

STANDING ON THE 'I AM'

Week #1 of a 6-Week Series Based on Richard Rohr's Book, *The Universal Christ*

May 20, 2020

Rev. Richard Rogers

Rev. Richard Rogers: Welcome! I'm Richard Rogers; this is the Wednesday Night Service, and I am so glad you're here!

This week we're going to start a new series based on *The Universal Christ* by Richard Rohr. You know, I think it's a fabulous book, and it teaches principles that Unity's been teaching for years. And it's great to hear it from a different point of view. So that's where we're going tonight.

I want you to take a deep breath; I want you to get ready for tonight. And then after tonight's service, we're going to be doing a Zoom gathering. And we're going to put the link right below you; you can just cut and paste it, put it in your browser. Join us on Zoom tonight – 8 o'clock. I just want to check in with you. You know, there's so many of you that I haven't seen in the last couple of months; I just want to see your faces; I want to know you're okay. I want to share your prayer requests; I just want to hear what's going on in your life. With just a little time of connection on Zoom for everybody that attends Wednesday night.

The link is: <https://tinyurl.com/yd7ynxh3>

So let's take a deep breath, and let's get ready to have a fabulous experience with God.

MEDITATION:

So as we move into this time of prayer and meditation, I want you to feel the presence of God that is right here, right now. And the idea that has been blessing me – the words that have been blessing me – is this idea that, the simple idea that God is blessing me now. God is blessing me now. And I find, as I'm driving or doing exercise or a chore or activity in my life, those words just keep coming back to me over and over again: God is blessing me now. God is blessing me now!

And the truth is: as I begin to affirm those words over and over again, I begin to look for the blessings. I begin to notice the blessings. And I begin to give thanks for the blessings in greater and greater ways. God is blessing me now. God is blessing me now! It's the truth! That we're having a beautiful day today. The Spirit of God is blessing us and healing us. The Spirit of God is going before us and opening doors of abundance and creativity and love, joy and peace. God is blessing us now!

No matter what you're walking through right now – and no matter what's going on in your life and the life of your family – I want you to come back to these simple words: God is blessing me now. You know, as human beings we can organize our life in one of two ways: we can see everything as a blessing, or everything as a curse. And when we really, truly become masters of our own mind and heart and soul, we begin to see everything as a blessing. God is blessing me now!

We not only see it for ourselves – and see it for our family – but we see it for every man, woman and child on the planet. God is blessing me now. God is blessing me now! Over and over again, we open our minds, our hearts, our souls, and we give thanks for that. We give thanks for all the good that God is. That we are blessed beyond our wildest dreams. Thank you, God! We dedicate this day and everything in it to God. May I live the greatest truth I know; may I be the man that you know that I can be. And we know this for ourselves and for all people. Thank you, God! And so it is. Amen.

SONG:

Rusty Ferracane – ‘Go the Distance’ (accompanied by Craig Bohmler on piano)

I have often dreamed of a far off place
Where a hero's welcome would be waiting for me
Where the crowds will cheer, when they see my face
And a voice keeps saying, "This is where I'm meant to be"

I'll be there someday; I can go the distance
I will find my way if I can be strong
I know every mile will be worth my while
When I go the distance, I'll be right where I belong

Down an unknown road to embrace my fate
Though that road may wander, it will lead me to you
And a thousand years would be worth the wait
It might take a lifetime, but somehow I'll see it through

And I won't look back; I can go the distance
And I'll stay on track; I won't accept defeat
It's an uphill slope, but I won't lose hope
'Til I go the distance, and my journey is complete

I am on my way; I can go the distance
I don't care how far; somehow I'll be strong
I know every mile will be worth my while
I would go most anywhere to find where I belong

[Light applause]

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Rogers: [applauds] Fabulous! That was so good! That was so good! Gentlemen, thank you; thank you; thank you! Thank you for being here each week. Thank you for giving your gifts. Thank you for being so brilliant and talented; we are so blessed by both of you! Thank you, gentlemen! God bless you both!

