

THE GIFT OF MAYBE

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With Rev. Richard Maraj

MESSAGE

So how many people have a challenge or a difficult situation in your life where you have no idea if or how it's going to work out? Anybody have one of those? And how many people ever feel a little frustrated and impatient not knowing? Anybody? And last one: How many people have ever felt anxious waiting to learn something like if you got the job or not? Or if that new person you met will call or not? Or waiting to know your test results? Or waiting to know the election results? [Laughs along with congregation]

I mean, I think we all get a little bit anxious when we don't know things we want to know. I was reading a book this week called *The Gift of Maybe* by Allison Carmen. And in it, she shares she had an addiction for many years to something that affected her peace and her happiness; her ability to enjoy her job; and her relationships. And she said she was addicted to certainty ... meaning she felt she had to know everything. She needed to know, because knowing made her feel safe; it made her feel that she was in control. And so anything unknown; anything uncertain; anything unexpected made her feel vulnerable. It made her feel out of control, and it made her feel afraid.

This "I need to know" mindset always -- even if things work out -- causes more distress and worry and unnecessary suffering. And it also robs us of a level of peace of mind and our ability to handle the challenges and difficulties more positively and more effectively. The fact is, there is -- and will always be -- uncertainty in life. Will my relationship last? Will it get better? Is my job secure? Will I get laid off? Is my health going to be okay? Or a member of my family's health: will they be okay? Will my financial situation get more stable? Will the economy improve? We could on ...

But the relentless need to know, I would say, and the desire for constant certainty creates a level of fear of the unknown. It creates fear of the future. And our association with the unknown and the future sometimes is negative. And it's even a little bit scary.

Allison Carmen, in her book, shares how she made a positive mental shift from this "need to know" mindset by hearing this old story that gave her a new perspective. And I'm sure you've heard it.

*One day a farmer's horse ran away, and the neighbor said, "Oooh, that's terrible. That's bad luck."
And the farmer replied, "Maybe."*

And then the next day the horse came back with five mares! And the neighbor said, "Thta is fabulous! That is such good luck!" And the farmer said, "Maybe."

So the next day the son was riding one of the horses, and he fell and broke his leg. And the neighbor said, "Oh, that's terrible! That's horrible! That's such bad luck. And the farmer said, "Maybe."

The next day the army came to draft the son, and because his leg was broken, he didn't have to serve. And the neighbor said, "That is great! That is such good luck!" And then the farmer said, "Maybe."

You know, this whole mindset of maybe; if you look at the mindset of maybe that the farmer had really shows that -- no matter what happens -- we can accept and find peace with it, and not hate it; not resist it; not judge it. But we could actually just be present to it and make the best out of it. Not knowing didn't scare him; in fact, not knowing actually liberated him from the fear.

Our minds -- in the maybe mindset -- begin to open up from, "This is not good," to "There are so many things that are possible; there are so many options; there's so many ways that this situation can improve and resolve itself."

The fear of the future is something that we just make up in our own minds. The unknown has the potential for all kinds of things, including a lot of good things and a lot of great things. I want you to

think of a situation in your life where you don't know how it's going to turn out. It's uncertain. And now let's put on this mindset of **maybe**. Because that "maybe" embraces the unknown. Maybe says, "*Maybe things won't be as bad as I think.*" Maybe says, "*Maybe something good will come out of this.*" "*Maybe a different path is what I'm supposed to take other than this one.*" "*Maybe there's something I'll learn or I'll gain that will be unexpected to me.*" And, "*Maybe there'll be new lessons; maybe there'll be new discoveries; maybe there'll be new breakthroughs. Maybe there are a whole lot of really good possibilities that I just don't know yet.*"

And even if the thing that we fear happens, you know, **maybe** there'll still be other options and opportunities and experiences for us to have. You know, **maybe** helps us move from feeling that something is bad or horrible, moving it to feeling a level of hopefulness; positivity; and possibilities, with the awareness that we don't have to stay stuck or be hopeless or powerless.

The mindset of **maybe** says these following things:

Maybe my beliefs and fear about the future aren't true.

Maybe this will work out better than I think.

Maybe I'm stronger and more capable than I believe.

Maybe what is happening is for the best somehow.

Maybe I can find a way to find acceptance of what I'm feeling and what's going on, and still be okay.

Maybe, in time, this will all become clearer.

Maybe there are several ways that will work out that I just don't know at the moment.

Maybe this has something to teach me and show me something that will help make me better and make me even happier.

I love this mindset of **maybe**! You know, it sounds simple, but it's powerful, because it opens our minds from fear, limitation and negativity and empowers us to know that there are always possibilities. And there is always hope.

