

HOLY WEEK: WHAT NOW?

April 8, 2020

Rev. Richard Rogers

Rev. Richard Rogers: Good evening! I'm Richard Rogers, and I'm so glad you're with us today! We are going to celebrate Holy Week together! We are celebrating this wonderful time between Palm Sunday and Easter, and then we're going to open our minds and our hearts to all the good that God has for you.

And I want you to know how important you are: you are to this ministry and to my life... That we are holding you in prayer. That – whatever is going on – we see you safe and secure in the presence of God.

So let's pray.

MEDITATION:

As we move into this time of meditation, I want you to close your eyes, and I want you to feel the presence of God that is within you and all around you. That there is only one presence and one power: God the Good. That there is only one presence and one power: God the Good! And – no matter what's going on in your life today – we hold to that realization: that there is one presence and one power at work in my life. God the Good. That God's infinite Spirit is at work in every area of my life. That I am safe. I am whole. I am complete. I am prosperous. I am loved. I am blessed beyond my wildest dreams.

Take another deep breath. And just let the goodness of God roll into your life. Come right here, Spirit! Fill my life with your overflowing goodness! Fill me with all that you are! Fill me with the absolute abundance of your Spirit! Bless me in ways too numerous to name. And during this Holy Week, let me feel your presence and power. As I walk through each day of this experience, let me take it deeper. Let me know you in a more profound way. Let me walk in grace.

Today, we hold every man, woman and child that is a part of our ministry: we see them safe; we see them secure; we see them blessed; we see them healthy and whole. We see them happy and enjoying this time. That the light of this ministry goes out in all directions to awaken the souls who are hungry for more God. To awaken the presence and power of God that's within us all. That we are here for God. We are here for pure good. And today we celebrate the resurrecting power of God. And so it is. In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, it is done. Amen.

SONG:

Rusty Ferracane: 'Celebrate Your Life' (accompanied by Craig Bohmler on piano)

There are days so hard it seems like nothing's going right
There are nights so cold you're just praying for the light
There are times when you think that there's no going on
You're convinced that you're not that strong
But just then a day like this comes along ... so

Celebrate your life today
Great and joyful things have come your way

Love with all your heart and soul today
Know that God has made you whole
There will never be a better day than today
To celebrate!

Every morning there's reason to feel blessed
'Cause just for you God has set aside the best
You can do whatever you dream of
All you need to do is love yourself
And then you will find you will always rise above ... so

Celebrate your life today
Great and joyful things have come your way
Love with all your heart and soul today
Know that God has made you whole
There will never be a better day than today
To celebrate!

It can take so long to reap what you sow
You can lose your way even when you're sure which way to go
So why wait to appreciate what you have now
You already understand how
You just open your eyes and heart as wide as they'll allow ... and

Celebrate your life today
Great and joyful things have come your way
Love with all your heart and soul today
Know that God has made you whole
There will never be a better day than today
To celebrate!
To celebrate!
To celebrate!

[Light clapping]

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Rogers: Fabulous! Fabulous! Fabulous! Rusty, Craig: thank you! That was fabulous! Thank you; thank you! We are so blessed! Thank you for being here today. God bless you both!

Have you ever noticed that there's a pattern in your life that – while you're living it – you don't really pay attention, or you don't really notice, or you really can't see it? But it's only in hindsight – as you look back – that you can actually see the hand of God at work in your life in ways that, while you were going through it, you could have never imagined the blessings that were going to come from that experience?

You know, many of you know that when – by the time I was 23... And the thing that really got me into living a more spiritual life was – by the time I was 23 – I was a year's salary in debt. I couldn't make the minimum payments on my life. And you know that, in that time of really soul-searching and

transformation that I went through at that time, there were three things that really changed in my life. And all of them were about giving back.

The first one was that I began to work with the local YOUTH in our local Unity church in southern California. I began to give back as a YOUTH sponsor and to work with the teenaged kids to give back for all that I'd been given through my own experience with YOUTH.

I also became a "Big Brother" to a boy whose father was in prison, because I wanted to give back in a way of really making a difference in a young person's life.

And the third thing that I did was that I began to tithe. And it's kind of scary when you begin to tithe, but it's even doubly scary when you can't already make the minimum payments on your life, and you make a commitment that the first tenth of all you receive is going to go to where you're spiritually fed. And so I began to tithe.

Within two years... Within a year, I was completely out of debt. Within two years, I was making over \$100,000. And this was a few years ago; I was 25. So that was a ton of money for somebody who was 25. And I was leaving at the beach in southern California, making \$100,000 a year, with more money than I didn't need at the time. And so I did what many other people do: I found creative ways to spend it. And so, at 25, I went and I bought a 1969 Porsche 911 Targa: the one where the top pops off. And I thought I was the bomb of the bomb. I thought I was all that and a bag of nuts!

