

## TAKING THE CONNECTION DEEPER

Final Week of a 2-Week Series on Connection

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Last week and tonight, we're preparing our hearts and our minds for the sacred message that Easter brings for us. And we're talking about making the sacred connection, using some profound wisdom from the Master Teacher, Jesus: this man who didn't know where God started and he stopped or he started and God stopped. The man who wanted us to also know our oneness with the Divine.

So tonight, we're going to take the journey a little deeper that we began last week. And, even if you weren't here last week, you won't be lost, I promise. You won't be lost. But I want to make the invitation tonight that this journey of our human experience is not a journey toward perfection as we define perfection. But instead, it is a journey toward wholeness, toward acceptance, and toward integrating and embracing all aspects of our humanness as well as our divinity.

You may remember from last week -- or you'll hear it for the first time tonight -- I said you are the perfection of God, living out that perfection, now and again -- perhaps often, I don't know -- in imperfect ways. Right? We are all the perfection of God, living out that perfection in -- often, sometimes, now and again -- imperfect ways.

When we strive for perfection in the human experience -- in the human form -- we're always going to come up short. Always going to come up short. So, there's an old Sufi tale about this, and it goes like this.

*So, Nasrudin ...*

*He's always the main character in any Sufi tale ...*

*Nasrudin and his friend were having tea one afternoon, and they're talking about love and life and all things interesting, they thought. And his friend, Nasrudin's friend, says, "So, Nasrudin, why is it that you have never married?"*

*And he said, "Well, you know, I've been on the search. And I was in Cairo, and I met this beautiful, beautiful woman with eyes the color of olives -- dark olives -- and she was so intelligent. But she wasn't very kind, and so I couldn't marry her. And then I was in Baghdad, and I met this other just lovely woman. She was so kind and so beautiful, but we had nothing in common, so I couldn't marry her. And I just keep looking and looking and I couldn't find anyone. And finally, I found the perfect woman. She was beautiful. She was kind. She was intelligent. We had so much in common. She was completely and totally perfect."*

*And the friend said, "Well, okay; why didn't you marry her?"*

*He said, "Well, the problem is she was looking for the perfect man." [Congregants laugh]*

Where's my drummer who can go, "Ba da ding, ba da doong," right?

We can get in trouble in this human experience when we are trying to find this perfection in this on this plane. So, the journey is not toward perfection; it's toward integration; it's toward wholeness, it's toward bringing both our humanity and spirituality together.

So tonight, I want to invite us into a conversation. And actually it's not us in the conversation; it's a conversation that I am inviting you to have with your soul. A conversation for you to have with your soul.

And in order to have this conversation, I'm going to invite you to ask yourself two questions. And these questions come from a beautiful poem which actually poses lots of questions. But I'm only going to take

two of them tonight. And it's a poem called "The Invitation" by -- Oh! I heard an "Oh, yes!" -- by Oriah Mountain Dreamer. And here are the two questions I'm going to invite you to have a conversation with your soul about tonight.

The first one is -- and I love how she begins this one: *"It doesn't interest me what you do for a living ... I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself. If you can bear the accusation of betrayal and not betray your own soul."*

We'll explore that in a second.

But the second question, I want to introduce it, as well. The second question is -- and again starting off about what she's not interested in: *"It doesn't interest me what planets are squaring your moon ... I want to know if you can live with failure, yours and mine, and still stand at the edge of the lake and shout to the sliver of the moon, 'Yes!'"*

So, we're going to explore those two questions tonight. And I invite you to take a deep dive into your own soul to see what your answers might be.

So the first one: **Can you disappoint another to be true to yourself? Can you bear the accusations of betrayal and not betray your own soul?**

This question is about your spiritual authenticity. It's about your spiritual authenticity. You know, we often say in our belief system here that we are spiritual beings having a ... [pauses for congregants to answer] Thank you; two of you knew that. Great! I think you all knew that. You were just being shy. We are spiritual beings having a human experience. But I think sometimes we get that a little bit messed up, because we try to have spiritual experiences through human approval. Do we not?

And I'm going to ask a lot of questions. You do not have to answer them. They're rhetorical for you to ask your own soul. You don't have to answer mine unless you want to.

But what happens when the path of your soul doesn't make sense to others? What happens when following your inner knowing, your inner truth ... what if that means someone else is disappointed?

