

GRATEFUL FOR RIGHT NOW

Week #4 of the 5-Week Series, "40 Days of Gratitude"

Nov. 10, 2021

Rev. Richard Rogers

Rev. Richard Rogers: Okay, you ready? Take a breath; here we go. Buckle up! *[Congregation laughs]*

So do you think you spend more time living in the past, the present or the future? And I really want you to not just kind of throw away ... give me a throw away answer. I really want you to spend some time this week really paying attention to how much time and energy you spend thinking about and living in the past. Right? How much time and energy do you spend really focused on the future? Like, thinking, planning, worrying about the future? Right?

And how much time do you really spend in the present moment: in the experience of the present moment? Because I want to make a case tonight that I want you to learn from the past; I want you to plan for the future. But I want you to live in the now. I want you to live in this moment.

And culturally, there's a lot of talk -- spiritually, culturally -- there's a lot of talk about living in the moment: living fully in the moment. But I really want us to go deeper, and to really explain why that is. And, from a spiritual point of view, why that is so important: to move your focus off of the past, off of the future, and bring it really fully, clearly into this moment. Because, well: that's where God is. That's where possibilities are.

You know, when my wife, Jill, and I got together, one of the things that I knew: that she'd always wanted to go to Italy, especially Venice. Right? And we were spending a lot of time and energy putting my kids through college, and the idea was, "We'll get there." Right? "We'll get there. We've got plenty of time. Like, we'll get there."

And then, you know, six, seven years ago she had the breast cancer, and then she's had some neurological issues from that. And she hasn't been able to fly in a plane for the last six years. And there was a part of us that was like, "Wow. Are we ever going to get to Venice?" Right?

And the take-away from that experience was, for us, is that we're not waiting on anything. Right? If we want to do it -- if it's important to us -- we do it. Like, have you ever put off something you wanted to do, thinking there would be another time. And then it's just not right. And then you miss that moment ... and then it's gone. Right?

But I want you to see tonight how much, as spiritual beings, we are called to live in this moment, and to live fully, passionately: to be fully alive in this moment. Because this is what we have. We have this idea that we have forever, and spiritually, it's true: you're a spiritual being, and you're eternal. Because you're an expression of God. But this moment is a "now you see it, now you don't" proposition. Like, this moment will never come back again. There are no mulligans when it comes to this moment. Do you know what a mulligan is? Any golfers? Right? This is it. This is the moment.

Jesus said, in Matthew 6, "Therefore, I tell you: do not be anxious about your life, and what you should eat or what you should drink, or about your body and what you should put on it. Life is more than food, and your body is more than clothing. Look at the birds of the air; they neither toil nor reap, or gather into barns. And yet your heavenly Father feeds them all. Aren't you more valuable than these? And which of you, by being anxious, can add one cubit to a span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field: how they grow. They neither toil nor spin, and yet, I tell you: even Solomon, in all of his glory, is not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothed the grasses of the field, which today are alive and tomorrow will be thrown in the ovens, how much more will he clothe you? O, men of little faith. Therefore, I tell you: do not be anxious, saying 'What shall I eat? Or what should I

drink? Or what shall I wear?' For even the Gentiles seek these things. And your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be yours, as well."

Jesus spent a lot of time talking about the kingdom. You know, and for many of us, the way that we understood or heard the kingdom was this idea "the kingdom to come." And, for many of us, it was taught to us as if the kingdom happens after you die. But if you really look at what Jesus taught, he said the kingdom of heaven is at hand. He said, "*The glory of God is all around you, and men see it not.*"

He, over and over again, made a case that, if we're going to experience the kingdom -- if we're going to experience all the good that God is -- it only is available in this moment. And the idea that, for thousands of years, the churches have been talking about "the kingdom to come" ... Really, it's a mis-teaching of what he taught! Because what he taught is: was that the fullness of God is only accessible in this moment.

Now, can your mind make a story about your past and build bridges to your past, and build bridges to your future? And you can create mental constructs of what's going to happen in the future. And you can spend a lot of time thinking about what happened 10, 20, 30 years ago. Yes! Your mind can build bridges in conceptual ideas, both on the past and the future.

