

“Luminous”

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Deuteronomy 33:27a

The God of old is still your refuge. This God has everlasting arms that can drive out the enemy before you.

2 Corinthians 1:9

Yes, we are carrying our own death warrant with us, but it is teaching us not to rely on ourselves, but on a God whose task is to raise the dead to life.

Luke 15:20b-24a

“While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! Fetch the fattened calf and slaughter it. We must celebrate with feasting because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life! He was lost and is found!’”

Have you ever been really hungry?

Thirty-five years ago, I went backpacking in Yosemite. It was beyond expectation. By the time I walked through a rain-swollen stream late-afternoon of the third day, I was tired and ready to stop. I ate my rehydrated dehydrated food and finished with some freeze-dried strawberries for dessert. (Freeze-dried strawberries may sounds terrible, but with the moisture gone, these bright red slices dazzle your tongue.) I planned to save some of them for the next day so I ate half then carefully closed the package. Once my food bag was high in a tree, I laid out my sleeping bag and went to sleep.

The next morning, I laced up my still-damp boots and went to collect the food. On the ground I found the bag, empty, and a few crumbs of rice, peas, and strawberry. I stared, speechless. That bag had held all my food for the next two days. I may have cried. I may have eaten some of the crumbs. I thought of the three cookies in the car twenty miles away, soft, chewy chocolate chip cookies. And I started walking. By the time I arrived at the parking lot that night, I was empty. Those cookies tasted... divine.

God wants for us to hunger after relationship with the holy as intensely as I hungered for those cookies. Longing for God, we then *want* to grow spiritually. We eagerly pursue our walk in faith.

Faith is a holistic action that involves our whole being, heart, mind and body. When we want to grow closer to God, we need all three.

Today we continue our sermon series on spirituality, using Richard Rohr’s book *Breathing Underwater: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps*.¹ Last week, we examined ways that our belief that we should handle things ourselves gets in the way of our relationship with God. We were reminded that something will drive us, control us, in our lives, but that only God will do it well. On our own, we falter and fail. Thankfully, God’s task is to raise us again to life. Resurrection.

Jesus tells us of a father who watches the road for months, maybe years, waiting and hoping that his son will return to him. There's no guarantee he ever will. And yet, this parent never gives up hope. And when finally the young man returns to him, he shows no displeasure or anger. The youngster knows that he has let his father down. He deserves... nothing, and he admits it. The father doesn't even answer this, he's so busy planning a celebration, because his son had come back to life. Not just returned home but back to life. Resurrection.

I'd like to share a couple of Rohr's assumptions about addiction:

One, we are all addicts. Humans are addictive by nature. Addiction is a modern name for what the Bible calls sin. We need help to break us out of our illusions and entrapments.

The prodigal son had been caught up in his own dreams of what his life ought to be. He deluded himself with popularity and wealth, but when the wealth ran out so did his popularity. Then, as a swineherd, he was trapped in a belief that he needed to take care of his problems himself.

Two, *stinking thinking* is the universal addiction. Substance addictions are the most visible but actually we're all addicted to our own way of doing things, our own way of thinking. We don't notice it but one's own addiction is always hidden and disguised as something else.

How long did that young man watch pigs, moaning as they ate better than he did? How long did his own way of thinking keep him believing that this was better than going home and facing his father?

When he finally came to his senses and went home, he found a reception beyond belief. No scolding or reprimand. Just love as he was wrapped in his father's arms.

This is a story of us all. We each get caught up in our illusions. We find ourselves trapped in webs of our own making. We think things are a certain way and we cannot see any other possibility. We are so locked into our own ways of thinking and doing things that we cannot recognize that we only see part of the picture.

If we accept that addiction is a part of the human condition and that the universal addiction is to our own way of thinking, how are we ever to return to God? How do we return to *our* senses? How do we accept, as Step 2 of the Twelves Steps says, "that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity" and that only that greater Power can do it?

This is our spiritual journey.

Do you recall Jesus saying that *we* are the light of the world? (Matthew 5:14). God's activity in us leads us to "great luminosity and depth of seeing"(8). This luminosity is the light that Jesus is talking about.

Spirituality is "a gradual letting go, unlearning, and handing over" (8). It's a lifetime of unpacking our assumptions, our hurts, our ways of being, and giving them to God. And as we open ourselves to God's healing, we slowly allow our hearts, minds, and bodies to be opened. And God's light shines through us.

True faith requires that all of our parts work together. A simple head or heart belief is not enough. True Christian faith is incarnational. We have to be fully and completely present.

God always welcomes us. Nothing we can do will cause God to turn away. We are invited simply to enjoy and celebrate God's presence. This is the banquet Jesus so often talks about. He tells us that we, and everyone else, are invited, yet we can find so many excuses for not

accepting, whether it's indignation about the others who are also invited or a sense of our own unworthiness. What holds you back?

We need to be open, heart, mind and body, to accept God's offer. You can tell when you're open because when you are present, open and available, you allow the moment or the person to change you. But how do we open ourselves?

Contemplation and meditation open our mind. We all know that prayer is important, but for this, simply saying prayers does not get us where we need to go.. We all know how rote prayer time can become. Yet when we empty our minds, we experience a heightened awareness of God's presence.

Beyond this, we need to fill our heart. We begin by healing past hurts. We have all been hurt and we close off parts of our heart to prevent further pain. But closing our heart keeps us from knowing God's love fully. And distances us from the people we love. We need to allow people to touch us deeply, and for them to allow us to touch them. You can know your heart is open when you let others truly influence you and change you.

This healing also helps us to open our body. The body has memory and it continually offer its messages, gently at first, then forcefully when we try to ignore them. We protect our vulnerable ones from negative body messages because we know that even when our mind forgets, the body remembers.

Being physical – all of it – is so important. As Christians, we believe that God takes on a human body. Jesus is physical, socializing, laughing and teaching, touching people as he heals them, yet we still have negative attitudes toward our bodies, sexuality, emotions, play, and such.

Spirituality is about connecting, and reconnecting, the head, heart and body, and growing toward full luminous living.

We unclutter our hearts, minds and bodies and develop a connectedness between them by letting life come to us on its own terms. As we do, we also offer our ways, the good and the bad, to God.

And we gradually find that God can restore us to sanity as we accept God's embrace and are welcomed into God's presence

It is a long journey, often one step forward and two back, but slowly we heal. Our hearts, heads and bodies reconnect. But, and this is important, God is ready to embrace us now. Immediately. God resurrects us again and again. And we become luminous.

ⁱ This sermon borrows heavily from Richard Rohr's *Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps*, Franciscan Media: Cincinnati, 2011, xviii-xxiii, 8-15.