You know, Jesus understood this conundrum, if you will. He understood this dynamic. And he said, *"For what does it profit a man [or a woman] to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"*

And I love to just like add my little pieces to things, and I'm not above even doing it to Jesus' statements, because I think everything can be improved on, right? Even Jesus' statements. So that was probably blasphemous, wasn't it? I apologize.

But just think about adding these words, *"For what does it profit a man to gain the approval of the whole world and forfeit his own soul?"*

Ooh! So whichever way you're going to say that, that speaks to kind of the tension that happens in us when we trade our truth for approval; when we lose ourselves in pursuit of being accepted or admired or even loved.

I want to read this. It's not a quote. I wrote it, but I want to get it exactly like I wrote it, because I really like it. So it is a quote! So Rev. Dr. Michele Whittington once said [congregants laugh]:

*"To betray your soul for approval is to abandon the divine presence within you. But when you choose to disappoint another, rather than disappoint yourself, you're choosing to stay in alignment with the God in you."*

Now, I want to be really clear about something. This isn't about being mean. This isn't about being selfish. This isn't about being thoughtless or uncaring, or making rash decisions that are obviously harmful. It's not about that at all. But it is about honoring you.

So, I want to give you a quick personal example. Many, many, many, many years ago at my former church -- this was a long, long time ago -- but I gave a talk similar to this. Not tonight's talk, but the idea of honoring yourself, and maybe someone else might not like it.

So, I gave that on a Sunday. And then the next Sunday, this man who I didn't recognize, but who was apparently in church the week before, came up to me. He was not happy with me. I mean, I could tell, like, *"Oh, boy, back away. Can I run out of the room right now?"* But I was there, so I'm like, *"Okay; what is it that he has to say to me?"*

And he said, *"It's all your fault."*

I'm like, *"Oh, okay; what, sir, is my fault?"*

*"My wife left me because of your talk last week."* [Congregants laugh]

Oh, well ... I didn't say all the things I could say, like, *"Oh, I don't think it was just my talk that did that."* [Laughs] I suspect there was something else going on there, but that talk perhaps gave her permission to do something she needed to do.

Now, I want to go on record here as saying I am not suggesting anybody here do that. So please do not go home and tell your spouse you're leaving. Or, if you do that, don't blame me. [Congregants laugh] Right? Okay. Don't blame me for that. [Laughs]

But the importance is: Are we honoring ourselves? That's the point.

Here's another example. So, there was an elderly man traveling with a boy and a donkey. As they walk through the village, the man was leading the donkey and the boy was walking behind.

The townspeople saw this and said *"Old man, you're a fool for not riding. You've got this donkey. You're old. Get on the back of it; you should ride it!"*

And he thought, *"Well, okay; to please those people, I'll do it."*

So, he got on the back and he was riding the donkey. They go into the next town. The people in the next town go, *"Oh, what a selfish old man. That poor little child is walking while he rides on the donkey like a king. How dare he?"*

And so, the old man went, *"Oh dear, I shouldn't be doing that."* So, he got off and he put the little boy on.

They go into the next town. Sorry, that just cracks me up. And the people say, *"Oh my gosh, look at that little boy. He's so lazy, he's letting that poor old man walk."*

And they made the suggestion that they should just both ride on the donkey, and the old man's like, *"All right; to please them, we'll both ride on the donkey."*

And as fate would have it, they go into the next village, the next town, and the people go, *"You're being so cruel to this poor donkey, both of you riding on this donkey. How cruel of you."*

So, to appease them, they both got off. And the old man thinks, *"What now? What am I going to do now?"* So, he and the little boy pick up the donkey and start carrying the donkey. [Congregants laugh]

But here's what happened. They were crossing a bridge, and it was kind of rickety and they lost their balance. And the donkey fell into the river and it drowned.

This is a horrible story, isn't it? So sorry! But this is a moral. The moral of the story is: if you try to live your life pleasing others, you are eventually going to lose you're a— Umm ... [Congregants laugh] Donkey. Donkey. Donkey. Donkey.

That was a good catch, wasn't it? So ... It was a good catch. I know.

So, as they say, seriously, have you ever found yourself losing your "aha" -- donkey -- because you have given away your power? Because you have said yes to things that do not resonate with your soul, with your heart?

I just want you to think about that ... not in blame of yourself, not in blame of anybody else, but just as a recognizing that perhaps your soul is inviting you to listen to it a little more clearly.