But the way that we access God -- the way that we truly know God; the way that we step into the infinite blessings of God -- is NOW. It is only in this moment that the fullness of God opens up to us. Only in this moment: when we are fully present in this moment.

How many times ... Have you ever, like, driven home from work, and you're pulling into the driveway or the garage, and you wonder, "*How did I get here?*" Right? It's like you were ... we were so thinking about this or that, and we were so disconnected from the experience that we were having, we were totally living by auto-pilot. It's very hard to move into the kingdom from an ... No. **[Laughs]** I'm going to rephrase that. It is impossible to move into the kingdom from a place of unconsciousness. We actually have to awake in the moment to the fullness of God. Because, in the moment, there is no lack. Right?

How many of you have ever heard the idea that, in God, all things are infinite? In God, there is an infinite supply of good? Right? We've heard that, right? So, the reality is that we can only experience it in the moment.

Here's an affirmation that I want you to play on ... that I want you to play with this week. It says, "*In this moment, I have everything that I need.*" Will you say that with me?

[With congregation]: "*In this moment, I have everything that I need.*"

Now, we don't believe that! **[Congregation laughs]** Right? We just don't believe that! We think maybe there's a possibility, if we win the lottery, that there will be a time when we have everything that we need. But we do not believe that, in this moment, we have everything that I need.

How many of you have run out of air in the last two minutes? **[Congregation laughs]** Like, does everybody have enough air in this room? Right? Now, we can argue about whether it should be warmer or cooler. We can argue about the temperature of the air. But, in this moment, you have everything that you need. Like, your body has all the nutrition it needs, because you're still here. Right? You have all the oxygen you need. You have all the blood running through your body. In this moment, you have everything that you need.

But there is such a belief in lack and limitation that we don't honest believe that we have everything that we need. But when we move fully into this moment -- and really begin to embrace the infiniteness in every moment -- we realize, in every moment, we have everything that I need.

And there's a game that ... A little computer game I play on the computer. And one of the things that I love about this game is that every game that I play is 100% you have the ability to solve it. Now, does that mean that every time I win this game? No. But what intrigues me is that, every time I play it, it is completely solvable. Right? It's completely ... That, every time I play it, there is a way to win. And I love that! I love that idea!

And what I want you to begin to look at in your life: when you move into the moment, and really embrace the fullness of God -- that the kingdom of heaven is here and now ... When you embrace the moment, and realize that, in this moment, everything I need has already been provided ... Because our assumption is, "*Huh. There may not be enough.*" Right? But when we move into this moment, everything changes.

You know, the master of living in the now is Eckhart Tolle. He wrote *The Power of Now*; many of us have read it. I want to share a couple of quotes, because I think he has so much to say about really living and moving in the moment.

He says, "*Realize deeply that the present moment is all you have. Make the now the primary focus of your life.*" He goes on: "*As soon as you honor the present moment, all unhappiness and struggles dissolve.*"

Like, I really want you to hear that! The moment you move into the ... The moment you fully embrace the moment, I want you to see that all the unhappiness and struggles are based on the past or the future! "*When you truly move into the moment, all unhappiness and struggles dissolve, and life begins to flow with joy and ease. When you act out of the present moment awareness, whatever you do becomes embedded with a sense and quality of care and love ... even the most simple facts.*"

So one of the difficulties that we deal with is how smart we are. Right? We are so smart that we create all these constructs, and then we begin to live into them, even when they don't make us happy.

Eckhart Tolle goes on: "*Time isn't precious at all, because it's an illusion. What you perceive as precious is not time, but the one point that is out of time called the 'now.'* That is precious, indeed. The more you focus on time, past and future, the more you miss the now, the most precious thing there is."

So sometimes Winnie the Pooh says it best. **[Congregation laughs]** Right? Winnie the Pooh asks, "*What day is it?*" Piglet squealed, "*It's today!*" Pooh says, "*That's my favorite day.*" **[Congregation laughs]** Right?

So what I want us to look at today is: how do we move out of the past, out of the future, and be fully present in the now? And really allow ourselves to expand into the now? Because it doesn't look like it. It looks like the areas of opportunity are ahead of us. We keep having this vision for our life that the future is going to be better. And I want you to have a vision that the future's going to be better!

