

HOLDING BOTH

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Okay; so are you ready?

What is your tolerance for holding good and bad? For some people -- and this is a spiritual term -- it just freaks 'em out. [Congregation laughs] Like, for some people, there is only one way. And that gives them a great deal of confidence. It gives them a great deal of security. It makes them feel safe to believe that there's only one way. And, of course, their way is the only right and one way.

For many people, religion has been about thinking about fighting all that is bad and wrong and evil. You know, the very old "Onward, Christian Soldiers," right? The first line: "*Onward, Christian Soldiers, marching into war.*" Now I don't know how much that really lines up with Jesus' teaching. You know, that's not really ... [Laughs] I can't find where he ever said that we're supposed to go to war with anybody or anything. Right? That's ... It's hard to put "Christian" and "warrior" into the same sentence. Because it's not the reality!

But there are people of all religions -- fundamentalists -- who believe that their path, their religion, their belief is the only path. And it's so interesting to me that all religions have that group or that sect or that belief that their path is the only path and anyone who's not on their path is less than, dehumanized, victimized, whatever.

But I want us to be able to hold both good and bad tonight. Because for many of us, there are things that we love and there's things that we hate. And we're pretty clear which is which. Jesus said it this way; Matthew 5 beginning with verse 43:

"You have heard it said that you should love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of the Father who is in heaven. For he causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good. He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward do you get? Don't even the tax collectors do that? And if you greet one another only of your own people, what more are you doing? Even the pagans do that! Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

So what I want to talk today is expanding your tolerance for that which is not your belief, your group, your tribe, your understanding so that we can move into the world that works for everybody. Right? A world that is big enough for us to actually enjoy.

Because how many of you can think of a time in your life where you wanted to be the policeman of everybody else? [Congregation laughs] Right? Where you knew what was right, and you were going to make sure that everybody around you knew what you knew was right? And that they were going to line up, heaven or high water? Right?

And so tonight, I want to expand that to be: How much can you tolerate, both the good and the bad, in your life?

There's a Chinese proverb that goes something like this:

The farmer and his son had a beloved stallion who helped the family earn a living on the farm. And one day, the horse ran away. And his neighbor ran over and exclaimed, "Your horse ran away! That's terrible luck!"

And the farmer said, "Maybe it is; maybe it isn't. Only time will tell."

Right?

And then a few days later, the horse returned leading a few wild mares with him when he returned to the farm. And the neighbor runs over shouting, "Your horse returned and brought several horses with him! What wonderful luck you have!"

And the farmer replied, "Maybe it is; maybe it isn't. Only time will tell."

Later that week, the farmer's son was trying to break one of the mares, and she threw him and he broke his leg. Again, the neighbor runs over and says, "Your son's leg is broken! What terrible luck!"

And the farmer replied ...

With me! [With congregation] *"Maybe it is; maybe it isn't. Only time will tell."*

A few weeks later, the soldiers from the national army came marching into town recruiting all able-bodied young men. And because his leg was broken, the son wasn't able to go into service in the army. And again, guess what the neighbor said? He comes running over and says, "What great luck you have!"

And the farmer says ...

[With congregation]: *"Maybe it is; maybe it isn't. Only time will tell."*

Of course, the moral of this story is that there is, in every event, there are always two sides. And sometimes we want to name an experience "good" or "bad" before we've had the opportunity to really experience it. To really know it.

Sometimes we get so devastated when life takes a turn in one direction or another instead of just being in the experience.

In Matthew 7, Jesus says:

"Judge not, that you may not be judged. For with that judgement you pronounce, you will be judged. And the measure you give will be the measure that you get. Why do you see the speck in your brother's eye but not notice the log in your own?"