Alright, tonight we're focusing on standing on the "I AM." And the question that I want to place before you tonight is: Who do you look like? Like, in your family, do you look more like your father or your mother? You know, do you take after more your father or your mother? You know, what about your children? Do your children – if you have children – do they look like you? Or do they look like their father or their mother? Do they look like your partner? You know, sometimes in families, we get so concerned – or so fixated – on which, on who a child looks like.

You know, in our family, my son looks about as close to exactly like me as is humanly possible. He looks just like me! I think he's adorable! He's a good looking kid; I think he's better looking than I am, but he's a good looking kid! And he looks so much like me! And my daughter just looks exactly like her mother. And as my daughter gets older, she just looks more like her mother. And so, I don't think our DNA co-mingled at all! I mean, it was either one or the other! I don't think there's a whole lot of mixing going on there!

You know, and in my family, when we look back at family pictures – we were just going through a lot of mom’s pictures recently – and we were going through all the pictures. And you can see family resemblances generation after generation. You can see these family resemblances. In fact, my mom has a picture of herself on the beach, and she’s probably two or three years old. And there’s a picture of my niece at the same age – also on the beach; also in her little swimsuit – and they look like twinsies! I mean, it’s crazy how much alike they look! It’s just fabulous!

And so part of our growing and maturing is understanding our biological family: how much we’re like our biological family, and how much we’re not like our biological family. I mean, I hope that you feel like, in your life, that you’ve moved forward and higher than your family of origin. That we want to take all the good from our family – we want to take all the blessings from our family. But, you know, the idea is that every generation gets a little bit more loving, a little wiser, a little bit more prosperous: that we just keep moving the ball forward. And that’s...

I was on a call last week with – I have a group of friends – a group of men that we talk to each week. And two of the men in the group are brothers, and their father passed away. And I have known these guys for a lot of years; I’ve known these guys since high school. They were part of the Youth of Unity group that I belonged to 100 years ago when I was in high school. And one of their dads, for a while, one of our sponsors. And I could share with these two brothers how impactful their father was, and how much they are like their father, or I see that they’re like their father. Their father was very well educated – really, just a very smart guy. And what I always liked about him was that he was well educated – advanced degrees, taught at university – but he had this spiritual life. And he was really one of the first men that I’d ever really met that had advanced degrees, but also was deeply, profoundly spiritual. And I loved the way that he married both of those qualities.

When you were growing up, who did you want to be like? Like, of your family members, was there a family member that you really wanted to be like? That you wanted to take after and emulate? Or was there a family member that you hoped and prayed [*chuckles*] that you wouldn’t be like? You know, and I think most of us have a little bit of both: that we have those family members that maybe we admire and respect and enjoy, and we have those family members where it’s, “*God; please, God! Don’t make me like that! Like, I don’t want to grow into being that person.*” So most of us carry both sides of that coin!

You know, I think about *Star Wars*. And I think about Luke Skywalker. And you remember the scene! It’s *The Empire Strikes Back*, and Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader are in this duel. And, you know, the movie quote is: Darth Vader says to Luke Skywalker, “*Obi Wan never told you what really happened to your father.*” And Luke Skywalker says, “*He told me enough; he told me you killed him!*” And Darth Vader said, “*No! I am your father!*” And the trauma of that was so great! [*chuckles*] You know, that he lived this image of just hating Darth Vader – hating everything that Darth Vader stood for; hating everything that Darth Vader was; just wanting to take him out at any opportunity.... And then he finds out that he is his father! And if you remember the scene, they’re in this duel – they’re in this long silo, of a space silo. And Luke Skywalker is so distraught at hearing that Darth Vader is his father that he lets go and falls into the abyss. And, in that moment, we have no idea what’s going to happen to poor Luke Skywalker. But we feel the trauma of finding out who his father is.

You know, and that’s part of our journey: is really making peace with our heritage, and where we came from. And who our people are and who our people aren’t.

You know, my father was adopted. And he didn’t find out he was adopted until he was in junior high school. And he had a lot of cousins that they all played with. They grew up in southern California and L.A., and they had a lot of cousins they played with. And his cousins were teasing him that he was adopted. You know many kids, you know, we tease each other about being adopted. And they said, “*No;*

no! You really are adopted!" And my dad went home and asked his parents, and they said, "Yes; you are adopted." And that's when he first found out; he had no idea that he was adopted. Found out when he was 13 that he was adopted, and then it was kind of never discussed again.