This poem's question invites you to trust the voice within, even if it isn't popular. Even if others don't understand it. Even if others don't like it.

You know, I'll be honest with you. I don't like the fact that Steve is leaving. I don't like it one bit, but I know that it's right for him. And so, I said -- not that he needs my support -- but 100%, you go do you boo. Right?

So, is there something for you that you sit here tonight and go, *"Wow, you know what? I have not honored myself in some situation"*? Could tonight be the night your soul says, *"Well, how about it? Maybe it's time. Maybe it's time."*

And I know that's not an easy path, and I know that it takes courage. And I know it sometimes means standing alone. But the invitation is: Can you do that? To honor your own soul.

So here is an affirmation. I'm going to say it, and then, if you feel like you resonate with it, I will invite you to say it again with me.

*"I will not betray my own soul to be what others want me to be. I will live from my truth, because my truth is sacred."*

If you want, I'll say a piece and then repeat if you feel like you resonate.

*"I will not betray my own soul ..."*

[With congregants]: *"I will not betray my own soul ..."*

*"... to be what others want me to be."*

[Congregants]: *"To be what others want me to be."*

*"I will live from my truth because my truth is sacred."*

[Congregants]: *"I will live from my truth because my truth is sacred."*

Take a breath.

When we do that -- when we do that -- we make a deeper connection with the divine of our being. We express the God within us more fully and more completely and more freely absolutely 100% of the time.

So, that's question number one.

Question number two is this: **Can you live with failure and still stand at the edge of the lake and shout to the sliver of the full moon, "Yes!"?**

So our first question was about spiritual authenticity. This one is about spiritual awakening. Hmm. How is that about awakening? Well, stay tuned. We'll get there in a minute.

So last week, last Wednesday, we actually did talk about failures. How can we fail and be all right with ourselves? We did speak about that, but it occurred to me that perhaps that one needs a little more conversation, because many of us have a hard time with that. Or it could just be me. I don't know. I may be the one who needs to go into this one a little bit deeper, because failure is not really one of my favorite things to do. Making mistakes is not one of my favorite things to do. Being wrong is really not one of my favorite things to do. And yet, we all do it.

In this human experience, we all do it more often than we probably even realize! Certainly more often than we want to admit. But here is a spiritual truth, just in case you don't know it already. Your divine identity does not vanish simply because you make a mistake; simply because you mess something up; simply because you fall short. And It does not impact your spiritual identity one iota.

And because this is the season of Jesus, I want to give you another example from him. He knew this to be true. And there is a passage in John, Chapter 8, that I want to share with you:

*Early in the morning, Jesus came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery. And making her stand before all of them, they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such a woman. Now what do you say?"*

*They said this to test him so that they might have some charge to bring against him. But Jesus bent down and wrote with his fingers on the ground.*

By the way, as a side note, I would love to know what he wrote, but the Scripture doesn't say that. So, we were left with this big question: What did he write? I don't know, but that's irrelevant to this part of the story, so we'll keep going.

*When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and he said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin ..."*

Which, by the way, means missing the mark; error. Sin is a word a long time ago from archery. It's an archery word. And it means your arrow did not hit the bull's eye. That's what a sin is. Your arrow missed the bull's eye. So really sin literally is missing the mark or making a mistake. Okay. So, he said:

*"Let anyone among you who is without sin ..."*

Who has not made a mistake ...

*"... be the first to throw a stone at her."*

Hmm.

*Well, when they heard that, they went away ...*

They probably skulked away.

*... one by one, beginning with the elders. And Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. And Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"*

*And she said, "No one, sir."*

*And he said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way from now on. Do not sin or err again."*

Jesus separated the mistake from the spiritual being of that woman who was right there in front of him. He didn't shame her; he liberated her. The story directly refutes this idea that we're defined by our mistakes or our failures.

But what happens when ... what do we do to ourselves when we make a mistake? Do we not often shame ourselves? Do we not often regret what we've done? We tighten about it; we replay it the moment over and over; and sometimes we even define ourselves by our mistakes.

But here's a thought. What if you saw any mistake you made as a divine messenger? We're going to call it your **mistake messenger**. What if every time you messed up in some way, something whispered in your ear, *"There's more of you to know; there's more of you to love. This experience will take you there if you'll listen."*

I kind of think mistakes are how the universe speaks to us in bold print. You know, like all caps, bold, underscored, exclamation point, exclamation point. I need to get your attention here! I need to get your attention. They're wake-up calls; they're invitations.