Okay? So here's the deal: God allows for dichotomy. God allows for good and bad; light and dark; day and night; birth and death. And God can hold it all! And in that experience, we get to practice free will. And I want you to see that free will is the dominant spiritual principle in the universe. That God gives all of us free will to choose our life; to choose our experience; to choose how we think and how we feel and what we do. And that is the only principle that can never be revoked: that you get free will! You get to choose in every moment what you choose to bring in; to call forth; to invite into your life.

And I want you just to see all that is good and bad or good and evil; all that is filled with light and all that is filled with darkness. And you don't have to judge it! Just see it; just notice it; and realize that you are greater than all that you see. And then choose what you want in your life.

You know, every time there's a national disaster like in Turkey and Syria this last week, someone will come forward and say, *"Why does God allow that? Why does God allow evil things to happen in the world?"* And I truly believe that, in the experience of God, everything is allowed so that we have the authority and the power to choose what we want to do with our life.

And some of us will say, *"Well, it would just be so much easier if there was only good!"* Maybe. But part of growing up spiritually is choosing what you want to bring into your life. As a parent, my children -- as they grew up -- got to make more choices. Did everybody have that experience in your own life, and maybe if you're a parent? Like, when my children were 2 and 3, their decision-making ability was pretty

small. Like, "Do you want applesauce or do you want yogurt?" Right? And when you're 3 or 4, or 2 or 3, that's a big decision! "Well, do I want this or do I want that?" But I wasn't throwing them the keys to my car! Right?

And so what I want you to see is part of our own spiritual maturity demands that we can see it all. And then choose what's the highest and best. That it is available to all of us.

Debbie Ford, the author of the book, *The Dark Side of the Light Chasers*. She passed away several years ago. She wanted to write a book, because she noticed, as spiritual people -- as people who were committed to good, and only good, in their lives -- that they had some resistance when it came to acknowledging what wasn't good. What didn't look right. The evil or the problems. Because they just wanted to be happy, happy, like rainbows and butterflies and unicorns all the time.

And in her book she says a couple of quotes that I want to share with you. The first one is:

"Embracing our dark side gives us a newfound freedom to be with the darkness in others. For when I can love all of me, I will be able to love all of you."

Like, that's a moment of freedom! When you can look at yourself ... And because ... As adorable as you are [congregation laughs], there may be some parts of you and some behaviors in you that aren't quite as cute as others. Like, is that too far of a step? Could we have or get an "Amen" over that one? [Congregation: "Amen!"] That maybe there's a part of you that is still a work in progress. [Congregation laughs]

Now, I'm not saying all of you; I'm saying just a small fraction. She goes on:

"When you can make peace with yourself, the world will mirror back to you that same level of peace."

Like, what if that's really it? What if, to make peace with the world to make peace with yourself? Then you become at peace with all things! When you're in resistance to any part of your humanity, that part of your humanity has to keep showing up over and over and over again until you can love it the way it is.

How many of you are in any level of resistance to any aspect of how you show up? Like, all of us, right? For most of us, there's an aspect of us where we go, "That's just ... That's not right!" [Congregation laughs] "Like, I don't know who that guy is! I know it's me, but I don't know who that guy thinks he is!" Right? Because I haven't -- and I'm assuming you haven't -- made peace with every aspect of who you are.

And then the final quote:

"Your life will be transformed when you make peace with your shadow. The caterpillar will become a breathtakingly beautiful butterfly. You will no longer have to pretend to be someone you're not. You will no longer have to prove you're good enough. When you embrace your shadow, you will no longer have to live life in fear. Find the gifts of your shadow and you will finally revel in all the glory of God that is within you. Then you will have the freedom to create the life you desire."

Jesus said:

"Why do you call me good? No one is good, but God alone."

I want us to look today at who we are: really, truly who we are. And I want you to see that I believe that we have two natures. We have a spiritual nature and, as a spiritual nature, I want you to see that this line is infinite. And what that means to me is that you have an infinite number of ways of expressing God. There's an infinite number of ways that your soul came to express God. And all those ways are options. You can either express God in a great deal of darkness or you can express God in a great deal of

light. You can express God in a great deal of hatred; you can express God in a great deal of love. Everything. Within that spectrum is everything. And you get to decide where you're going to be on that spectrum.

