

CULTIVATE WONDER

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Alright; you ready?

So during the holidays, do you have a strategy? Like, what's your strategy? Like, for some of us, I just want to be as unconscious as I can go and see if I can just make it through the next 30 days. I mean, what's your strategy? Like, you just turn off all the lights in your house, and you pull the blankets over your head and hope that you can just make it through? What's your strategy?

Because I believe that most of us -- whether we're aware of it or not; whether we're conscious of it or not -- have a holiday strategy. And I want to bring it to our awareness. I want to bring it to our attention. Because I want us to make sure that strategy is actually working for you.

Have you ever done something that you knew wasn't going to work? And you did it more than once? [Congregation laughs] Like, you're convinced that if you just keep trying, it's going to get better! Right? And it didn't work the first time; the 50th time; the 500th time. But it's like, your faith that your strategy is going to work even though it's never worked before, is really commendable. Either that, or it's not so healthy.

See, I think there are two -- if you look at the mythology of Christmas -- I think there's actually two dominant ways we move through the holidays. And those two ways are either wounded and angry from our broken self; or open-hearted, generous, our divine self.

And when we look at the mythology that surrounds Christmas, we see that imagery all over; all around us. It's that wounded, angry soul that feels broken; feels like a victim; is a victim to circumstance; is a victim to what other people are doing. Has been a victim for years, and believes -- because other people have done them wrong at some point -- that they get to act in any way that want and somehow it's justifiable.

And the other side of that is that sometimes child-like, open-hearted, generous, innocent part of us that looks at the holiday with wonder and amazement and is touched by the beauty all around us. And is the divine child: is that Christ child expressing.

And two of the most prominent image of both sides of this coin. The first one was that most of us became aware of was Charles Dickens' novel, *The Christmas Carol*, in which he introduced the character, Ebenezer Scrooge. And in fact, Scrooge now is a word in our vocabulary that describes that person who's tight-fisted; cheap; really just kind of miserly and doesn't want anybody else to have anything. And that's Charles Dickens; that's the image, right? And his favorite line of Ebenezer Scrooge ... Remember? You know what I'm going to say: when he said, "*Bah! Humbug!*"

And "*Bah! Humbug!*" is such a fun thing to say! Let's just practice it once. Let's say it together. Ready? [With congregation]: "*Bah! Humbug!*" I mean, it's fun to say! Right?

And we can throw that down at anybody's holiday celebration that we don't agree with; that we want to judge. Like, if a neighbor is doing it wrong or a family member is celebrating the holidays wrong, you just get to say, "*Bah! Humbug!*" And you just feel so righteous! You know, you feel so above the fray, right? Just, "*Bah! Humbug!*" Right? And you just get to enjoy it.

And we watch, as we read this story or we've seen it depicted in film, we watch as Ebenezer is visited by three ghosts: the Ghost of Christmas Past; the Ghost of Christmas Present; and the Ghost of Christmas

Future. And in this story, he has an awakening. He has an epiphany. He has a moment where he sees the direction of his life and he's not happy with it.

And no matter how unconscious we want to stay in life, there's a moment where life reveals itself to us and demands that we either choose or not. But it is that moment where we see that, if we keep making this same choice over and over and over again, we can't be surprised when we get to the outcome that our choices over and over and over had led us to.

So he sees the Ghost of Christmas Past and he feels, again, like the victim to circumstance; the victim of other people's choices. And he feels justified, then, of being the way he is until he sees the full ramification of the man that he's quickly becoming.

And my other favorite is: in 1957 Dr. Seuss wrote the book, *The Grinch*. Right? And the Grinch is so wounded by life that his strategy is to steal Christmas from all the Whos down in Whoville. And he's convinced that, if he can steal every ounce -- every present, every ribbon, every bow, every part of his feast -- he's convinced that he will somehow feel better if he victimizes others at a level that he felt victimized by himself.

So his strategy, of course, is to go down dressed up as Santa. Go down to Whoville, steal everything and take it back. And he's convinced that he will feel better about that.

And I want you to see these two classic ways of dealing with the holidays. Like, how many of you have ever noticed that you've been Grinchier than you needed to be in a situation? [Congregation laughs] We have two honest ladies; three! [Congregation laughs] And when you raise somebody else's hand, it doesn't count. Right? [Congregation laughs] It's not helpful, right? Because [laughs] it's not helpful.

And so when we see that, we realize that there is this opportunity that we can do life from our woundedness; we can do life from our victim; we can feel justified in being small and petty and ugly, because somebody once did us wrong. And we feel justified in that!