And my favorite thing to do was: on a Sunday after I'd go and work with the kids on Sunday morning, go have some lunch with friends and family. And then I would get in my car and I would drive the back roads of Orange County. And this was long enough ago that there actually were back roads in Orange County, California, before there was all covered in houses and everything was a "Rancho" this or a "Mission" that. And there were actually backroads: old country roads. And I would get in my Porsche and I would drive too fast, and I would just have the time of my life in that convertible that was just a fabulous experience.

And one of those Sunday afternoons, I was blazing down the road, and the sign came up that I'd never noticed before, and it said... It was a monastery. It was a Hindu monastery. It was a Hindu retreat center. And it said, "Daily Tours Available." And so when I could finally slow down the car and turn around – and find a safe place to turn around – I went back, and I took a tour. And I... One of the rooms they took me into was the Meditation Room; there was a Chant Room and a Meditation Room and a Dining Room...

And in the Chant Room, lining the walls were all the gurus of this monastery... Of this Hindu monastery. And one of the pictures I immediately recognized, and it was the picture of Jesus. Or one of the pictures – one of the artistic renderings – of Jesus. And I was like struck, because it was like, "Wait! That's my guy!" And they said that, in this monastery, he was one of the gurus of this monastery.

And in that moment, I personally began to realize my relationship with Jesus. Because I've always had a special relationship with Jesus, but – at that moment – I realized that he truly was my guru: my teacher. That, over my whole life, I've had this personal relationship with Jesus. And in that moment, I realized that he had always been there guiding me and directing me. And it was as though everything in my life at that moment made sense. And it made sense — not in a Christian church – but in a Hindu monastery! And I got it! I realized at that moment the relationship that he and I have had – like, unconsciously or unaware or. But – at that moment – it just became absolutely crystal clear that I had a personal

relationship. That he was not only my teacher; he was my guru. He was that presence and power that I could call on to guide me and direct me. And he was my teacher, and that I could have this relationship with him. And that it was available all the time, 24/7; it didn't matter. And that I could really have this connection – the deep, providing connection.

And as we celebrate Holy Week this week, I really wanted to spend some time dwelling on the teachings of Jesus that have made the biggest difference in my life. The teachings that have really been the game-changers for me. The teachings that have made all the difference in the world. And, in my way of thinking about it, I have three inner teachings and three outer teachings that are really the basis of what I come back to over and over again.

And what I see during this Holy Week is that it really is a time to kind of re-examine what are our fundamental spiritual understandings. What is it that we understand is happening in Holy Week? And how can we deepen our own spiritual experience in this time?

And so those three inner teachings, for me – and I've taught them before – but these three inner teachings... The first one, of course is **LOVE**. Jesus taught love over and over again. Love was the central theme of his ministry. And his love that he taught – the love that he offered – was bigger than any love that I had ever experienced – or, when I read the Scripture – that anybody else had ever experienced in that time. Because his love wasn't about even exchanges. It wasn't about loving the people who were loving him. The love that he was talking about was this love of unconditional love for every man, woman and child. He loved people that really had no right to expect his love. He was just pure love.

And then he taught. He taught in Matthew 5:44: *"But if you say you love, then love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."* And I want you to see how hard that is! I bet every one of us today – in one way or another – has somebody that we're a little upset at. Somebody that we're disappointed in. Somebody we're angry at. Somebody who we don't want to love! And his teaching, over and over again, is right here, right there with the person you want to love the least, Jesus says, *"Love them! Love the people who would even do harm to you!"* Love 'em! Love them right there. Love 'em!

Like... but I don't want to! I got it! Nobody wants to! Right? But we do it... And, as we do it, we actually open our heart and our soul to be a channel for God's infinite love in that moment, in that situation, that heals and transforms not only us, but the relationship. And it transforms what's going on in the world. And I guarantee that there's somebody in your life that you've been stingy with love. Somebody in your life that you've been holding back. Somebody in your life that you haven't been as loving as you could be. And, during this Holy Week, what if you were willing to love them at the level that Jesus loved? What if you were willing to love them in all the love that they deserved? Love! Just love 'em! Love them right there! Love them, and just see the impact that has on your life.

And the other thing that Jesus said consistently is **DON'T JUDGE**. *[Chuckles]* Now, not judging is hard! Right? Because people are so... *[Chuckles]* People! Right? They're just so human! They're so... that we just want to judge the heck out of 'em! We just want to judge them and tell them how wrong they are or how right we are. We want to just judge them because they're not making good choices. We want to judge them because they're acting silly or stupid or wrong... We want to just judge them! We want to judge the people we see on TV. We want judge our own family. We want to judge the people we work with. We want to just judge everybody.

