

WHY OUR PATH IS NEVER BACKWARD

April 15, 2020

Rev. Richard Rogers

Rev. Richard Rogers: Welcome! I'm Richard Rogers; I want to welcome you to the Wednesday night service, and I am so glad you're here with us online! I think you're going to love tonight's service. I think you're going to be inspired, because you are such an important part of this ministry. And I want you to know that we are absolutely – each and every day – holding you in prayer: seeing you safe and secure in the presence of God; seeing you surrounded by all that God is.

So let's move into our time of meditation.

MEDITATION:

I want you to take a deep breath, close your eyes, wiggle into your seat. And know that right where you are, God is. Right where you are, is the living, moving Spirit of God. That you are surrounded and enfolded in pure Spirit. That within you is God's infinite reservoir of blessings. So as we take a deep breath – as we relax our shoulders, relax our arms, relax our legs and our hips, let the muscles of our face relax – wherever you hold your stress, just breathe into that area. And give yourself a moment to know your oneness with God. Give yourself a moment to connect with the presence and power that created heaven and earth. The power that gave you life... that moves through every cell and fiber of your being. For you are one with the infinite power and presence and life force of God!

And we release any fears, any drama, any stories, any worries, any upsets. And we focus on the infinite life of God. That there is only one presence and one power: one God, manifesting through every cell and fiber of your being. One God! One good! One life, one love, one truth moving through every aspect – every organ, every system – of your body. You are alive with God. I am alive with God!

Take another deep breath, and feel how good it feels to be you. That you are surrounded and enfolded in pure Spirit. God loves you. God love you just the way you are! God has loved you from the beginning of time. And today we just smile into that infinite goodness, that infinite love, that infinite life, that infinite abundance. And we say thank you, God. Thank you, God, for this day. Thank you, God, for the beauty of this day. Thank you for my friends and family; thank you for all my blessings. Thank you for my spiritual community that supports me and guides me and directs me through this time: that offers me spiritual food. Thank you, God, for all the blessings in my life. And I dedicate this day to you. I dedicate this day to all that you are in my life. In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

SONG:

Kirsten Plambeck: 'Heal' (accompanied by Craig Bohmler on piano)

Take my mind and take my pain,
Like an empty bottle takes the rain.
And heal, heal, heal, heal.

And take my past and take my sins,
Like an empty sail takes the wind.
And heal, heal, heal, heal.

And tell me some things last.
And tell me some things last.

Take my heart and take my hand,
Like an ocean takes the dirty sands.
And heal, heal, heal, heal!

And tell me some things last.
And tell me some things last.
And tell me some things last.

[Light applause]

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Rogers: Fabulous! What a great song! Thank you; thank you; thank you! Thank you for being here today! Thank you for supporting this service! God bless you both! Thank you; thank you.

Alright! I love today's talk! And I want you to know that this service is absolutely dedicated to you, and I want you to know how much we miss you not being in the room, and how special and important you are to this ministry. But I hope you enjoy today's talk, because it just makes me grin when I think about this talk.

So, here we go! So have you ever tried to get back together with a boyfriend or a girlfriend? Like, have you ever done that? Where you remember them in a certain way, and you maybe think fondly of them, and maybe you see their picture on Facebook, if you were single when they had Facebook. And you think, *"You know; let's get together! Let's get together!"* And then what happens is, usually, maybe it starts kind of hot and heavy, and then – but after a time – you realize, *"Oh! That's why we're not together!"* Or maybe it happens in the first time you have dinner with them again. And you have dinner with them, and you're not even five minutes into the meal and you go, *"Oh, ha, ha, ha, ho! I remember! [Laughs] I remember why we don't do this! I don't like you!"* And it's such a transformative experience!

Because there's part of our mind that wants to go back to old ways, where we keep thinking fondly and nostalgically about old ways. And it's all kinds of things! Like, you know, I've lost a ton of weight. Not literally a ton, but close. I lost a ton of weight but, on Easter, I don't know if it's because of the years and years as a kid of having Easter baskets with sugar... but I was seriously craving sugar on Easter evening. So I went into the kitchen, and we don't have a lot of dessert things in the house. We have, like, zero. But we had the ingredients – and I checked – we had all the ingredients for molasses cookies. And molasses cookies, peanut butter cookies... Cookies are my thing! Cookies and doughnuts are my thing! And I haven't had a doughnut now for I don't know how many months now: no doughnuts! Because slippery slope.