But I've got to go to Dr. Seuss. And I'm going to be reading from the last third of the book, just 'cause it's so much fun! So this is the point where he's already stolen everything.

Three thousand feet up! Up the side of Mt. Crumpit

He rode with his load to the tiptop to dump it!

"Pooh Pooh to the Whos!" he was grinchishly humming

"They're finding out now that no Christmas is coming!

They're just waking up! I know what they'll do!

Their mouths will hang open a minute or twos

Then the Whos down in Whoville will all cry a loud BooHoo!"

"That's a noise," grinned the Grinch, "That I simply must hear!"

So he paused. And the Grinch put his hand to his ear.

And he did hear a sound rising up over the snow.

It started out low; then it started to grow.

But the sound wasn't sad! Why this sound sounded merry!

It couldn't be so! But it WAS merry! VERY!

He stared down at Whoville! The Grinch popped his eyes!

And he shook! What he saw was a shocking surprise!

For every Who down in Whoville, the tall and the small,

Was singing! Without any presents at all!

*He HADN'T stopped Christmas from coming! IT CAME!
Somehow or other, it came just the same!*

*And the Grinch with his grinch-feet ice-cold in the snow,
Stood puzzling and puzzling: "How could it be so?
It came without ribbons! It came without tags!
It came without packages, boxes or bags!"*

*He puzzled three hours, 'til his puzzler was sore.
Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't thought before!
"Maybe Christmas," he thought, "doesn't come from a store.
Maybe Christmas ... perhaps ... means a little bit more!"*

*And what happened then? Well, in Whoville they say
That the Grinch's small heart grew three sizes that day!
And the minute his heart didn't feel quite so tight,
He whizzed with his load through the bright morning light.*

*And he brought back the toys! And the food for the feast!
And he, HE HIMSELF! The Grinch carved the roast best."*

See, the dilemma today -- and I think every day, but especially during the holidays -- is that we feel all this sense of obligation. Like, how it's supposed to go; how it's supposed to look; and how everything is supposed to happen. And it's supposed to be "just so." And yet, when it doesn't go just so, we often feel like a victim to circumstances. And our cranky self comes out to express our displeasure. And all the while, our divine self is there reminding us that -- no matter how it goes -- there's something greater going on.

Reading from Matthew 19:14: *"Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.'"*

And I love this idea that we can either do Christmas from that cranky, wounded place, or we can tap into our child -- our inner child -- and allow that light to shine forth.

You know, the whole idea of the inner child was created originally by a psychologist -- a spiritual teacher; a mystic -- named George Gurdjieff. And he was Armenian, born in Russia. And he taught that human beings do not possess a unified consciousness, but they live in a state of hypnotic "waking sleep." But it was possible to awaken the higher levels of consciousness and achieve the full human potential. He called his method "The Work," and the whole idea of working on one's self originates from his work that started in the late 1800s.

He often called his work "The Fourth Way." And then one of his students, Peter Ouspensky, met Gurdjieff in Moscow in 1915. He was also Russian. And he began to teach the Gurdjieff process throughout England and the United States. And he did it for 25 years.

And then his student -- another doctor, Maurice Nicoll -- was a Scottish neurologist. And he came upon this process called "The Fourth Way." And he wrote *The Psychological Commentaries on the Teachings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*. And from the early '40s all the way through the '50s, he was the voice for this process.

And the reason that I want to share this tonight is: I think these three gentlemen are amazing. But they actually created the whole understanding that has been kind of stretched into the whole "inner child" movement. And their work was this idea that your personality isn't one unified whole; but it's aspects.

And that all of us have -- in a very simplistic way -- multiple personalities that respond to life from different points of view.

And as we move into the holidays, we can either respond out of our wounded self -- of our wounded child or our wounded adult or our wounded self -- or we can respond to life from our enlightened self.

And that's what I really want you to see tonight: is that, of all the different aspects of you, you actually get to choose how you respond in every moment. Now, sometimes we just don't want to be responsible for that. We just want to respond in any way we want to respond. And we don't really care how anybody else reacts to it, or how it impacts anybody else. We just want to respond from our wounded self and to the whole world, *"Good luck; God bless you. It's my God-given right to be as miserable as I want to be. And I'm just going to show up and be miserable."* And we have that right! Right? Because we have free will, we have a right to be as cranky as we need to be.

But what if this holiday season -- what if during this holy time -- we choose to meet this holy season from the holiest place within us? That we choose to not respond to life from our wounded selves, but to respond to life from the highest and the best that's within us?