But what I want you to see is: the access point for the kingdom -- the access point for the infinite -- is right now. 'Kay? I'm going to give you a few ideas on how to move into the now in your life.

The first one: how do you move into the now? The first one is: The way that you move out of your head and back into yourself -- back into your body -- is that we have to **BREATHE**.

You know, there's a lot of talk right now about mindfulness meditation. Right? And mindfulness meditation: the fundamental aspect of mindfulness meditation is that you use your breath to get centered. Right? That most of us kind of us are kind of "hee hee hee" breathers. And the mindfulness meditation teaches us to breathe from our belly: baby breathing, right? Where like, a baby breathes from their belly, and you watch their belly go in and out, right? And that's the way that we always ... that all of us can shift out of our mental constructs and breathe.

How many of you know that you're kind of a shallow little "hee, hee, hee" breather? Right? And what I want you to practice -- you can even start right now -- I want you just to take a few deep, clearing breaths, and I want you to just become aware -- how your awareness then moves down from your head down into your body. Just by the act of breathing! By the act of breathing, everything slows down, and you become more present. So that every time you're feeling anxious -- any time you notice that you're worried.

Because, by and large, there are millions of people today in the U.S. that are anxiety drugs. Now, if you're on an anxiety drug, I want you on it. **[Laughs]** Especially if you're on the highway. Right? I want you on the road calm and relaxed, right? But I really want us to see that, for some of us, because we're spending so much time in our past or worried about our future, that we're not in the present moment. And one of the greatest ways to move into the present moment is just breathe. Big old deep, belly breaths. Breathe! Right? And, as you breathe, what I want you to see is that you shift out of your head and back into your body.

Give us the next one. Two. Two is about **AWAKENING TO WHAT YOU'RE FEELING**. And most of us ... **[Laughs]** Have you ever been in an argument with somebody, and then about two days later you say, "Ooooh. Why didn't I say that? Ooooh, I should have ... That would have really got 'em!" Right?

And I think that sometimes, when it comes to our feelings, we're sometimes two or three days behind our feelings. That sometimes it takes us two or three days to actually figure out what we're feeling. Am I right? Because we spend so much time in our head, we're not always aware what we're feeling down in our body. And so the more that we become aware of our feelings, the easier life becomes.

Now, why would we not want to become aware of our feelings? We don't like 'em! Right? If we don't like 'em -- if we're afraid of our feelings; if we don't want to be feeling what we're feeling -- we want to go unconscious from the neck down. We want to think about, but we don't want to have to feel it.

But what I want to suggest tonight is: if you don't know what you're feeling -- if you can't feel what you're feeling -- you can't release it. That, whatever feeling it may be -- upset, anger, disappointment, frustration -- whatever you're feeling ... that all you have to do is to be willing to feel it long enough so that you can release it and give it to God. That, no matter what you're feeling is, you can release it in a moment. And, as you release it and give it to God -- as you do it with your breath, as you just take a deep breath and just let it go -- at that moment, you are actually free. But until you actually know, you can't heal what you can't feel. You can't heal what you can't see.

Unconsciousness is not a great way to move into spiritual healing. Right? So I want you to feel what you're feeling, and then I want you to let it go, and it actually moves you into the present.

Three. The next one is about **STOP TAKING YOUR THOUGHTS SERIOUSLY**. Right? That we have been trained to believe what we're thinking is right, is true. Right? And part of our journey to move back into the moment is when we can begin to giggle about our own thoughts.

"Isn't that adorable that she believes that?" Right? *"Isn't that cute that he's thinking that thought, and really thinking that's the way it is?"* Right? That, when we actually begin to hold our thoughts loosely, and move down into our body and to our breath, everything gets easier.

Because, have you ever spent a whole night in worry? Right? How much did that move your life forward? Right? Most of the time, a year later you can't even remember what you worried about. But it seems so real at the time!

Over and over again, what I want you to see is: just because you're thinking it, doesn't mean it's real. It doesn't mean it has any power over your life. I want you to know what you're feeling so you can release them, but I want you to hold your thoughts lightly.

