

R2D2

Romans 6

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I have to introduce you to new member of the congregation if you look that way on the stage. R2D2. [A robot.] He should be able to speak I think. It's very intelligent. Well, fairly intelligent.

That's R2D2. Leighton jokes because we had him down at Colony Inn during welcome weekend. All our cash registers are computerized, you know, so Leighton was wondering were the two computers getting together during the night or anything. But, that's the thing we know that they CAN'T do, and old R2D2 can do a lot of things that we can do but he certainly can't fall in love with the cash register. You may look at him and you may say, "Yeah, well he seems pretty alive, he seems to be able to move whichever way he wants" but actually he can't.

I mean, he has buttons here and you just press the button and a certain thing happens. So you press #1 and he goes forward, you press #5 and he goes back, press #9 and he speaks and really he can't do anything but what the person who controls the buttons wants him to do. So he isn't actually free at all and of course we are utterly different from that, aren't we?

I mean if I press 1 and 1 is you picking up in the mail box an overdraft notice, well, I can't tell what you're going to feel, sure I can't. If I press 1, or if I press 5, and say to you, "Do you know what your best friend told me about you?" Well, I am sure I can't possibly tell what you would feel if I press that button and yet, isn't that kind of a tragedy? That actually if we pressed 1, you know what happens when you see an overdraft notice.

We could all probably describe it exactly the same. The old adrenaline pumps and the old worry comes up and we go to the old check stubs and we get them out and we start going through them. Yet, we like to feel, "We're not robots, we're not, we're not. We don't need to do that, I just decided to do that. It just so happened that the overdraft notice came in at the time that I decided to do it."

It is same when somebody says to you, and we've all been the same boat, haven't we? We've all been in that spot where somebody said to us, mentioned our best friend and said, "Oh, do you know what so and so said about you?" and you know we could all describe what happens. We just back off, we bring the wagons round, we feel "Boy, what are they going to say", and we feel exposed.

We like to feel "No, we're not robots, we can respond differently to that", and yet it is surprising, isn't it? How much of our lives seem not to be free? I mean we get up okay, the alarm goes off, well, depending on how you're programmed you know. You put it off and sleep for another five minutes. Or, you put it off and you jump out of bed before you can change your mind. Then you like to think you're a free individual but you know, okay, the old teeth and the shaving and then the breakfast and you like to think you're free except when the toast is black. It's black!

You like to think, well, this is a wonderful morning but you see the old black toast and something happens inside. Yeah, it should be like little green apples and she should stretch out her hand and say, "How are you feeling hon?" you know. You should feel that it's like the rising of the sun to you but she doesn't say that, she says, "Boy, you're late!" And you like to feel that you won't

respond the way you usually respond but yet you do. And so you're late and you blast out into the garage and into the car and you back that thing and "Why the kid left the bicycle in the middle of garage?"

But at least you get out on to the freeway and you're moving along and that VW fuel injection whips in, in front of you. So, you like to think you're free but actually you know just the fact we laugh together at it, we know, why there are a lot of things we're not free about. In a way some of it isn't bad because some of it is instinct, you know some of it. So I throw something at you and you duck, you know, or you tell me this is going to fall, well I move back like that because there is a self preservation instinct and there are certain instincts that are there to preserve us.

But I think what we are all concerned about is that often those instincts find nothing inside that responds and modifies them. I think that's what concerns us. Many of us realize that R2D2 has nothing to fight against Ted pressing these buttons. We press the buttons, we send the old message to him, he has nothing to fight against, there is no heart inside him. He has to do what the external stimuli tell him to do. And we know that the external stimuli do tell us to do certain things as they tell animals to do certain things but we like to think that there's a heart inside us that does not have to be driven by those external stimuli.

In other words it's really good to be able to read the overdraft notice and feel "Boy, I ought to do something about this." But you would like to think that within you, there is a quiet heart of peace that does not get panicked by that and that kind of responds to it and gets the control of it or the upper hand of it. I think what frightens many of us here in this room, and loved ones we are all the same you know, you are not different, we are all in the same boat. What frightens many of us in this room is, that the external stimuli come and it seems as if there's nothing inside at all to modify it or to control it. It seems often we're little robots at the mercy of the external stimuli. I think there are all kinds of reasons for it you know.