But I made cookies: I made molasses cookies. And they were ***[makes an 'al bacio' chef's kiss gesture]*** incredible! They were a work of art! Each little round thing was just a work of excellence! And I had

about three. And I had about six. And then the sugar went from my lips into my body, and instantly I started not to feel good. Because when you haven't had sugar for a long time, and you have sugar, you remember it one way, but you experience it very differently than that.

And so, I wanted to talk today about all the times when we remember something one way, but the experience of it is **[points opposite direction]** is over here. It's just different! And sometimes... Have you ever had a couple that you used to, like, go out to dinner with? And then you go out to dinner with them, like, after five or 10 years that you haven't really seen them? And it's like, "Ooohhh. *That's why we don't do this anymore!*" And because, for me, there's like a short-term memory loss, where I remember it one way, but it's really not that experience.

I remember there was an Italian restaurant here in town. And the momma made all the pasta by hand, and it was just incredible pasta. Incredible homemade pasta! And then they sold out, and they actually moved back to Italy. And the people who bought the restaurant, they tried to make the pasta the way that momma made the pasta... but it wasn't good. Right? But I always wanted to go back to that Italian restaurant! Finally, Jill said to me, "Look; *we can go there, as long as you know it's not going to be as good.*" Right? Because, in my mind, it was going to be the way I remembered it! And those times were just over.

And so, over and over again, what I want you to look at are the times in your life where you look back on something fondly or nostalgically, and it really keeps you from focusing on the here and now, and the blessings that you want to create in your life. Because one of the areas that, spiritually, we get stuck is with looking back at our life. And looking back at our life in a way that we have, like, fond memories of... but it actually keeps us stuck. It keeps us stuck in a loop that really doesn't allow us to move forward in the way that we want to.

And so, one of the things I want you to be willing to look at today – especially this week: the week after Easter – I want you to be willing to look at the places in your life where you're still looking backwards. Where you're looking at yesterday, and your eye isn't on the focus: on today. And there's a line from Kahlil Gibran's poem on children where it says, "*Life does not go backwards, or tarry with yesterday.*" And I really want you to see that there's a human part of us that really wants to hold on to the way life used to be.

You know, one of my favorite times was when my kids were small. And my kids were growing like weeds, the church was growing like a weed... It was such a fun time for me! There were, like, a million things to do all at one time, and the kids were just hysterical and fun, and they were little. And all their cute little outfits! And it was just a great time, right? So there's a part of me that enjoys that and, if I get too focused on that, it takes away from the truth that this is the best of my life. This is, literally, the best time in my life! And I don't want to miss the joy of right now – the joy of today – because I'm looking back at another time.

And that's really what Easter's all about. Easter is about the death and the resurrection. That, sometimes in our lives, we get so focused on the past that we actually have to let that die so that we can be resurrected into a higher level of good. And the thing that is important to really know about the resurrection is that Jesus didn't resurrect as who he was; he actually resurrected into the Body of Light. He actually resurrected into a higher form of himself! He didn't come back just the way he was... not that that wouldn't have been a miracle! But that's not what happened. Over and over again, as you die

to the old ways, you actually make room for the next higher level of expression. It actually heals the wounded and broken parts of ourselves, and moves us into a higher level of good. The purpose of dying and letting go of the old is so that we can be born anew! And we can be born anew in a greater expression of God! That's the challenge that's before us!

Like, if right now – during this time of pandemic – if you're just trying to get back to where you were, you've missed the point. Because, over and over again, I can absolutely – I will be you a dollar! – that, over and over again, in your life, you can find times where you didn't get the blessing... You didn't get the miracle... You didn't get the good that a moment offered you. So what happens, over and over again, is that we have to relive it; we have to go through it again.

And what I don't want to have happen right now in this time, is for us to think that we are about recovery. Because recovery and resurrection are totally different experiences. Recovery is about going back to where we have been, but resurrection is about moving to higher ground. It's going to a place where we've never been before.

And during this time of this pandemic, I don't want you to have a mindset that you're in a time of looking for recovery. We are not looking to recover; we are looking to resurrect! We want to take all the good that is available. Literally people are giving up their lives – giving up their lives! – so that we can have, as a culture, a breakthrough into a higher level of good. And if people are giving up their lives, and we're just going back to the way it was, we have completely missed the point! We are not experiencing the level of good that is available to us in this moment, because the reality is that – through death and resurrection – we're called to go a higher level of good.

Now, do I know what that next, highest level of good is for our society? No. Do I know how to get to that next level, highest level of good for our society? No. But what I want you to see is: by holding a mindset that we are going to resurrect through this experience – to a higher level of good – that's the thing that actually creates the higher level of good. I don't want you looking back and saying, "*I want to get back to the way it was.*" No! We've got to die to that concept! We're actually going to move to a higher level of good.

