

GOOD STUFF!

Week #2 of a 5-Week Series, "The Five Unity Principles"

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Rev. Jimmie Scott

So I want to start with a story. No; I don't want to start with a story. [Congregation laughs] I want to talk about essence.

The talk this morning is, "GOOD STUFF!" And when I first came up with this idea -- after being appointed to [laugh] give the lesson this morning -- I had to think about what essence means to me. And being a person who thinks, sometimes, too much, of course that journey took me a little deeper than I had intended.

But the thing I want to say about essence is that it is both a tangible and it is an intangible thing which suggests to me that our qualities have to be nurtured, and they have to be nourished in order for us to experience both levels: both the intangible and the tangible. And once we begin to find out what those qualities are in more depth, we have to continue to nourish them and we have to encourage them in our lives. And they have to be supported and they have to be appreciated by us.

I think it's one of the reasons Jesus was able to actualize these qualities in his life in such a practical and potent way that we still are struggling with understanding them because they seem too simplified for us. But he had that innate ability to completely trust God. And because of that ability, he understood that everything that happened in his life was a gift from God. And that he had to develop the resolve not to let anyone or anything convince him otherwise.

And that's one of the hardest lessons in our lives is learning to distrust some of the thoughts and feelings and beliefs that come to us as a result of our heritage; as a result of our childhood; as a result of who we are; and who we assume ourselves to be. And it's a continuing process. It's like a living thing.

And the Scripture kind of speaks to that in a number of ways. But it also comes back to remind us that everything that takes place in our lives has a reason. One of my favorite Scriptures is: *"And God saw everything that he had made; and behold, everything he had made was very good."*

Let me say that again: *"And God saw everything that he had made; and behold, everything was very good."*

Now let's take that to another level. We come into this world as innocents. And that's complicated. Because as innocents, we don't have a formula for goodness or badness or rightness or wrongness. What we have is something that I like to call an "exploration instinct." We want to explore everything that's in front of us; or everything that we can imagine; everything that we want to see. We want to know what it's all about.

We also come into this world with "survival instinct." And that is coupled with an incredibly creative mind. Almost ingenious minds. But therein sometimes lies a part of the problem. Because every day -- in one way or another -- we come up against something that challenges us to no end. And as a child, I often faced much of this. And it was confusing to me. And sometimes it was disappointing to me. Because I wanted to be a, quote, "good child." And today I'm not even sure what that means. But it gets stuck in the mind. And when things get stuck in the mind, they become a part of our living experience.

Milton's phrase in *Paradise Lost*: *"The mind is its own place and, in itself, can make a heaven or a hell, or a hell of heaven."* And I've found that is true for me. Because when things are going good in my life, that creative aspect of my mind that is not quite of God gets restless and uneasy. And then I start to question

everything that I do. When I do that, I forget about what's possible in my life. I even begin to doubt myself and my beliefs. I forget about the things that I've done. And so it gets me off track.

And what I'm trying to understand, even today in this advanced age, is to remember with clarity whether something in my life is fear-based or whether it's just a moment of me selling myself short. It's an ongoing process, particularly when I want to be perfect. [Laughs]

Perfection. You ever want to be perfect? [Congregation laughs] Ever do something -- make a mistake -- and think, "*I should have done better than that!*"? And then it's past. And four days later, "*How did I mess that up?*" Four days later! This is how deep the mind is. And this also, to me, shows the more reason we should be understanding that we are created to be on this planet and that's all. The "goods" and the "bads" we sort of make up in our own minds about what's good. Some of my worst mistakes have turned out to be my most fruitful experiences! But I, in my own mind, could have taken those experiences and created a living hell for myself.

So today's message is about Unity's second basic principle. And our essence is of God is what that principle is about. There's a lot of language in the booklet that you're able to pick up out in the Courtyard, but I like things to be a little simple. So I'm boiling that whole summary that they have in the book down to this simple statement: that **OUR ESSENCE IS OF GOD. THEREFORE, WE ARE INHERENTLY GOOD.**

And this God essence is the same essence that was expressed in Jesus Christ. He was the expression -- the full expression -- of this essence that we're all made of. The reason that Jesus was able to actualize these qualities was his innate ability to trust God, because he inherently understood that they were gifts from God, and he had the resolve not to let anyone or anything convince him to distrust this "good stuff" that made him strong, but also tender, loving, kind and respectful. These qualities were gifts from the Creator.

And, to me, the simple way of explaining that is to say that I'm here to be the best person I can be. You are here to be the best person you can be. The attributes that allowed for Jesus to be fully expressed in that manner that made him the Christ are equally available to us! **THAT'S THE GOOD STUFF.**

Now growing up in literally the South, and in a Baptist church, the only thing I heard about "essence" was about how bad I was. Now, I want you to imagine a six-year-old child with an inquisitive mind and an inquisitive nature, and hearing that I was a horrible person and I was going to hell for every mistake I made. I want you to think about that! Why would we do that to a person? And in particular, why would we do that to a child?