One great principal in education of course is reward and punishment -- you know that -- or praise. Most of us were brought up on that and it was good at the beginning where your teacher praised you when you did something well or your coach praised you when you threw the ball right or your parents praised you because you did something right. It was good. But then you got into school and then you began to find that people praised other people and you began to find too that there was an unseen silent praise that was called peer approval. And you began to feel more and more that certain people in the class had that peer approval and certain others hadn't.

Then you found yourself looking for that peer approval. Maybe it's not bad, maybe we're all born with some instinct for somebody to approve of us. But how many of us found ourselves being utterly dominated by that? Wasn't simply that we recognized that person liked me and that person didn't like me or that person liked that person and didn't like me or all the class seem to think this guy was great because he played football -- they didn't think I was great. It wasn't simply that we realized that, it was that we ourselves began like little monkeys to play to the gallery to get that for ourselves.

In other words, often that instinct became as powerful for us as pressing that little keyboard is for R2D2. Then we went to college and it just got worse because maybe we were not good at sports but maybe we could gain approval some other way. Then of course the whole grade system drives you crazy because you feel it's a direct comparison between you and everybody else.

It's not so much in comparison with some degree of perfection but it's comparing you with the rest. So you begin to feel, "Boy, I have to scrape over the top of the others somehow to be approved of."

And of course it just finds its epitome in the battle for the key to the executive washroom when we get into whatever company we join because we find that there too the approval of your peers or the approval of the significant others in your company is important.

You begin to find yourself having moved your way through the morning traffic and parked your car in the parking lot. You begin to find yourself behaving like a little robot because you're pleased when a certain person says good morning to you and you're cast down when a certain person doesn't say good morning to you.

Then you get into your office and somebody apparently recognizes you and you're glad and somebody else apparently doesn't know who you are and you're cast down. It's not long before many of us find our lives utterly dominated by this kind of thing. Loved ones, the tragedy is it isn't only in relationship to strangers or to our colleagues at work or school but so often it's what governs our behavior at home.

She speaks nicely to us we're nice back. She speaks irritably to us we're irritable back. He comes home and he's in a good mood, our evening is made. He comes home and he is in a bad mood, our evening is destroyed. More and more we feel frustrated with ourselves because we see we're almost little robots. We're almost little beings that are just controlled by what other people say, what other people do and you know how we shared about the weather, things like that, it's just so silly.

We find ourselves getting up and it's cold and miserable so we're depressed. We get up on a nice spring sunny morning and we're delighted. And we begin to wonder, is there anything inside me that can initiate life itself separate from all these stimuli? Of course, what happens is we begin to wonder if there is anything there?

I think that's what's happening with more and more of us in our present society, don't you? We're becoming so much the toy of the commercials on television. We're becoming so much the toy of the pressure of the posters. We're becoming so much the toy of even the psychological methods that are used to choose people for their jobs that we begin to think we're just little machines.

I am a little boss-pleasing machine, I am a little wife-pleasing machine, I am a little professor-pleasing machine, and I am a little grade-getting machine. Then it comes to the point where I am a little thrill-happy machine because we begin to find ourselves using uppers. It's stupid. It's stupid. But we begin to even treat our body like a machine. "Oh, I am depressed so I'll take some Valium or I'll take something that will stimulate me, or I'll take a drink that will make me a little happier." And suddenly it dawns upon us that we're treating ourselves just as that red garbage can because that's all that is, it's a garbage can with some electrical gear inside it.

But we begin to think, I am treating myself like a metal garbage can, as if I can be controlled by what pills I take, or what drinks I take, or what cigarettes I smoke, or what people say to me, or what events happen to me, or what the weather is like, or whether somebody cuts in front me in traffic, and of course, what terrifies many of us is, we begin to feel empty inside, we do.

We begin to feel empty inside. We begin to really wonder is there any me there at all? And if there is any me, what is that me? What is it as distinct from this machine that pleases its professors, that pleases its parents, that pleases its friends at church, that pleases its friends on the sports

field, what is that me? Some of us I think have almost got to the point where we think "I don't know, I don't know what the 'me' is, I don't know who I am at all, I don't know what I would really act like, I don't know if there ever was a 'me'."

