

## God's Gulf Stream

Romans 11:17

Sermon transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

There are two very different ways to look for a job. One is -- you try to decide in your own mind the kind of thing you would enjoy doing. Then you begin to read the employment opportunities in the newspapers. You forward your resume to the employment agencies. Then you begin to attend interviews. You compare the jobs that are offered to you. You judge them on the basis of their financial appeal, and on the basis of the working conditions, and on the basis of the future that they would offer to you personally, and then lastly, on whether you'd really enjoy doing the thing or not. On the basis of those considerations you take one of the jobs.

Now, that is walking by sight. The only information you get on the job is what comes through your eyes or comes through your ears, or comes through the understanding of your mind. But the whole operation is simply an interaction between you and other human beings, or between you and certain job situations. Now that's walking by sight.

Now the other way to find the right job is that you believe that such a complex person as you are must have been created by the Supreme Being that created all the much less complex things that we see around us in nature. You conclude that since each one of those has a very specific function to fulfill, it is most likely that your Creator put you here on earth to fulfill a very specific purpose for him.

So you begin to spend time each day thinking about your Creator. You try to withdraw your mind from all the noise and the distractions of the world around you. You try to get gradually a sense of quietness inside in your heart, where you come to the conclusion that God himself is actually interested enough in you to guide you to the right job if you will move slowly and quietly enough.

Then -- you begin to read the employment opportunity columns in the newspapers, and you begin to apply to some of the agencies. You refuse the interviews that you sense a little check inside in your heart about. Each opportunity that comes up, you examine it in the privacy and quietness of prayer and conversation with your Maker. Then you gradually make a few moves towards a job and as the result from the other people seems to confirm the sense of peace that you have in your heart, and as a particular job seems to fulfill some of the criteria that you know God himself is interested in for you, then you begin to move towards that job. As everything continues to confirm the way you're moving, you accept the job offer.

Now loved ones, that's walking by faith. That's believing that your Maker has a certain job and a certain position for you. You continue to believe that against all the odds. You continue to act in obedience to that belief, whatever it may cost you or however hard it may be, with all the other voices blazing in on you. That's it, loved ones. It's two very different ways to walk. Of course, that's only it in regard to a job. Actually there are those two different ways to walk in regard to everything in our lives.

Now, that way of walking by faith -- that sense of contentment that makes you feel, "I'm right with my Maker. I'm not way out here on a limb. I am in fact doing what he wants me to do" -- that sense of rightness that comes from that walk of faith, was established first as a normal way to live life

about four thousand years ago. It's in Genesis 15:1: "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.'"

By the way, we have a tendency to wait in our bedrooms for a thunderous voice like that. We think that's the way it must have been. Loved ones, we have to begin to get the message that though the TM'ers {practicers of Transcendental Meditation} are wrong and transcendental meditation simply opens you up to evil spirits taking advantage of your own passivity, yet there's something in the truth that you have to quieten yourself over a period of time of half an hour or an hour, before all the activity of your mind begins to run down and you begin to be able to concentrate on God.

Actually if we would do that, we would hear a voice, too. Honestly we would. We're dumb. We say we never hear these things today. But actually it's because we never spend enough time alone with our Maker to hear this. But we would if we did.

Genesis 15 verse 2: "But Abram said, 'O Lord God, what wilt thou give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'Behold, thou hast given me no offspring; and a slave born in my house will be my heir.' And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, 'This man shall not be your heir; your own son shall be your heir.' And he brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness."

He reckoned his faith to him as righteousness. That made him right with God. In other words, if Abraham had been going by sight, he'd have looked at Sarah, seen that she was over seventy as he was, that they were childless, and therefore that there would possibly be no descendants for him. But he was so close to his Maker and had such a feel for what his Maker had planned for his life that he believed that his Maker wanted him to have children, and that he would actually have descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, and that somehow his Maker was able to introduce a higher law of life that would extend and expand the normal abilities of his body and of his wife Sarah's so that they would be able to have children.

Now loved ones, even though the contemporaries of Abraham in the world at that time continued to operate according to the simple natural laws and allowed the normal human circumstances to limit what could happen in their lives, yet Abraham himself struggled out of that kind of narrow dependence, and began to live his life and began to face the practical questions that he had to meet in his life, on the basis not of the natural laws around him, not of the human limitations that confined him, but on the basis of the power and the promises of his Maker to override those laws and to bring in a life that elevated and expanded the normal possibilities of this human existence.

Loved ones, that's true. Abraham started to live that way. Then his son Isaac caught that way of faith from his father. He began to see that his dad was not dumb. He was not stupid. He knew how to manage the affairs of life and indeed, he was a very successful man. But Isaac began to see his father always worked on the basis of this added dimension. He always worked on the basis of the idea that there was an uncreated life -- that the Maker of the world actually intended us normally to use -- to transform and expand and transcend this present life and its opportunities.