And Jesus was pretty clear about this. In Matthew he says, *“Do not judge or you will be judged. For the same way you judge others will be the way that you will be judged. And the measure used, will be the measure that you receive. Why do you look for the speck of sawdust in your brothers’ eyes, but pay no attention to the plank in your own eye.”*

Over and over again, what I want you to see is that our human tendency is to judge. And that, somehow, if we can judge the heck out of everyone, we actually feel safer. Like, we feel like we’re doing a better job. But the reality is: as you judge others, life comes at you that way. If you’re judging others about what they should be doing – and what they should be saying and how they should be acting or what they should be doing with their money – I guarantee that life is coming back to you at the level that you judge. And what Jesus taught over and over again is: Love them! Don’t judge them! Because the reality is: you can’t be loving somebody and judging them in the same moment. Because the moment you move into judgement, you move to your head; your heart closes. I double-dog dare you to try it! I want you to try this week judging somebody, and keeping your heart open at the same moment. Because you literally cannot do it! You cannot judge someone in the same moment that you’re loving them. And I want you to try it; because you can’t do it! The moment we judge, we close our heart; we go up into our head; and we condemn them based on whatever thought we’re thinking about them. And Jesus said just don’t do it. Just don’t do it! Stop! Just open your heart; just love!

And the third point about this inner practice – because there’s three inner practices – he taught **FORGIVENESS**. And he taught to forgive everything. To forgive literally everything. In Ephesians 4:31: *“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, and every form of malice. Be kind; be compassionate to one another. Forgive each other, just as Christ has forgiven you.”*

And this is the deal! Right? That these three ideas – love, don’t judge and forgive – are all really just forms of love! That when we stay in this triangle of love – when we stay in this presence of love – it is and becomes our inner walk. Over and over again, the simplest way Jesus taught us to be in the world was love; don’t judge; and when we mess up – or we make a mistake, or when another person makes a mistake – we just forgive. And it brings our spiritual life down to something so simple: that we’re just walking in love. Love; don’t judge; and when you mess up, forgive.

And that really is the basis of what Jesus taught. That this is the simplest way to look at our spiritual practice. Love. Don’t judge. And when you mess up, forgive.

Now, those are the three inner aspects of the process. But there’s also three outer aspects of the process. And this is where life gets really big. And this is where life gets amazing. Because as we practice the inner three, we’re now actually ready to begin practicing the outer three, or what I call “the big three.” And the big three have to do with...

The first one is that **JESUS TAUGHT THAT THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN WAS AT HAND**. And that’s a radical idea! Because most prophets – most teachers – are teaching that the kingdom of heaven is available... The kingdom of God is available... But what Jesus said over and over again was the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Matthew 3:2: *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* From Luke 17:20: *“Once, being asked by the Pharisees, ‘When will the kingdom of God come?’ Jesus replied, ‘The kingdom is not coming so that it can be observed, nor will people say, ‘It is here’ or ‘It is there.’ Because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”*

And I want you to really hear that: that the kingdom of God is fully present. And so where is it? If it's fully present, why don't we see it? So the kingdom of God is within each and every one of us. Within each and every one of us is this infinite reserve of God's good. That God's good is so fully complete within you.

And so – for most of us – we're trying to create a better life of joy, of peace, of abundance outside: "out there." We work on our goals "out there" to go get it. But, really, what we're learning to do is unleash it from within... that the kingdom of God is within you! The Infinite is within you! Everything you desire – everything you want; everything that you long for – is within you! And we're learning that – the kingdom of God – that we can actually access this infinite reservoir of God's good, because it's always within us! That whatever you need – whatever you desire today – there is an infinite storehouse of God's good within you. So the kingdom of God is at hand.

Two: **JESUS TAUGHT HIS ONENESS WITH GOD**. Now, why is this important? In John 10:30 we read that Jesus said that, "*The Father and I are one.*" In Philippians he goes on, and Paul says it this way in Philippians 2:5-6: "*Let the same mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.*" Can I read that again? Verse 6: "*...who, being in the form of God*" – this is Jesus – "*thought it not robbery to be equal with God.*"

See, when Jesus taught his oneness with God, he goes on and then says that, we, too, are created in the image and likeness of God! So that we are sons and daughters of the Most High! We are actually heirs to all that God is! So when we actually get this idea of oneness, not only is the kingdom of God within us, but we are literally one with God! We are the living expressions of all that God is! That we are whole and complete and lacking in nothing! That, when we actually get this idea that within us is the kingdom of God, and that we are created fully and completely in the image and likeness of God.