And one of the reasons that I so enjoy living in Phoenix is just because of the name, "Phoenix." The Phoenix bird in mythology was a bird that died, was burned, was crucified, was transformed into another version: into a higher version of himself. And, over and over again, many of us came to Phoenix – because many of us were not born and raised here! Many of us came to Phoenix because we wanted to have a higher experience. We moved to this community because we wanted to live in a greater life. We believed that this place would offer us an opportunity to live a greater life. That's what I want for us! That's what I want for each and every one of us!

I don't want you to be holding a mindset of recovery. I want you to hold a mindset that we are being born again into a level of life that we have not yet experienced, but that we are willing to live in a life – and a world – that works for everyone.

See, when we think about nostalgia – moving back into times where there's the 50's, or the 60's, or the 70's – what we often do is we miss all the difficulties of those times. And we kind of gloss over them, and remember in kind of a "sugar-coated" way how life was. But I don't want to go back to the 50's! I don't want to go back to the 60's or the 70's or the 80's! Definitely don't want to go back to the 90's! I

want to go to the next highest level that is available to each and every one of us, where we have a life that works for us at a higher level than we've ever known before.

And Jesus was pretty clear about this! Jesus' teaching about this is one of the places where he is the harshest in his teaching. Reading from the Gospel of Luke – Luke 9:61-62: *“Still another said to Jesus, ‘I will follow you, Lord; but first let me say farewell to my family.’ And then Jesus declared to him, saying, ‘No one who puts his hand on the plow and then looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”* Let me just read that one more time. *“Still another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord; but first let me bid farewell to my family.’ And Jesus declared to them, ‘No one who puts his hand on the plow and then looks back is fit for the kingdom of heaven.”*

Right now, that is a strong teaching! That's maybe even a harsh teaching. Like, this guy just wanted to go say goodbye to his family! He said, *“Yeah, Jesus; I'll follow you! I'll be one of your disciples! I'll be one of your guys; I'll be in your tribe. Yeah, I want to do this; I want to follow you! I want you to be my teacher! I just want to go tell my parents where I'm going.”* Right? From the human level, that does not look like that request is too much. *“Let me just close out my deal; let me just close out my business. Let me just finish things off; let me just close everything out, and then I'm absolutely in. I'm going.”* And Jesus says, *“No!”* That, as soon as you put your hand on the plow, you've got to stay focused!

And, for me... You know, as a kid, I learned to sail. And one of the things you learn when you learn to sail is that you have to have a mark on the horizon that you're sailing toward, or what will happen is your boat will go all over the place. So you have to pick a mark on the horizon, and point the boat toward that mark, and keep your eye focused on that mark. Because, if you look away – literally, if you look to either side – the boat will start moving in that direction. And if you don't have a point on the horizon, then you have to pick a point on the compass, and you have to sail to the point on the compass. But if you don't keep your eye on where you're going, then you end up all over the place.

And this is really a critical time. We're going through a time of tremendous amount of change. And I want your eye to be focused on where we're going, not where we've been. We know where we've been! We know that life – there were lots of life that were fabulous where we have been. But it's not the fullness of where God's calling us to be!

One of Jesus' other teachings is very similar, and I want to share it with you. Matthew 8:21-22: *“Another of his disciples requested, ‘Lord, first let me go bury my father.’ But Jesus told him, ‘Follow me, and let the dead bury the dead.’”* Man, that's a tough teaching! That just doesn't even seem nice! Right? It's harsh!

I mean, what I want you to see is that Jesus was so committed to moving the world forward that he didn't believe he had time – in the three years of his earthly ministry – to really focus on a lot of the human niceties that we spend so much of our time with. He wanted his disciples so focused on the kingdom of heaven and where they were going, that he wanted them to let go of the old ways – old concepts, old beliefs, old customs, old traditions – and really focus on where he was calling them to be, and living at that higher level of being.

And so, today, what I want you to really look at is: Where is your focus? Because I want you fundamentally living in the moment. I want you in the experience of right now, right here. But I also want your eye focused on where you're going. And, trust me, we are not going backwards! We are not

going back to the way life used to be! If we do try to go back to the way life used to be, we're going to have to repeat this experience again and again and again until we get off of it, and begin to hold a vision of what could be in our life today.

So, what's your greatest vision? For your life, for your family, for your world, for this ministry? What's your vision that is actually greater than any vision that you've ever held before? Because there's a human part of us that wants to keep lowering our expectations so that we're not disappointed. And there's a point where you lower your expectations so low that you're not even living the life that God has promised you. That you've minimized your life to the point that you're not actually enjoying the gifts that God has for you.