And then, when I was in my late 20's, I was with my dad; we were visiting my grandmother in her nursing home. And she was giving him a little bit of heat about being in the nursing home, and how she didn't like it; she wanted to get out. And I said to my dad as we were walking out – because he was really feeling torn up; he was really disappointed; he was feeling sad about that experience – I said, "Dad, you're a great son to Grandma. You were just a great son." And I remember my dad turning to me and saying, "That's the point. I'm not her son; I was adopted." And that was the first time that I found out that my dad was adopted. And it was in such an emotional moment; you know, I was trying to console my dad, and he told me he was adopted. And I remember I was blown away. My dad got in his car and he drove home, and I was going back to my house, and I remember racing home, calling my brother and my sister and saying, "Did you guys know that Dad was adopted?" Like, we had no idea! Like, we were adults; we had no idea Dad was adopted. And Dad carried that. You know, it was part of his journey... is he always felt bad about not knowing his "people." He didn't know where he came from.

And it was after both of grandparents had passed, several years after that, my dad got a letter in the mail from his favorite aunt, and said, "I have honored your parents' desire – your parents' request – to never tell you this until after they had gone. But what I need you to know is that you're my biological son." That his favorite aunt all these years was his biological mother! And, as the story goes, my dad was born in the late '20s, and it was just not okay. She got pregnant by this man, and my grandparents couldn't have children, and so my dad was adopted by what would have been his uncle. But he lived his whole life not knowing that. And the moment he found out who his biological parent was, there was I think a place in my dad that just calmed down. There was a place in my dad that – maybe for the first time in his life – he felt settled.

And I know that, when we don't feel like we know what we need to know, I know that there's a place in us that does feel unsettled. And today what I want us to look at is that – I'll call it drama – that there is a drama going on in our life. And the drama is: where and with whom do you identify? Because in our human condition, we can identify with our family, and we can say we look like this person, or we look like this person, or we act like Uncle Joe... Or please don't make me act like Uncle Joe! Or we have this color hair, or we're smart like this person, or we get cranky like this person. And we spend a lot of time really looking at our human identity. And I think we're always going to do that; there's a part of us that just feels a connection in our biology to the people that we come from.

But the whole purpose of living a spiritual life is that our identity is greater than our DNA! And what I mean by that is that our spiritual connection – that we are created in the image and likeness of God – that our spiritual identity really is the thing that is more dominant than anything else.

And so, if we just identify with our DNA – or if we just identify with our biological heritage – we really miss the best part of who we are. And I believe that that's spiritual! I believe that each and every one of us was created in the image and likeness of God. That really, in truth, we are created in God's image and God's likeness!

And Richard Rohr – he's a Catholic priest – wrote a book called *The Universal Christ*. And the purpose of this book is to reshape the idea that Christ is Jesus' last name: the idea that Christ was anointed in one individual in time, and that is the only individual who has ever been Christed. And he makes a case that it's universal: that it is God's creation expressed in human form.

And I think that there's such a powerful transformation that happens in our life when we begin to take on the identity of who we really are as a child of God. As we begin to take on the spiritual identity of our divine nature – not just our human nature.

And I don't want to take anything away from your human nature. I actually love that you have a human nature! I love the way you show up: I love your smile; I love the way you show up. It's adorable! Don't change a bit! But it's not the Good News! The Good News is that you were created in the image and likeness of God!

Let me read from Charles Fillmore, the co-founder of Unity. He said this: *“Christ -- The incarnating principle of the God man; the perfect Word or idea of God, which unfolds into the true man and is blessed with eternal life by measuring up to the divine standard, thus fulfilling the law of righteousness... God abides in each person as His potential perfection.”*

See; that's the Good News! You know, if you were brought up in a Christian church, the chances are very good that you were brought up believing at some level that you were a worthless sinner, and that you were saved by believing in Jesus Christ. And that, if you believed in Jesus Christ, you were saved from your own sinful nature, and that – because of that – you had a chance at redemption. You had a chance of transformation.