Loved ones, you know if some of you feel like that, I think a lot of us feel like that. I think a lot of us, in this mass society of ours, have almost turned into robots so that we hardly know if there is any person inside this garbage can or not. We really don't quite know what to do. I think a lot of us have gone to drugs to do it, you know. I think a lot of us feel there has to be something inside, there has to be something. Maybe if I live intensely enough I'll discover that 'me', so we think okay, maybe the cocaine will heighten my perception or my experience so that I'll at last know what is inside.

I think some of us do that. I think that is why some of us try to authenticate ourselves as Sartre said, by some kind of experience. Maybe a mad experience in sex or a mad experience in driving or something that will enable me to find out who I am to waken up the person inside, and yet, I think we have all found the same, that you don't find anything inside. You just become a slave to that new force that you're using, that new pill or that new drug or that new experience or thrill or circumstance.

Loved ones, that's the situation with many of us. I don't know how many of you know T.S. Eliot, really one of the main influences in modern poetry. You remember he wrote that poem, "We are the hollow men, headpiece stuffed with straw", and the old poets often have an ability to foresee where we are going. You know you're not the only one who feels like that, I think many of us feel like that. "We are the hollow men, headpiece stuffed with straw."

Of course where it reaches its lowest point, possibly, is in marriage. Marriage can become incredibly boring if you have two R2D2s married to each other. There just isn't much there you know, after you press the right buttons on each other, boy, what else is there to find? That's why the old marriages have such a hard time today. Because it's not two exciting people getting to know each other deeper and deeper as the years go by. No, it's he comes home and you switch on the TV and look at the television, then you have a drink of milk, then you go to bed, then you get up and you have breakfast and that's it, it just goes on and on and on.

In a marriage you know it's intense because even however dull we are, it eventually dawns on us, we don't have much interesting conversation, do we? We don't really have much to say to each other, do we? We don't really seem too interested in each other, are we? This relationship doesn't seem to be going anywhere, does it, and it certainly isn't developing, is it? It's probably a marriage or even two room mates, you know, two room mates can sense very fast when they've reached the deepest depth of each other and that's a shattering thing.

Now, loved ones, it doesn't matter if you program that R2D2 with a different keyboard. It still is going to feel empty inside and some of us have tried that. We've thought we'll program it with Zen Buddhism, so we programmed it with Zen Buddhism. It's still control from outside. Then we decide we'll program it with some psychology, and so we try psychology or the power of positive thinking and we try that for a while.

Some of us have even tried religion. We try going to church, we try reading our Bible, we tried praying, and we try to program something into it. Loved ones, it wouldn't make any difference. The only thing that will make that thing interesting is if somehow, someone was able, simply to flatten

the whole thing and to create a real person inside. Wouldn't matter so much if it were still the garbage can shape if somebody could create a real person inside. Now that's the only way you or I can ever discover ourselves. That's right.

The only way that we could ever discover the real person is if it could be remade, if it could be born again and it's the same with us. There is only one who can tell you who you are and can begin lovingly to bring you alive and to reveal the real person you were born. When you were born a little baby you were born a person. You were different and it's amazing, even though we're all so alike in so many ways, you are still different from the rest of us in this room, you are different, you are different. There is nobody else in the whole world like you.

When you were born a little baby, you were a person, a real person inside with all kinds of different plans for your life, all kinds of different potentialities really. You have a remarkable combination of qualities and insights that nobody else in this room has and the maker who made you wanted your life to be directed by that person inside you. It's just that you, like the rest of us, have kind of beaten that individuality down and have programmed yourself by all kinds of external stimuli.

But the miracle loved ones, of Jesus, this man Jesus, is that without going into all the philosophical implications of it, our Creator saw the way you and I were going. And He has put you into His Son and He has destroyed all that pre-programmed personality of yours and He has remade you in His Son Jesus. You can be remade in actual fact here in this life if you believe that. That's right and that's the only hope loved ones, that's the only hope. It can't be any other way, honestly.