Because this was so, when Isaac came to finding a girl that he would marry he did not go round the skating rinks of that time and go into the clubs and bowling alleys. He did not! He believed that the Maker, who had made him and his father, cared enough about him and about that important event in

his life to have it planned. So he actually trusted his Maker – trusted him to lead him to the right girl. That's the way, you remember, Isaac met his wife -- through God opening the way through Isaac's father and his servant, until Isaac met the right girl for him.

It's interesting that Isaac's son Jacob learned the same thing in a different context. Jacob was a miserable manipulator. None of us would know anything about that, I know! But Jacob was a guy who was always working angles, and always pulling deals, and always making sure that things went the way that he wanted them to go.

You remember the time came when he found himself returning to the brother whom he had deceived – Esau. He began to get scared, and you remember, there came a time when he had to get before God in a valley, and he had to pray and ask God whether he should continue to send the presents out to try to bribe Esau to be peaceable, and to accept him and to reconcile. God, you remember, put his thigh out of joint as if to say, “You must finally give up your manipulating and your working angles. You must believe that I have a plan for you and Esau. I will prepare him and his heart for you.” That's what Jacob began to do.

So even the manipulator, Jacob, began to trust this Maker of his to bring in an uncreated life that would elevate and expand and enliven and transcend the natural laws of finance and the natural laws of physical being. Without actually destroying those laws, this life comes in and lifts you up and uses those laws and transcends and expands them. Loved ones, those three men, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob -- those patriarchs began a dynasty of people who began to live like that.

It's almost like a Gulf Stream. That's why I called the sermon "God's Gulf Stream." Do you know there's a river in the world that runs right through the middle of an ocean? It is known as the Gulf Stream. It starts in the Gulf of Mexico in the warm tropical waters there. Driven by winds, it flows between Florida and Cuba and follows up close to the east coast of America, and then cuts across the Atlantic Ocean and disperses eventually on the coasts of Africa and Europe.

The amazing thing about the Gulf Stream is -- it carries not only the warm water that it picked up in the Gulf of Mexico with it, but it carries marine vegetation and marine life with it. If you were sailing in a boat in the middle of the cold Atlantic you could in certain places get out and swim in tropical water – the water that this Gulf Stream carries with it. It's incredible that even on the coasts of Europe and Africa, the influence of the Gulf Stream is so strong that in southern Ireland (and I know it usually rains and is cold in Ireland) there are palm trees that remind you of Mexico, where the Gulf Stream came from. Such is the moderating effect of that water on even the coasts of Europe and Africa.

Now loved ones, everywhere that Gulf Stream goes it carries with it fertility and a warmth and a life that transforms the environment round about. Now that's what this Gulf Stream of a faith-life is. Throughout the history of the world this Gulf Stream of God's uncreated life has been able to transform life wherever people have had faith that God actually cared about them. It's as if that faith sets loose superhuman powers that take the ordinary events of life and transforms them.

Loved ones that's the way we were meant to live. That's it. You know how repeatedly we face a situation in the office that is just frozen. It's just seized up. It just will not move. The boss sits in that position. The secretary sits in that position. The vice-president sits in that position. There's no movement. It's just seized or frozen.

Or in our family situations -- how many of us have home situations where the relationships are frozen? You've tried everything! You can't try anything else. In fact you can't say anything! The whole thing would get worse. You feel, "There has to be something! There has to be something else that will break this hold -- that will break this stalemate."

Loved ones, how many of us are facing it financially? How many of us come into situations with cars or with our clothes or our homes or the children's education, and you feel, "It just stops"? And you feel there's a deadness and a sterility about things.

You know what we do. We work with our mind. We manipulate, but we don't actually solve the things. We just get ourselves deeper in debt. We make more trouble for ourselves but bluff ourselves that we're solving it -- but really we're not. We're just moving the problem to another area and we'll have to deal with it later on.

Loved ones, do you see that God has lovingly so planned life that we will sooner or later realize that we weren't meant to live life with simply the resources of our own mental ability and emotional life? That life is made, and will only work, if there is this Gulf Stream of superhuman power and life that God can bring into your life if you have faith.

It is incredible and it just sounds stupid! But it actually works. Actually if you have faith in this God and if you begin to live your life on the basis of his promises and his wishes for you, instead of what you can make out of the circumstances and the people around you, you will begin to find things transformed in ways that you can't understand.

Now loved ones, it's a wide Gulf Stream. It's mentioned in Hebrews 11:29. So it isn't something new or something that hasn't been proven. "By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land; but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given friendly welcome to the spies."

"And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets -- who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life." (Hebrews 11:29-35)

Loved ones, that stream is wide. At the beginning it was like the Gulf Stream itself. It was narrow. At the beginning it was through Abraham, then only through some of his children through Isaac, then only through some of his children through Jacob. Then it was through the Hebrews, then only through some of the Jews, who were prepared to exercise faith -- until eventually, that Gulf Stream has widened out to include people from all backgrounds and all traditions who have one characteristic in common.

You'll see it in Romans 4:9: "Is this blessing pronounced only upon the circumcised," (and it used to be) "or also upon the uncircumcised? We say that faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received circumcision as a sign or seal of the righteousness which he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who

believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, and likewise the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but also follow the example of the faith which our father Abraham had before he was circumcised."