So, how do we do this? What does that mean? So within our DNA, we are pre-wired for everything that God is. When you look within our DNA, is every evolutionary step of everything that we have ever been. Is already within our DNA. And, if it's every evolutionary step of what we've already been, also within our DNA is every spiritual possibility. And that we are learning to activate what we have always been.

And so, how do we do that? Well, one of the ways I want you to see how we do that is that our nervous system is actually designed for the ecstasy of God. It's actually designed for the ecstasy of God! And the reason that we're not experiencing that more and more is because we're actually using our nervous system backwards. We're using our nervous system. And, for most of us, the way we're using it is: how much pain can I tolerate and keep going? And so, we use our nervous system really as a way of saying: how much can I tolerate and keep moving forward? It's kind of the Marine Corps approach to spiritual life.

But the way our nervous system was actually designed is to hold the ecstasy of God. We are actually designed to be able to look at the face of God and survive. That when we use our nervous system to explore higher levels of joy – actually the ecstasy of God – we are actually using and activating our nervous system at its highest level.

So one of the things I want you to look at during this Holy Week is: how are you embracing higher levels of joy? Of peace? Of love? Of the very ecstasy of God? To actually activate at the highest level possible so that we are actually awakening those levels of ourselves that we have never experienced before?

Because you are pre-wired for God! Not only is the kingdom of heaven at hand, but you are completely and totally one with God! That you are whole and complete and lacking in nothing!

And the third point that Jesus made – the third part of this “outer trilogy” – is that **ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE**. And Jesus taught this in so many ways! In Matthew 19:26 he said this: *“With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”* From Luke 1:37: *“For God, nothing shall be impossible!”* From Philippians 4:13: *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”* From Mark 10:27: *“And Jesus looked upon them and said, ‘With men this is impossible, but not for God; for with God, all things are possible.’”*

And so I want you to see that: when we actually discover that we’re created in the image and likeness of God... And we actually know the truth that we are created, and we begin to actualize all the potential that’s within us... And we realize that the kingdom of heaven is within us... That this infinite storehouse of God’s good is within us... Then we begin to live a life that is very big! Because truly – in that moment – all things are possible! When we get love right – as the foundation... When we move the focus off of what other people are doing, and stop judging them... When we get forgiveness down... When we get the “inner triangle” down... What I want you to see is that “outer triangle” becomes a triangle of infinite good.

So this Holy Week, Jesus demonstrated a possibility that was bigger than most of us can even imagine. He demonstrated the resurrection. He demonstrated death and then the resurrection. And what I want you to see today is: how are you being asked in your life to demonstrate a greater possibility? See, for many of us, we have believed that we are limited. That we are broken. That we are not enough. The spiritual truth is that you are greater than you could ever imagine. And as we begin to hold that spiritual truth in new ways, we literally transform our lives.

So I want you to take one of these ideas that I’ve talked about today. I want you to lay hold of them. I want you to take them into your time of prayer. I want you to make them the foundation of your spiritual walk this week, during Holy Week.

So what were the three/six ideas? The three inner ideas – the smaller ideas – are love; don’t judge; and forgive. The outer ideas are that the kingdom of heaven is at hand; that we are completely one with God, created in the image and likeness; and that all things are possible. I want you to take one of these ideas, and I want you to live them to the very best of your ability this week. Because as we take any spiritual idea, and we lay hold of that – we take it into our mind, our heart, our soul; we pray on it; we think about it; we speak into it; we study it – those ideas become alive to us.

Today, you’re not here to live a small life. You are not here to live in the limitations of your past. You are here to overcome every situation, and be the shining star: to be the shining light on the hill. You were created in God’s image and likeness! You were created to be all that God is! So let’s take that into prayer:

And I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to all that God is. I want you to feel the presence of God that is within you and all around you. And I want you to dedicate this week to your highest level of spiritual good. To take one of these profound spiritual ideas and take them into your life. Take them into your prayers. Take them into your inner chamber. And truly draw on them. There is greater good: God has greater good for you than you have ever known before. And so, today, we take these ideas: we meditate on them; we study them; we live them; and we become the Living Truth. We

become the Word made flesh. In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

OFFERING:

You know, I want to thank everyone for their generous support of this ministry during this time. You know, this is a critical time in the life of our ministry, and we are committed to serving our congregation and our community in the greatest possible way. And I want to thank all of you who have given so generously to support this ministry.

So we're going to do our regular love offering blessing. And our love offering blessing is: *"Divine love, through me, blesses all that I am, all that I have, all that I give, and all that I receive."* Let's say that together: *"Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I am, all that I give, all that I receive, and all that I am."* In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

God bless you all! Thank you for being a part of our ministry; I look forward to being with you next week! God bless you, friend!

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