Let's go to the next one. Do you see what it is? **LEARN TO SAVOR THE EXPERIENCE BY SLOWING DOWN.** How many of you know that you are fast eaters? [*Congregation laughs*] Any fast eaters in the room? Now, I'd like to suggest tonight that eating fast is a sign of fear. That, if you're a fast eater, there's really two dominant fears, right? The first one is: there's not enough time, so I need to eat fast. And the second one is: there's not going to be enough, so I need to eat fast.

Like, in the household that I raised in, my brother and I were both really big, right? [*Laughs*] And, in our household -- because we always had friends and family over -- it wasn't a contest, but it was certainly a challenge, right? To see who could get more of whatever it was, right? And, in our household, the way you got more was to inhale what was there, right?

But it was driven that, every time you're in a hurry, what I want you to see is: it's driven by a sense of fear. It's driven by a sense of lack. If you're rushing off anywhere, it is being driven by a fear. And if we're really going to truly move into the moment, the way we move into the moment is to slow down and see that being leisurely is spiritual. Being a person of leisure actually is a statement of faith that you know that everything you need is going to be provided, so you don't have to hurry through anything. That, whatever you're rushing through in your life, is absolutely a statement of your belief in lack.

And I want you to really take a deep breath and ask yourself, "*Who would I be if I was a man or woman of leisure? Well those people ...*" Right? But the idea today is: if God's giving you the kingdom -- if everything you need is provided -- could you just trust that? Could you slow down and experience the kingdom as a gift from God?

See, it's really hard to have an enlightening experience at 90 miles an hour. Right? The benefit of living your life at 90 miles an hour is that you always stay jacked up on adrenalin. Right? And the question then becomes: would you be willing to let go of the adrenalin of your life for the ecstasy of God if you couldn't have both?

Tonight I want you to see how much your fear drives you to be busy. Right? Drives you to get things done. Because you don't want to miss it! When that blue light goes on, you don't want to be at the other end of the store. Anybody old enough to remember, was it K-Mart? Blue light special? Right? You don't want to be at the other end of the store.

Okay; let's go to the next one. So number five. The way that we move into the moment is: **WE EXPAND THE MOMENT BY NOTICING OUR BLESSINGS.** So, as we begin to slow down, we begin to notice our blessings. As we begin to notice our blessings, we tend to move out of a sense of lack or fear or limitation, and we tend to move into abundance. That, every time you notice how blessed you are, the belief that there's not enough doesn't make sense.

Like, most of us were raised in an environment where we were told to count our blessings. Like, this idea of just counting your blessings. See the good that is all around you; count your blessings.

Six. Six is this idea of **PRACTICING RADICAL ACCEPTANCE.** That, when we can accept things -- when we can accept ourselves; when we can accept the moment exactly the way it is -- then what reveals itself to us is God. It's good. It's a higher level of good!

And the last one is -- seven is: **GIVE THANKS.** And so for this 40-day period, we're over and over and over again ... we're going to give thanks.

So are you ready for your homework? Now, you can pick all seven of those. But I invite you to pick one: one of those spiritual ideas to move you into the present. And I invite you to actually entertain that affirmation I gave you: "In this moment, I have everything that I need." And I want you to really practice not hurrying through your life. I want you to see tonight if you can actually practice slowing down and experiencing the kingdom that is right here.

Jesus said, "*The kingdom of heaven is all around you, and men see it not.*" Right? The implication is that every woman has fully embraced it, and every man .. .Awww, never mind. **[Congregation laughs]**

Let's pray:

I want you to take a deep breath, and I want you to feel the presence of God that is right here, right now. And I want you to breathe really deeply into this moment. That the kingdom of heaven is all around you. The glory of God is fully present. And I want you to breathe into that. I want you to slow down into that, and feel the Infinite expanding before you. That, mentally, you can create a world of lack and limitation. That there's not enough to go around. But, as you slow down -- as you breathe; as you move into this new moment -- God is fully present. And the glory of God is all around you.

So take another deep breath. Holy Spirit, help me stay awake. Help me stay awake to this moment. Help me stay awake to all that is. Help me to be present to your infinite goodness, and know that the glory is in front of me. In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

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