

“Breathing Under Water: Step 3 Sweet Surrender”

Luke 9:23-24

Today we look at one of the most challenging steps in life and in faith: Surrender. It sounds easy enough to just let go and accept life as it comes to us. But that is not always easy when life could be so hard. How do we accept violence, tyranny, injustice and pain? Surrender according to step three and according to Jesus seems impossible. Take the story of the bus explosion in Egypt this past week. How are we supposed to just accept that?

The third step is (screen), “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God and *as we understood God.*” In A.A.’s *Big Book*, we find these challenging words of wisdom (screen), “When I am disturbed, it is because I find some person, place, thing or situation - some fact of my life - unacceptable to me. I can find no serenity until I accept that person, place, thing or situation as being exactly the way it is supposed to be at this moment. Nothing, absolutely nothing, happens in God’s world by mistake. Until I could accept my alcoholism, I could not stay sober; unless I accept life completely on life’s terms, I cannot be happy. I need to concentrate not so much on what needs to be changed in the world as on what needs to be changed in me and my attitudes. Shakespeare said, ‘All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.’ He forgot to mention that I was the chief critic. I was always able to see the flaw in every person, every situation. And I was always glad to point it out, because I knew you wanted perfection, just as I did. A.A. and acceptance have taught me that there is a bit of good in the worst of us and a bit of bad in the best of us; that we are all children of God and we each have a right to be here. When I complain about me or about you, I am complaining about God’s handiwork. I am saying that I know better than God.” Alcoholics Anonymous (*Big Book*), 4th Edition, P. 417.

This is hard for us because we tend to confuse acceptance with resignation. We feel that if we accept things as they are, we are just resigning ourselves without trying to make a difference in the world or make things better. We spend much of our energy fighting with ourselves, repressing parts of ourselves, denying our shadow stuff, and thus end up projecting our own stuff onto others. In his book, *Breathing Under Water*, Richard Rohr writes, “How long it takes each of us to just *accept* –to accept what is, to accept ourselves, others, the past, our own mistakes, and the imperfection and idiosyncrasies of almost everything. It reveals our basic resistance to life, a terrible contraction at our core or, as Henri Nouwen, a Catholic priest and writer told me personally once, ‘Our endless capacity for self-loathing.’ Acceptance is not our mode nearly as much as aggression, resistance, fight, or flight.”

Acceptance is not about giving up. It is about something much deeper. It is about focusing our energies on what is life giving. Rohr says that is about giving to instead of giving up. Father Thomas Keating called this kind acceptance (screen) “Consenting to the goodness of life.” In fact, Keating believes that the whole spiritual journey is about learning to consent to God’s will and goodness. It is about seeing the presence of God through all

the pain and suffering of our world and of our own lives. This is counterintuitive for most of us because we often fall into the trap of denying reality or trying to control it.

Our scripture for today is about gaining a perspective on how to consent to the goodness of life. It is from a conversation Jesus had with his disciples about following his way (read Luke 9:23-24). The invitation and challenge of following Jesus is to deny the self, the ego, and its illusory attempts for control and happiness. Our ego self will trick us into believing that life is about striving for more: more esteem, more control, more power, more possessions, etc. We get stuck in the cycles of behavior that become so essential to our lives but which often lead us to never feel satisfied. As Rohr puts it (screen), “Here is the incestuous cycle of the ego: ‘I want to have power’ > ‘I will take control’ > ‘I will always be right’ > ‘See, I am indeed powerful!’ This is the vicious circle of the will to power. It does not create happy people, nor happy people around them.”

This is of course not easy work. We know from reading the gospels how the disciples struggled with the teachings of Jesus. They faced many struggles with surrendering to God’s will (screen -the headlines of bullet points):

- **They struggled over power:** “Later the close followers of Jesus began to argue over the *stupid and vain* question, “Which one of us is the greatest disciple?”⁴⁷ Jesus saw what was going on—*not just the argument, but the deeper heart issues*—so He found a child and had the child stand beside him. **Jesus:**⁴⁸ *See this little one? Whoever welcomes a little child in My name welcomes Me. And whoever welcomes Me welcomes the One who sent Me. The smallest one among you is therefore the greatest.*” Luke 9:46-48
- **They struggled with security:** When Jesus was arrested, most of his disciples abandoned him. In fact, Peter flat out denied that he even knew Jesus.
- **They struggled with grace:** After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the disciples struggled with accepting new followers based on the rules of their religion.

The addictive nature of our ego pursuits of happiness often lure us into believing that we can find happiness on our own. After all, one of the big illusions of life is that we are on our own and that we are separate from God. What we need is to ground ourselves in those experiences that remind us of who we are as children of God. In the movie *Seabiscuit*, there is a scene when this amazing horse was having trouble running in line and doing what his trainers expected him to do. The commonsense wisdom would be doing more of the same: more training, more running on the tracks, more work with the jockey, etc. But what was needed was something totally different. Here is the clip:

https://youtu.be/s_c9TfYYgdQ

What the horse had forgotten was how to be free and run wild. Too much running in a circle was not in his innate nature. He needed to remember how to be a horse.

The invitation is before us to take this step of making a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God which has to be done daily. Following Jesus is not something that is done once and for all. It is about the daily practice of surrendering our wills to God each and every day. (screen) “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross **daily** and follow me.” Luke 9:23 This does not mean all of our troubles will end or that we will be protected from harm in life. It does not mean

that we will get everything we ever wanted as “prosperity theology” might promise. What it does mean is that each and every day we have a choice to make. We can pursue the illusions of power, control, security and esteem, or we can consent to the grace of God and allow God’s love to flow through us. We can stay trapped in living lives of striving and working against our inner goodness or we can consent daily to God’s energy of love in our lives and let it shape our moments and our days. This would make all the difference. In your bulletins/announcements, there is a daily practice of dwelling which I hope that you will take and try this week. It is by Joyce Rupp based on words by Henry David Thoreau. It uses the imagery of flow and water. We will take a few minutes to practice it. If you are a child, I invite you to draw an image of your favorite body of water (pool, lake, river, pond, or ocean). Write words or draw images of how it makes you feel.

REFLECTION (screen with an image of flowing water)

Dwell as near as possible
to the channel
in which your life flows.

~ Henry David Thoreau

Dwell...

Be at home with the deeper part of yourself. Slow your hurry in order to focus on what truly matters. Ask yourself each day what you need in order to keep near to this vital center. Inhabit the dimensions of your life in such a way that an abiding peace flows quietly in you.

as near as possible...

No need to be perfectionistic about the desire to be near what counts most to you. Set forth reasonable expectations. Be kind to yourself when you lose touch with this essential aspect. Give yourself to your central focus repeatedly. Take courage. Have hope. Trust what matters most.

to the channel...

Identify the current out of which your beliefs and values flow. What core intention moves your thoughts, feelings, actions? Is it to be a channel of the Holy One's love? Perhaps it is a yearning to live the best of who you are? Only you know.

in which your life....

Your life. Not someone else's. Pull back from comparisons and envies. Be patient and lovingly honest with how you maintain this most important center of your inner world. Acknowledge your desire to be faithful. Seek kinship and support to help you be true.

flows...

Notice what throws you off course or distracts you from being with what your heart deems worthy. Be willing to part ways with whatever keeps the deep waters of your soul from moving freely, lovingly, peacefully. Dwell as near as possible to the channel in which your life flows. Amen.