So, I'm going to ask you to do something very pleasant right now. And that's: think of a mistake you've made recently. Because I know you probably have! I have; we all have! Some mistake you've made. Maybe you've been beating yourself up about it. Maybe you've been feeling bad about it. Maybe you've been questioning your worth, your value, because of it. Blah, blah, blah.

How about this? How about if you know that it's a message for you to, I don't know, to grow beyond a pattern that you've been in, perhaps? Maybe it's a message to tell you that you're not aligned right now with your spiritual truth. You're off kilter a little bit. Maybe it's a message saying, *"You're stronger than you think you are. Come on and let's prove it to yourself."* Or maybe it's saying, *"Hey, honey, your ego is in the driver's seat there. Why don't we just take a step back and let Spirit drive the bus for a little while?"*

I don't know what the message might be. But if we look at it as a divine message – "it" meaning any mistake we made -- it doesn't define who we are, but it can be a messenger to help us connect more deeply with who we are already.

So instead of punishing ourselves for mistakes that we make, could we not ask this question: What is this experience trying to show me? And that's where the spiritual awakening comes in. What is this experience trying to show me?

This question -- can you live with failure and still stand at the edge of the lake and shout to the sliver of the full moon, "Yes!"? -- invites us to shout "Yes!" to life, even in the presence of messing up. Not because we like messing up, making mistakes, failing ... but because it's part of the process of deepening into who we know ourselves to be: whole, worthy, and divine.

And let's be clear: this "Yes!" isn't a denial or it's not false positivity. It's actually ... I'm going to call it, like, a warrior's "Yes!" It's this "Yes!" that stands in faith; that says, *"I know that this thing that just happened -- that I just did, that I just messed up -- I know that this is taking me somewhere great. And I'm willing to look and find out where it's going to take me."*

It's a "Yes!" that says, *"I choose to wake up and know that I'm worthy and know that I'm whole."*

I want to tell you one more story. This is another true story.

So, many years ago, it went to a performance of a group called Cavalia. Kuh-vol-yuh. I think that's how it's pronounced. They're kind of like Cirque de Soleil, but on horseback. And I forgot where they were -- somewhere in Phoenix -- but it was an indoor auditorium. A fairly big stage, but not a massively big stage. And these beautiful horses on the stage doing all sort of things with their riders -- just beautiful.

But one of the things they were doing was running on this stage like a gallop -- and there's like many horses running in a circle -- and the riders are doing flips and cartwheels and standing! And, you know, flipping and landing on the horse. I mean, it was unbelievable to watch! It was mesmerizing to watch.

But the most mesmerizing thing happened when one of the riders – and, remember, we are going at a good clip around this tight circle. He did a flip, and he missed his footing, came down. Did not fall off the horse, but came as close to falling off the horse as he possibly could have without actually falling off. He was like hanging. He was hanging from the horse. And that horse did not stop, because it was in a row. It couldn't stop. We'd have had a crash if one horse had stopped.

So, this horse is going; the rider is hanging; and we are all in the audience like [gasp; gasp; gasp!]. And we watched this rider find out he was probably stronger than he thought. He got back up on that horse ... not just to sit. He stood back up on that horse, and went, "Yes!" [Congregants laugh]

And when he did that, the entire auditorium rose to their feet in ovation! In yelling; in "Woo hoo!"; in adoration for what that man had done.

That was ... That's the only thing I remember specifically out of that performance, because it was transformational to watch him say, "Yes!" in the face of a pretty ... I don't think he's supposed to fall! Right? They're not supposed to do that! He made a pretty big mistake there. He may have even got in trouble for it afterwards. Who knows?

But that recovery was someone -- whether they knew it or not -- who said, *"I am waking up to my divinity right here and right now and I am saying 'Yes!' because of this mistake that I just made."*

So, as we approach Easter -- and the beautiful message of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection speaks to our relationship with the Divine -- my invitation now to you is to really deepen into these two questions. Because when you honor your truth -- even when others don't understand -- you are standing in your spiritual authority.

And when you rise from a failure and say "Yes!" to life, you are experiencing a spiritual awakening.

And when you do these things, you don't become whole and worthy and divine. You don't become that. But you make a connection with that which you already are. And then you will be an answer to one of Jesus' prayers when he said, *"And the glory which Thou, God, has given me, I give to them so that they may be one, even as we are one."*

Namaste.