There's nobody else can help us, there's nobody else can save us. All they can do is program us again. All they can do is hold out different carrots to us, beat us with different rods but nobody can create you inside yourself as you were made except your maker God who has done that in His Son Jesus. That's what it means to be born again. It really means to have all those external antenna and stimuli destroyed and it means you being made again inside by God, born of His Spirit, Jesus coming alive inside you and you beginning to be the individual that you really are.

Now, there will be all kinds of growing pains. And we'll talk about those as the year goes on and how to beat them and how to come into a real baptism of the Spirit so that you're able to let out what is inside but the first step is to get something inside. Loved ones, there is only one person who loves you enough and He is anxious enough for you to be a free will individual to do that and that is our dear Father God who made you and made me. And He has done that. And you, there is a person, you, intact inside Jesus that can be released to you this very day, really. By His Spirit, God is able to make that person real inside you if you believe, that's it. But that's the only way.

The only way is this morning to say, "God, I certainly know my life is going that way. My life is certainly programmed till I am sick and tired and bored with it and it's brought death not only to my home, to my friends, to myself but even to my marriage. God, I want to become a person. A person who feels from within some direction for his life, some feeling for her life, some desire as to what I should do in this life apart from reacting to this person who is playing praise games with me or this person who is playing reward games with me."

"God, I need to discover myself inside. Lord, if you have destroyed this mess that I now have, this excuse for a personality that is just a robot, if you have destroyed this in Jesus, I don't know the

details, but Lord, I believe that. And I ask you Lord God to bring about a new birth inside me so that I will be born inside as a person."

Loved ones, God does love you enough to do that, He does and nobody else does. You know it takes a lot of care over that little flower because we'll all keep blasting with all kinds of incentives to do this or do that and it'll take a lot of grace from God to enable you to keep going the way you, yourself want to go. But loved ones, He has a life for you to live that is different from all the rest of us here, completely different from all the rest of us, and that's the only life worth living, there's no other life worth living.

The more you spend your time living this bluff life, the more time you are wasting. So, I would encourage you, whatever age you are, even to just when we close our eyes this morning to just ask God, doesn't matter how much you understand or how little, if you ask Him, "Lord, I want to be remade. I don't know the details but I do want it and I do want somehow to begin to feel again inside. I want to know what you planned when you sent me here to earth."

I pray you know that, you'll be able to do it and then go out in faith that He has done it. And then you'll begin miracle of miracles if you go out in faith believing that He has done it. You will begin to find little directives coming inside from your own heart, little feelings, my Maker wants me to do that and oh loved ones, it's life, clean, good water of life compared with this old imitation life. Let's pray.

Dear God, many of us I think feel like R2D2s. We often are just bored to tears doing the same thing day after day responding the same way, unable, it seems to control our instincts at all. We see we're often just a plaything of circumstances and even of people and even of our friends. Lord God we feel we've almost died inside. We wonder how could we ever become interesting people? But Lord, we know that you see all this and you know it all and Lord Jesus you're the only one who said, "You must be born again" and we begin to see why you said it.

So Lord God, if it is true that when Christ died, we all died, then we believe that. Lord Jesus we want to believe that. That when you died on Calvary in time and space and in eternity in a cosmic death, that you took us with you. And you destroyed this pre-programmed personality of ours and you freed us from all these external stimuli of wanting people's approval and wanting the security that circumstances can give us.

Lord, you destroyed all that and you made us new as you rose from the dead, we rose with you and we have been born again with you. Lord Jesus, you are a gentleman and you want us to be freewill agents and you will help us to be. So Lord, we ask you to come into us now, send your Spirit into us so that we can begin to know what you, Lord God, have sent us here on earth to do, and the way you want us to live.

Lord, we ask you to speak to us as we go out from this place this day. Lord, we are going to have faith. We're going to believe that you have done that. That you have, in fact, destroyed this old personality with Jesus and you've brought to birth the new one that you originally gave us. And Lord we thank you for that, we thank you and we expect to hear from that Spirit, that personal Spirit within us now as we go out from this place this day. Thank you Lord. We intend to begin to live free and act from within what we really think you want us to do. Thank you.

Now, the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit go with

each one of us now and throughout this coming week. Amen.