In Philippians, the Apostle Paul said it this way: *"Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it; but one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press toward the goal to win the prize, which God has called me heavenlyward in Christ Jesus."*

Now, in this Scripture, Paul is talking about Christ Jesus. He's not talking about Jesus Christ. And I want to make the distinction, especially in this week, between Jesus Christ and Christ Jesus. Jesus Christ – when Paul refers to Jesus Christ – he's referring to Jesus when he is doing his earthly ministries. He's referring to him during the time when he was in the physical body. But when he refers to Jesus as Christ Jesus, what you'll notice is that the Christ and Jesus have now switched positions. In his earthly ministry, Jesus came first and the Christ came second. Now, that's not how he lived it, but that's how he was addressed: as Jesus Christ. Jesus, the Christ. Jesus, the incarnate of God. Jesus, the expression of God. Jesus, the one who expressed his Divinity. But when he goes through the crucifixion and the resurrection and the ascension, he moves from Jesus Christ to Christ Jesus. Now the Christ is his dominant way of being known. The Christ in him – the God in him – is his dominant way of being known.

And I really believe that this time – this is where we really need to keep our focus on. That we are called to fully express the Christ within. Not our personality. Not how cute we are or nostalgically looking back at the ways we've shown up or friendships. We are being called right now to express the fullness of God that is within us. Because that's the way we're going to get through this. To get through this, we have to be willing to live the greatest truth that's within us. That is our power: that is God in us!

During this time, I want you to step up and be the very best of you. Not looking back; not holding on to old images of yourself: wasn't I cute when I was this or that? But I want you to have a vision for yourself and of your life that is moving you, your family, the community, your church forward in greater ways than ever before.

So are you ready for your homework? Here's your homework! I want you to actually be willing to go through the Easter experience one more time, as an exercise. As an activity. I want you to be willing to imagine placing some things – and letting them go – in the hands of God. I want you to let go of every aspect of who you have been, and be willing to have a vision of yourself: who you're being called to be now. Because there is – for many of us – a difference between who we have been and who we're being asked to be. We haven't fully integrated our humanity and our divinity: our Christ self, our Divine self, our spiritual self with our personality. And that's the work I'm inviting you to do. That's the work that we're being asked to do in this Easter season and as we move forward: is to let the old ways die and to be resurrected into a higher version of yourself. To be willing to live the life that God has promised us.

And I know that, for some of us – maybe for all of us, truly – there’s a part of us that wants to hold on to old aspects of our life, old dramas, old stories, old identities. And it’s very troubling when we think about letting all that go. But the truth is: now is the time.

Whatever aspect of you you’ve been holding on to, would you be willing to let it go, so that God can be born through you, as you, in a greater way than ever before? You were created in the image and likeness of God: that’s our path. That’s our way. That’s the way we move through this time: is demonstrating all that God is within us. So let go of the old, and hold a vision for yourself, your family, and your world that is greater than you’ve ever lived before.

Will you take that into prayer with me?

And I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God. There is only one presence and one power: God the Good. And that, through that power of God, we are dying to the old ways. We are letting old aspects of ourselves be released, be crucified. And we are being born again into a higher experience – a greater experience – than we’ve ever known before. And we can trust God: God, I let go! I let go of the stories; I let go of the drama; I let go of all that I’ve been. I let go! And I am willing to be born anew; I am willing to be born like the Phoenix into a greater expression of myself. I am willing to be born into the highest expression that you have for me. Awaken all that you are in me, God; let me manifest the living truth of your Spirit in me. Let me awaken and live the Christ within. Thank you, God, for all the ways that you are demonstrating a higher possibility in my life. And for every time I want to hold on to the old ideas – the old beliefs, the old drama – give me the faith and the courage to let them go, so I may live the truth of who you are in me. Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! And so it is. Amen.

OFFERING:

Will you join with me now as we bless our offering? And I know that many of you are giving electronically, and you don’t have a check or money that you’re going to give. But some of you are giving with a check. Whatever it is, I want you to imagine holding your gift – your offering – in your hand. And we’re going to bless this offering together. And our offering blessing is, *“Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I have, all that I give, and all that I receive.”* Together: *“Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I have”* – and I want you to feel that! – *“All that I have, all that I give, and all that I receive.”* In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, it is done. Amen.

God bless you, friend! Again, thank you for being a part of this ministry! Thank you for your generous support of this work, especially in this critical time, where we’re able to reach so many in their hour of need. And I just want to thank you over and over again for how generous you’re being with this ministry. God bless you, friend! I look forward to being with you next week. Thanks for being here!

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