And once that child has internalized those ideas -- once that child has begun to believe about him or herself -- that carries on into every aspect of our lives. The relationship with themselves; their relationship with every person they come in contact with. They begin to make judgements based on this belief that we are all created in this image that has doomed to this place that is called hell. And we have to live with that until we die. Then why would one want to live?

So this morning, when I speak about this principle, I'm speaking about it from the standpoint of: Are you willing to go beyond believing that ideology and begin to accept yourself as the incredible human being you are? Because, to me, that is the gateway to heaven, as the preachers talk about.

That principle remains with us throughout our lives. Saint Augustine summed it up brilliantly. He said, "*Faith is to believe what you do not see ... And the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.*"

So if I don't see myself as a horrible individual, and see myself as a child of God, then I begin to appreciate myself. And as I begin to appreciate myself, I begin to appreciate everyone that I have interactions with.

One of my favorite Jungian analysts, Robert Johnson, has a statement that moved me very deeply when I first read it in 1995. It's a statement from Credo in Unum which, in English, means simply conflict and unification.

Dr. Johnson says this: *"It is perhaps this human tendency to see everything in our lives as good or bad that creates the greatest obstacle to accepting and utilizing our various inner personalities. We don't realize that our categories of good and bad are usually arbitrary and subjective."*

And he goes on to say: *"We derive most of these standards from our family; from our culture; and from childhood conditioning. And we get it without ever questioning it."*

He says, *"But if we have the courage to look with open minds at some of the instincts and energy systems within us that we are so ashamed of, we almost always find that they can also be positive strengths, and that they are merely normal parts of a total human character."*

I want to share a little story. It's about some elementary school students whose teacher had given them an assignment to write an essay about what they'd like God to do specifically for them. And I made some assumptions that this was probably a religious or private school, because in my day you couldn't talk about God too much in the public school system.

So anyway, the teacher who made the request was sitting at home after reading many of the essays and spending her time in the classroom. And there was one particular story that captured her attention and, as she read it, she began to weep. And at the very moment she began to weep, the husband walked into the house and noticed her crying. He asked her what was going on, and she handed him the paper and said, "Here; read this." She said, "it's from one of my students."

So I want to read you the essay. It said:

"Dear God,

Today I ask you something special. Make me into a television set."

[Congregation titters]

"I want to take its place and live like the TV in my house. I want to have my own special place and have my family gathered around me. I want to be taken seriously when I talk. I want to be the center of attention and not be interrupted.

I want to have the company of my dad when he arrives home from work, even when he is tired. And I want my mom to want me when she's tired or sad or upset instead of ignoring me.

Lord, I don't want much. I just want to live like a TV."

So at this moment, the husband say, *"Oh, my God! That poor kid! What horrible parents he must have!"*

And the wife looked up at him and said, *"That is our son's essay."* [Congregation murmurs]

So we've been blessed to live in an incredible world with incredible people. Even incredible families. But sometimes we allow our attention to be impacted by old, outdated beliefs that really have no place in a society that has the intention of bettering itself. Beyond that, what an incredible thing to have our children experience!

I was born before TV, but I understand those feelings. Because in my family there wasn't time for questions. There wasn't time for having communication that connected us at a deeper level. That was childhood "imaginary" stuff ... *"There's no time for that! We're too busy making a living. We're too busy doing this, that or the other."*

Yet these connections are what make us whole. These connections are what enables us to experience the fullness of God's love. Simple connections! On every day in every way we get the opportunity to do that with one another: to see the good in others and to enable them to see the good in us.

Our essence; our intrinsic nature; our core being; that indispensable part of us that gives us our true identity is of God. Therefore, we are inherently good!

So this God essence -- this goodness -- again, was fully experienced by Jesus because he was willing to go through the furnace to allow it to be expressed to his fullest extent. Every day -- every minute of every day -- we have the opportunity to understand that or to release it and let it go. But it's the thing that has kept me connected to Unity for the past 40-some years, and to live an incredible life. To do things I never believed I'd be able to do. And to know that God lives and has its being in me.

I don't want to draw this out too long. I want to share another little interesting story for those of us who like the truth and also like a few sports. [Congregation titters] During the 1957 World Series between the Milwaukee Braves and the New York Yankees. Hank Aaron came up to bat; Yogi Berra was the Yankee catcher. Berra noticed that Aaron was holding the bat wrong. And so he whispered to Aaron, *"Turn the bat around so you can read the trademark. That's the traditional wisdom on how to hold a baseball bat."*

Hank never looked back, but said to Yogi, *"Didn't come up here to read."* [Congregation laughs] *"Came up here to hit."* He had 11 hits during that same series; drove in five runs.

We know what is right for us to do. We know it inherently! Doesn't take any training.

I'm going to leave you with a favorite quote of mine from Carl Jung. He said, *"The most terrifying thing in the world is to accept oneself completely."*

And then there's this quote from Jimmie Scott: *"I do it every day, and it literally scares the hell out of me."* [Congregation laughs and applauds]

God bless you! [Congregation laughs, whoops and applauds]

[Congregation applauds]

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