And you sometimes think it would be easier at a time of the year where there's less going on; and there's less busy-ness; and less demand; and less financial stuff; and less people stuff; and less "stuff" stuff. And if we could just do it in the quiet months ... but I haven't really ever found those quiet months, because they all just seem to be getting busier and busier and busier.

So my case tonight is: I want you to think about -- for the next 30 days -- you're going to show up from your holiest point. From your divine self. And you're going to notice when you're acting in a way that's not really becoming of a child of God.

Can everybody see the times when you're responding to life from something that really isn't very attractive to you or anybody else? Well, now we're up to six; okay, great! [Congregation laughs] We're moving in the right direction! Right?

And so what we're going to do -- what we're going to play with -- is this idea that you have many, many aspects of you. The way I sometimes say it is: I want you to be conscious on who's driving your bus. And in your bus, there are many sub-personalities who, from time to time, want to take the wheel. And when [laughs] the less-than-attractive part of you is driving, it's not always helpful for all of us.

So your job for the next 30 days is to recommit to being the Christ: your divine self. To being your holy one. To being your loved one. To being the one just is a pure expression of God. The place of innocence and the place of purity and the place of the highest and best that's within you.

There's this story that Jesus in Mark ... It's Mark 5:2-10.

"And when they had come out of the boat, they met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit who lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, even with chains, for he had often been bound with fetters and chains, but the chains he had wrenched apart, and the fetters he had broken. And no one had the strength to subdue him anymore. And night and day he lived among the tombs and on the mountain. And he was always crying out and bruising himself with the stones.

And when he saw Jesus from far away, he ran to him and worshiped him; and crying out with a loud voice, he said, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, God, do not torment me!'

Then Jesus said, 'Come out of this man, you unclean spirit!' And Jesus asked him what his name was, and he replied, 'My name is Legion, for I am many.'"

And I want you to see this as a metaphor for what's happening in all of us, right? That there's a wounded part of all of us that is so wounded by life that, when we act from our wounded place, we just create problems. And it's a mess! And we're not always fun to be around. And it's less than attractive.

And there are many times -- and there's many aspects -- that have been wounded by life. And we can respond to life from those wounded places; we can! We have a God-given right to! But when Jesus called them out, he had an opportunity to choose more than his past pain; more than his past wounds; more than all that he had been through. Jesus called them out because he saw his spiritual perfection.

Tonight I want to call you out. I want to call out that part of you that is holy and divine and created in the image and likeness of God. And sometimes we feel it's too much work to be that person. It's just easier to be your cranky self or our small self or our petty self. Because that's what everybody expects, and it'll just be easier. Nobody will get too close to me, and it will just be easier to be my small self.

But this year, what if you made a commitment to greet this holy season from the holiness that is within you? From the best that is within you? From your divine nature? Would you be willing to step into this holiday as the son or daughter of the Most High? The heir to all that God is?

And we can blow off another Christmas ... You know, think about how many Christmases have you blown off through the course of your life! Just went unconscious and just got through them.

But what if, this Christmas, you actually decide that you're going to use it as a launching pad for your divine self? Your holy self? The best that is within you? And that, every day, you wake up and you decide: *"I'm going to bring my best today. I'm going to be my best today. I'm going to be the best that God is in me!"* And every day you wake up with all that you have to do; and all the responsibilities; and all the things that you want to do and you don't want to do. But you just keep showing up from your best! And really use this season as a spiritual launching pad into your best new year.

Would you be willing to try? Will you pray with me?

I want you to take a deep breath. And I want you to just open your mind for a moment, and I want you to see all the wounded parts of you. All the parts of you that have been banged and bruised by life. All the parts of you that have felt like a victim and have been disappointed and frustrated and angry and upset.

And I want you to see your divine self standing up and acknowledging all the wounded places; all the wounded aspects of your personality, of your being. And your divine self stands up and acknowledges each one and loves and heals each one. And blesses each one. And that your divine self -- your holy self; your sacred self -- decides that it is ready to be in charge. To be in charge of your life. To guide you and direct you, and to be your dominant way of being in the world. That you could still be your smaller selves, but tonight you are going to put those away. You are going to allow God to heal each one. And you are going to be the best that is within you: the very best that is within you.

And every morning when you get up, you recommit. And every night before you go to bed, you give thanks for the power of God within you. For you are more than your smallness; you are more than your past. You are your divine nature. You were created in the image and likeness of God.

So tonight we give thanks and we allow every part of us to be healed. We allow all the smallness to be lifted higher. And we do it all for the glory of God. So in the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.