always gave homework. I'm thinking this homework I'm going to give you is pretty big. You're going to shed this. I'm going to give you a little trick later about how you can support yourself in doing that.

I'm not a big poetry fan -- although I do love Maya Angelou, but I also love a modern poet. She's a young woman. Her name is Chelan Harkin. I've had the pleasure of interacting with her a bit, and she's an utter delight. And she's kind of like a modern-day Rumi, I think.

And she wrote a poem called "I Am Light," and you may recognize a line from it. That was our opening affirmation. And here's her poem:

*What is this acumen we've developed to describe our terrors?
Why are our stories of pain so well carved and whittled?
Why these PhD certificates of our errors hanging all over ourselves?*

*No matter what the degree of joy, of beauty, why not give ourselves over to that?
No matter how far we are from where we're aiming to go, why not look at it differently?
Why not say, "I am light, building a kingdom of myself"?*

What our world needs is for each and every one of us to step into that — I was going to say belief, but I'm not going to say belief -- into that knowing that we are light building a kingdom of ourselves.

Hear this, my friends: You are each; we are each; I am; every single one of us is the perfection of God living out that perfection, now and again in some imperfect ways. We are the perfection of God living out that perfection, now and again in some imperfect ways.

Sometimes we blow it. My question is: Can you really, really, really blow it and still love yourself and still know who you are? Can you look at your mistakes and say, "*I am light building a kingdom of myself*"? Can you rise up again and again when you falter?

Michael Jordan -- you've probably heard of him, right? Not, by the way, the actor, but the basketball player who, arguably -- and I'm not about; I don't want to get in an argument about it -- but arguably might be the best basketball player ever ... you may have your own opinion on that. But perhaps; a lot of people think he's one of the best, if not the best.

He once said this: "*I have missed over 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and I missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.*"

The first wedding that I ever did as a minister ... I had been the minister of my church not for very long. And one of my congregations, one of our board members -- very influential and important person in this new sweet little community that was being grown. I had some friends who were getting married and needed a minister and my congregant, our board member, said, "*Oh, you know, our minister, she's amazing. She'll do such an amazing job for you. Have her.*"

And they're like, "*Okay, sure. We trust you.*"

So, I got there to do the wedding. Oh, I wanted to do them all so proud! Oh, I didn't. I didn't do them proud at all. The first thing that happened was I mispronounced badly the groom's name. That's not

good. You don't really want to start off like that. And I could hear the groans, and I saw the look on his face and heard the groans. Like, *"Oh, this is not good."*

But the rest of the ceremony went fine. We signed the license, put it in the envelope, said goodbye, went home. Took out the license. [Laughs] And maybe You don't know this, but the license has two parts. There's the top part that the couple and the witnesses and the minister sign. It's for them to keep: their memento. And then there's perforated, and then there's a lower part, which everyone also signs, and the minister is responsible for mailing that into the clerk of the court to get filed so that this marriage is legal.

When I pulled it out of the envelope, that bottom part had been tucked under. It flipped down, and it wasn't signed. I didn't have them sign it. I totally forgot to do that.

Now, if I were being honest -- which I'm going to be honest -- I did have a moment of thinking, *"I'm just going to sign this; they'll never know."* [Congregants laugh] But I couldn't do that. But it did cross my mind!

So, I had to call this couple that I did not know. Thank goodness they didn't go on their honeymoon right away. They took a couple days before they left. And I had to get two new witnesses, because their people were gone. They'd come in from out of town. They were gone. I had to scurry around and get two witnesses, go to their home, have them sign. They were not happy. Neither was my board member happy.

But here's the deal. Do you think I ever did that again? [Laughs] Oh no. Right? Can we love ourselves right in the middle of a mistake and learn from it? And grow from it? And stretch from it? And become a better us because of it? Can we do that? Can we look at our flaws and our misshots and our failed this and whatever and say, *"Ahhh. Okay. I'm going to rise up again. I'm going to see that I am light building a kingdom of myself"*?

So that's what I want us to do. I want us to remember who we are. Remember that loving yourself doesn't mean arrogance. It doesn't mean refusing to learn from your mistakes. It doesn't mean any of that. But it means accepting who you are in your humanness, with your magnificence and, now and again, those imperfections that pop in. Recognize that you are perfect, even in your imperfect moments. Be like Michael Jordan. Be like Jesus. Be like Maya Angelou. Be like anyone who has recognized their divine essence and has the power to rise again and again.

So, tonight my message -- which is Jesus' message coming through me tonight -- is to embrace every part of you: your strengths, your missteps, your humanity. To look at your flaws, and still stand in the truth of who you are. Right here, right now, in this moment, choose to know that you are a living, breathing expression of the Divine, sacred, and holy in every way. Because that's the truth, And you got to love that truth.

Namaste.