In other words, this blessing is to all of us loved ones who are the real children of Abraham, to all of us who will live believing that our Maker knows us personally as he knew Abraham, and has put us here for a certain purpose and is able if we will spend time with him to reveal that purpose to us. Even when we don't understand it fully, if we will keep checking with him and have moments of quietness during each of our days, he will lead us in his way! Even when we're turning to the right or the left, the promise is that you will hear a voice saying, "This is the way. Walk ye in it."

So actually this blessing is for you -- if you will stop living your life as if it depended only on you and on your wishes and your preferences, and you'd start living it in the belief that your Maker knows you, loves you, and has a certain plan for you -- if you'll start living it that way, as if you're checking with a friend: "What do you think? You think this is right? I think I'll turn right here. Is that OK?"

That's what he wants. If you live that way with him as a friend, he will bring this supernatural Gulf Stream of superhuman life that will begin to enlarge your own capacities and will begin to bring about miracles in your own relationships.

Then, loved ones, it's good just to share the truth that God brings us today about this in Romans 11:17: "But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches."

The olive tree is the Gulf Stream. "If some of the branches were broken off" -- that is, if some who are children of Abraham according to the flesh--some loved ones who are born Jews and are Jewish --- if some of them because of their lack of faith have been broken off, "and you, a wild olive shoot" -- all of us Gentiles, who had not the privilege of being born into that dynasty of faith in the early days --- but we, "as a wild olive shoot were grafted in their place to share the richness" of the root. Actually, the Hebrew says. "of the olive tree", because the root of the olive tree was in Abraham, though in our next talk you'll see that it's even deeper than that. But the root of the olive tree was in the patriarchs. We've been allowed to share the richness of that root --then "do not boast over the branches."

I'm sure there's a truth there. You remember the way the early Jewish Christians in the New Testament church demanded that the Gentiles become Jews before they would let them into the Christian church? You remember that way that made the Gentiles feel that they had to submit themselves to a tradition that actually was not necessary in order to become Christians. Eventually that was washed out as unnecessary, but you remember the feeling that gave to those Gentiles.

Now there is truth to us, too. There's a way in which you can boast over the Jewish people who do not have the same faith as many of us have, isn't there? There's a way that you can say "Come up to our level and you can share what we have."

It's probably important for us to see in this dear Word that we should not do that. Moreover we should see that God wants to preserve their dignity. They are still in a unique way his dear people. The Messiah himself wants to deal with them personally in a way that will preserve their dignity and will yet destroy self-righteousness, in a way that will call them to himself and yet enable them to

feel that this is the fulfillment of all that they have been trying to walk in for years -- rather than seeing that it is going into something alien to what they know.

I'm sure there's a truth in that, that all of us have to realize -- I think frankly not only with loved ones who are Jewish -- I think it's an attitude that you should have to everybody. I think there's nothing as off-putting -- and I was once guilty of living this way -- there's nothing as off-putting to the old agnostic as having you dear evangelical Christians looking down on us and treating us as if we have to rise up to your level of language and your little conventions in order to come into the fullness of God. So it is important to be clear of any boasting.

Then I just mention the verses that follow in Romans 4, where Paul describes the original experience in Romans 4:18: "In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations; as he had been told, 'So shall your descendants be.' He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was 'reckoned to him as righteousness.' But the words, 'it was reckoned to him,' were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also." (Romans 4:18-23a)

Loved ones, I would ask you: Are you living in the midst of God's Gulf Stream? Do you live your life, do you look for jobs, do you look for a car, do you look for a girl, do you look for a guy, do you look for a school -- in faith -- or do you look for it by sight? Do you live your life with this dear Creator right at your elbow in a real loving, conversing, trusting relationship with him, or are you still trying to live it on your own?

Loved ones, you don't need me to tell you -- it's just dead on your own. It is a finite world and we are not finite beings. We are made to be infinite and we'll eternally find frustration with this intractable world unless we begin to experience the transcending and the transforming power of this uncreated life from God. It's his wish that you would live that way.

Let us pray. Dear Father, we realize we have such a casual attitude to you, such a religious attitude. We see with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob that they were very practical about their relationship with you, and that they depended upon you for all kinds of things that were very real and material. Lord, we see that that's your desire for us, that we would stop putting you away at the end of Sunday evenings in our Bibles, and we would instead begin to walk with you on Monday morning, and begin to spend time each day getting your mind on things, and consulting you, and then experiencing all that excitement and that thrill of walking out on limbs of faith, that we would normally not dream of ever venturing upon, in the absolute trust that you wanted us to move there, and that your Spirit would transform the circumstances to make success possible.

Lord, we see that that's your plan for us, that we would walk daily with our God, experiencing the superhuman power of your Spirit. We would begin that now. We know it's easy. We know we simply have to start being concerned with what you want, and to begin to discuss this with you. So we would set out on this way of faith this very day -- for your glory.