Now, not only are we spiritual, but we're human! Right? And there's an infinite number of ways that you get to show up in humanity. And we see it all around us! We see the infinite number of ways that people show up in their humanity.

But the place where we live is this intersection where our humanity and our spirituality come together. And even that's infinite.

And so tonight, I want us to look at all the ways that we can accept life in a greater way by accepting more and more of who we are. That we are both perfect and imperfect. And we have to hold both! Because our spiritual nature is perfect! It's created in the image and likeness of God! And our human nature is never going to be perfect.

I love in ancient Greece that anything that was ever built had to have a flaw in it. They actually designed it to have a flaw in it, because they believed that only God could be perfect. Only God should be perfect!

And I think that some of us, instead of embracing how perfect our spirit is we keep trying to make our humanity perfect. It's never going to work! Like, we are a piece of work! [Congregation laughs] Right? We just are!

And so what I want you to hear me say is: I want you to be able to hold the perfection of who you are in one hand and the imperfection in the other hand. And allow that to be.

So here are a few points I want to make.

1) The most important thing I think we ever do is **SELF-ACCEPTANCE**. That self-acceptance is our path to a greater life. And the more that we can accept, the more embrace a deeper level of who we are.

2) Second thing -- that we've talked about this year -- is **DETERMINE YOUR VALUES**.

3) If we want to change who we are, **START SMALL AND BUILD GRADUALLY**. If you start with the place where you feel the most broken, it may overwhelm you and you stop the process. If you start just making little tweaks along the way, it empowers you to go forward and move forward in greater and greater ways.

4) The fourth point is **BUILD A SUPPORT NETWORK**. We talked about that last week.

5) And the fifth point is **EMBRACE FAILURE**. And we're going to talk about that next week.

So here's what I want us to do. This is your homework. You ready? I want you to practice holding all that is good and evil; all that is good and bad; all that is light and darkness ... and just observe it. You don't have to judge it. Just observe it. Just see it for the way it is and know that God in you is greater than that. Because the moment you don't have to change it, all the pressure's off.

See, if you look at something and instantly go into, "*Oh, my gosh! I've got to fix it! I'm imperfect; this is terrible! I'm the worst person in the world!*", you don't want to see very much, because everything you see overwhelms you. But when you can just see it and be with it, and not take it so seriously, things can evolve. God can transform us.

So your homework this week is just to see yourself just as it is in this moment, and realize that in the next moment, it may be different. It may transform! It may move to a higher level. But just see it and see if you can live with it the way it is.

"Well, Richard, there's things in my life there's no way I can live with. It's just wrong. It's bad. It's terrible."

And it's like: Remember that point that says what we resist tends to ... [Congregation: *"Persist."*] Like, that's true! So when we see an aspect of ourselves and we move into resistance; when we see an aspect of ourselves and we move into judgement; when we see an aspect in somebody else and we think to ourselves, *"They're just awful."* Right? Guess how many of those people get called into your life over and over again until you can make peace with them? Because they're there by divine appointment. They're there for your soul's evolution. So the moment you stop judging them, you'll even stop noticing them. Because they won't bother you anymore.

All of life is a game. And how we play this game really does matter. So everything in your life -- both good and evil -- is a choice. And you get to choose it. You ready?

Will you pray with me?

I want you to open your mind, your heart, your soul tonight. And I want you to see your world with softer eyes. I want you to see your world with just love and acceptance. To know that everything in your life is both perfect and imperfect. Both good and bad. And that's okay. It's supposed to be that way. It's designed to be that way. And that in every situation, God is there. So we hold it lightly and we allow the glory of God to be made manifest through each one of us in our perfection and in our imperfection. And so it is. Amen.

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