And the fact is: every one of us, in every challenge and situation, has a choice. We can choose to stay in uncertainty and anxiety and negativity, or we can open to the mindset of **maybe**. "*Hmmm. Maybe there is a solution! Maybe there's a way this will work out so that things will improve and get better.*"

How many people have heard of Michael Phelps? I mean, that's obvious! He won eight gold medals at the 2008 Olympics. But what people don't know is that the autumn before the Olympics, he fell and broke his wrist, and had to have surgery. And he wasn't able to swim for a couple of weeks. And, at the beginning, he wasn't able to go back in the pool. And even when he could go back in the pool, he couldn't use his upper body. So his coach said he was devastated. He actually said, "*It's over; I'm finished.*"

But the coach thought **maybe** there's a way to keep training and keep improving and moving on, in spite of this. And so what he ended up doing is just kicking. He went in the water, and he was only able to kick. And he was kicking and kicking and kicking for all those weeks. He was there in the pool with his teammates as they were all swimming, but all he did was kicking.

And do you know it was his kick in the butterfly that got him ahead by only one-hundredth of a second that helped him win the gold medal? And so **maybe** the wrist injury actually helped him get to the goal that he had anyway. **Maybe!**

Kahlil Gibran said, "*Your living is determined not so much by what life brings to you, as by the attitude you bring to life; not so much by what happens to you as by the way your mind looks at what happens.*"

How we look at what happens -- "*This is impossible; there's no way out*" or "*Maybe there's a solution*" -- absolutely makes a difference in how we feel; how we act; how we experience; and the outcomes of our situations.

The mindset of maybe really does give us hope and opens us to greater possibilities. And it reminds us that it's not over. That it is not over!

You know, one of the things that limits our minds is when we do linear thinking. And that is the idea that, *"This one thing necessarily has to happen for me to feel happy."* That, *"This particular outcome has to happen for me to be a success."* And when things don't go the way we want, we unfortunately -- because it didn't go the way we wanted -- it's hard for us to see any good beyond it.

You know that story about the guy; there was a flood, and the water kept rising. And he went up on to his roof and he prayed, *"God, save me!"* And then his neighbor had a boat, and he said, *"Get in the boat!"* And the guy said, *"No; God's going to save me."* And then a firefighter came with a speedboat and said, *"Come on in!"* And he said, *"No; God's going to save me."* And then a helicopter came and said, *"Climb up that rope and get in!"* And he said, *"No; God's going to save me."*

So the water kept rising and the guy ends up drowning. And he goes to heaven. And he says, *"God! Why didn't you save me?"* And God said, *"I sent your neighbor; a firefighter; and a helicopter! What more did you want?"* [Congregation laughs]

There's an important point here: we are so fixated and we are so attached that this is how it has to be. That anything other than that gets us disappointed and devastated. And what it does: it limits our ability to enjoy blessings and all kinds of good in our lives, because we are so rigid in our mindset. We can't even recognize the good when we see it in any other form.

Allison wanted to be a lawyer. She wanted to absolutely go to NYU. She figured a degree from New York University law school was going to be huge; it would have her set for her whole life! The prestige; the connections; I mean, she was all set. And she didn't get accepted, and was devastated. Bawling her eyes out. Thought, *"My life's over! Everything I wanted, like that -- it's gone! It's gone!"* She was crying; she was awful-izing about how terrible everything is, and how suddenly her future wasn't so bright. Just down in despair.

A couple of weeks later, a friend said, *"What are you going to do?"* And she said, *"Well, I don't know."* So she started thinking and realized she does still want to go to be a lawyer. And so Fordham had accepted her, and she thought, *"Well, what the heck? I'll go to Fordham. I'm sure it'll be good. Won't be great like New York; it won't give me that kind of life. But ..."* And so she accepted it. In fact, she missed the deadline; she had to actually beg to get in, which she did.

And so here are the things that happened while she was at Fordham:

- She met the man of her dreams and fell in love, and they're still married and happy;
- She met her two best friends, who are still her closest best friends today;
- She got a job at a firm that hired a lot of Fordham grads;
- And they paid for her master's degree, and most of the courses were at NYU. [Congregation: "Awwwww."] So she ended up going there!
- And so she ended up starting her own firm with a bunch of colleagues and people from Fordham University.

She was so fixated that it had to be NYU law school that she almost missed out on some of the blessings and joys! And it might have even turned out better than she thought.

She wrote, *"I could have saved myself so much heartache if I had adopted the mindset of maybe sooner."*

We can be very narrow and limited in our thinking, and thinking life could only look this way and be this way. Maybe says:

- Maybe your life isn't over because that thing didn't happen for you.
- Maybe a different choice will actually give you more unexpected blessings and good. Maybe you actually might find more joy and happiness on this new and different path, and learn more; and become more.

- Maybe really does open up so many opportunities and realize how God can bless and enrich our lives in so many ways.

Joseph Campbell said this: *"We must be willing to let go of the life we have planned to accept the life that is waiting for us."*

Sometimes we keep going after something, and it's a constant struggle and it's going nowhere. And sometimes we just don't pay attention to the signs that life is trying to show us.

When I was in my 20s, I wanted to be a professional speaker. I wanted to be a motivational/inspirational speaker, traveling all over speaking to large corporations. That's what I wanted to do. What I did not want to do was become a minister. [Congregation laughs]

While I was getting some gigs, they weren't as frequent; they weren't as high paying as I wanted. That was a struggle. I kept getting invited by church after church to speak. I've spoken at over 60 Unity churches, and most of them before I was ordained. And so finally I started paying attention to what life was showing me. That just because I had planned this, that God had something different and better. And eventually, with a level of acceptance and tuning in and being aware, I realized that was something I needed to let go, because something greater was coming to me and through me.