And over and over again in this book, *The Universal Christ*, what Richard Rohr is about is that the Christ is, at nature, is a condition, is the expression of God in all of us.

And reading from John 1: *“In the beginning was the Word; the Christ.”* And I'm going to paraphrase it. *“In the beginning was the Word.”* And in the King James Version it's the “Logo.” *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. The Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it.”*

And I love that imagery! That you were created in the image and likeness of God! That – no matter what you were told about yourself – that you carry that Spirit of God! You carry the Logos; you carry the Divine Principal! You carry the Matrix within yourself! You carry all that God is within you! And – no matter how much darkness; no matter how much confusion; no matter how much ignorance or disbelief that we have about our Christ nature – there is nothing that can hide the spiritual truth of who you are! You were created in the image and likeness of God!

Jesus said in John 10:30, *“I and the Father are one.”* You know, in Unity, maybe one of our favorite Scriptures is from Colossians 1:27: *“Christ in you, your hope of glory.”*

And really what I want us to focus on today is: I want you to move your identity away from your humanity. Acknowledge your humanity. Acknowledge where you came from; acknowledge your DNA. But what I want you to begin to do is to identify that your primary identity – the primary way that you show up – is as an expression of God. Until we can really integrate that truth – that spiritual truth – that we are created in the image and likeness of God. That is the Good News! The Good News is that you are saved because God is in you!

The Good News is all things are possible, because God is in you! The Good News is that you can transform any area of your life, any situation, any moment, anything that is going on in your life! The Good News is that everything can be transformed when you identify first and foremost that the power of God is in me!

Now, many people teach that we have the spark of the Divine, or we have the essence of the Divine. And what I want you to see is: in that teaching, it's as though we water it down to be tolerable. You know, when you think of a spark, do you think of a raging brush fire? No! You think of a little, teeny **[laughs]** spark! So when you say, *"I have the spark of the Divine in me!"* it's like – in all of this, there's this little, bitty spark of the Divine. And what I want you to begin to see is that there's this raging spiritual fire within you! That the glory of God is within you! Not in you as a little spark of the Divine, but it is the fullness of God that is within you! That the total of God is in you waiting to be expressed!

And you can say, *"Well, I am Italian,"* because some of us come from that lineage. You can say, *"I'm an African American."* Yes! Yes! But your true identity – the thing that brings the whole human family together – is that you were created in the image and likeness of God. You are empowered by the Christ Spirit!!! The fullness of God is in you!!!

So are you ready for your homework? This week your homework – as we're going through this series on *The Universal Christ* – your homework is to, over and over again, identify with the greatest and not the lesser. To identify with your spiritual essence. To identify God in you as your way through any obstacle, any challenge, any problem. That, no matter what you're called to deal with today – no matter what you're called to overcome; whatever you're called to know or be about in your life today – it's not because of your DNA that you can get through it. It is because Christ in you is the Good News! The full power of God is in you!!!! And as we identify with that – as we bring that to the focus of our mind, our thoughts, our prayers – it changes everything!

"God in me is my path." Will you say that with me? *"God in me is my path."*

Let's take that into prayer:

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God that is right here, right now. That there is only one presence and one power: God the Good. There is only one presence and one power in me: God the Good. There is only God in me: God the Good. Today we awaken to the fullness of God in us. We awaken to all that God is. We awaken to the truth and the power and the possibilities of God in us. Today, no matter where you came from – no matter what's in your biology, no matter who your family is, who your parents were – today identify with the power of God, and watch everything in your life be transformed. And so it is. Amen.

OFFERING

This is the time of giving of our gifts and tithes, and I invite you to hold them in your hand. I brought my check, myself! We're going to bless them together! And our offering blessing – we're going to keep it really simple tonight: *"Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I give and all that I receive."* Together: *"Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I give and all that I receive."* In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

CLOSING

So for the next couple of weeks I'm going to be focusing on Richard Rohr's book, *The Universal Christ*. If you want to read along with me, we're going to go section by section. And I invite you to join us and really transform your mindset from looking at yourself as separate to looking at yourself as created in the image and likeness of all that God is. God bless you, friend; have a great week, and I look forward to being with you TONIGHT at 8 O'CLOCK ON ZOOM. Be there! Aloha!