So we need to look at our lives and say, *"Is there something I need to change? Is there some way I need to be open and flexible? Something I need to let go of?"*

So what area in your life might your soul be saying it's time to let go? It's time to make a change? And it's time to move in a new direction? Maybe there is a different path; maybe there is a better path!

Maybe.

The one thing about this: only you can discern if it's time to let go. Only you can tune into your soul and know when it's time to accept and not resist and release. Or maybe it's time to just hang in there; to persevere; and to keep going. To exercise patience and persistence. But again, only you are the one who can listen to what your soul is calling you to do.

Do you know what P.T. Barnum, Henry Heinz, Milton Hershey, Henry Ford and Walt Disney had in common? It's okay; I'll tell you. I have it written down right here. [Congregation laughs] It is two things. One: every one of them went bankrupt at least once. And second: none of them were dissuaded by their failures; or the uncertainty; or the unknown.

Their passion drove them to pursue their dreams. Each of them knew it was theirs to do and keep saying, *"Maybe this time it'll work. Maybe they will love this product. And maybe it will make their lives even better and make them happy. Maybe this thing will succeed and be a huge success."* And their areas were the circus; ketchup; chocolate; cars and amusement parks.

Interestingly, Barnum called his *"the greatest show on earth."* Interestingly, Walt Disney: *"the happiest place on earth."* They thought big! Because they had passion. They had a drive. They had persistence. And no uncertainty or unknown would stop them from doing what they were called to do. They were relentlessly hopeful. And they were relentlessly possibility thinkers and relentlessly persistent.

So I ask you: What is a relentless desire in you? That your soul is saying, *"Keep going for it; you'll find a way?"* Maybe get some help. Maybe try a new idea. Maybe come at it from another angle. Maybe it's still in you; maybe it is what you are being called to give life to still.

How many people saw the movie, *Madagascar*? Okay. So in it, you'll remember [laughs with congregation] the lion was thrown out of the jungle by all the other animals. And they closed the door on the lion to the jungle. And the lion went crazy banging against the door, saying, *"Let me in! Let me in!"* and he's totally distressed that he's locked out of this door. But the funny thing was: there was space all around the door! He could have gone back into the jungle through any way except the door!

And the point is: sometimes we get so fixated that a door closed and it's over: *"If I don't get through that way, it'll never come back."* But there are lots of options! And it's like that for every situation in your life where you're struggling! We think that the one answer is the only one; but there are lots of them. Lots

of them! We just need to open our minds and say "**Maybe.**" "Maybe there's a different way; maybe there's an opportunity; maybe there's another possibility."

And so my question for you is: What possibilities are available for your life? Are you willing to open and expand and go around all the different doors to all the other opportunities that are there?

A man was walking around in a field and he encountered a tiger. And so he took off. And the tiger chased after him and he came to a cliff. And there was a vine, and he climbed halfway down the vine, and the tiger took a little swipe at him; almost got his head. But he got safely halfway down the cliff. And then a second tiger showed up at the bottom. So there's a tiger at the bottom and a tiger at the top. And just when he thought things couldn't get any worse, a mouse from the cliff started gnawing on the vine. And so he's not having a great day there! [Congregation laughs]

And then suddenly he sees next to him a bright, red, ripe strawberry. And he reaches down and he grabs it. And he eats it and enjoys it and says, "Ahhhhhh. How sweet this is."

See, in life sometimes there are tigers above and before us, and tigers behind us, and somebody's gnawing at us ... and yet, there are still strawberries around. If we are willing to take time to enjoy the precious moment and beauty and realize there are all kinds of things that are uncertain and challenging and difficult, and there's still beauty. There's still so much good. And life is still sweet if we'll pause and enjoy it.

The way that story ends is that the tiger at the top tried to swing at the guy. He fell and landed on top of the tiger below. They got into a scuffle. That scared the mouse away. And the guy climbed down the vine and just walked away. That's how it ended. [Pause] **Maybe.** [Laughs along with congregation] And so ...

One of the things about the mindset of maybe is: it helps us be present and not get caught in the past or the future. It helps us be able to have the presence to be present and to enjoy the sweetness of life that is still and always here.

The mindset of maybe helps us deal with the unknown and the uncertainties and the many things that we don't know in life, particularly when things are challenging or difficult. So instead of dwelling in negativity and feeling stuck and having fear, maybe helps to have hope and open ourselves to possibility. Instead of resisting and fighting against what is, maybe helps us accept and maybe let go and move on. Instead of giving up because obstacles are hard, maybe says, "*It is your passion; keep trying and keep being persistent. Keep going!*" And instead of dwelling on the past or the future, maybe says, "*Enjoy the present moment.*"

Staying positive; having hope; opening ourselves to possibilities: those truly are the gift of maybe.

God bless you! [Congregation applauds]

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