

Living From Within

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Loved ones, I'd like to share a few things before we listen to Grace and see the slides that she has of Afghanistan. The spiritual life means this: each one of us is sent by our maker to give to this world, and to do in this world, things that only we can do. That's a fact -- it is, really. And I don't blame you too much for not believing that because we have kind of encouraged the use of each other so that probably most of you feel the same way as I did -- that you're just a function and there's not much difference between you and anybody else. But that is wrong, loved ones -- you are different from everybody else. You are. You are physiologically different, and you're psychologically different, but most of all you're made different, inside, from everybody else. And your God wants to give to this world, through you, something that is different from what anybody else can give.

Now honestly; you're shortchanging yourself unless you really grasp that. I don't blame you doing what we all do when we hear that. We think, "Oh, that's a preacher's line," or, "That's Christianity's line," or, "That's a good way to kind of build up my self esteem." It's none of those things loved ones -- that's a fact; you are actually different from everybody else in the world and you're different for a purpose. Your God has made you different so that there is a whole, as you would say, a whole slew of things in this world that can only be done through you and it's to be done differently through you from the way it's done by anybody else.

Now I don't know how to get you to believe that. I could get each one of you and tramp on you and kick you and all kinds of things -- I don't know how to get you to believe that, but that is actually a fact. And I know you keep on thinking to yourself, "Well, that's nice of you to say that, and that helps me, but there are plenty of people in my office that can do the same thing as I do, and there are plenty of people who can use the same drill as I do, and use the same computer." Loved ones, you will believe this, won't you -- that there's nobody else like you? At least you'll believe that? That even if you're an identical twin, in some way you're different from your twin; there's some way in which, psychologically, you're different. And of course, what I'm saying is, the big thing is even if you were exactly the same as another person to even a psychologist's eye, inside you have a different relationship to God, our God, than any of us have.

And our God, your God, wants to do something through you, and express himself through you, in a way that nobody else will express it. That's actually what spiritual life is and if you just believed that and started to live that way and started to really depend on God to tell you what he wanted you to do, you'd begin to live a spiritual life. The tragedy with us all is that we have not believed that. Probably in some way some of you sitting here tonight actually don't believe it even yet. Some of you who are Christians -- some of you, even, who call yourselves baptized with the Spirit, have got into religion the way you got into the Lions' club or the way you got into the school football team -- it's something that kind of gives you some stimulation from outside; yet you actually have never established a real relationship with your Creator.

A lot of the stuff you do that you say he tells you to do actually is just what somebody else says you should do, or what you read in books you should do. So a lot of us here this evening, more than we would care to admit, even though we call ourselves Christians, have little experience of the free

life. We have little experience of being the only individual like ourselves in the whole universe, and little experience of walking day-by-day with this dear God, knowing that we're going to live something original this day that nobody else can live.

The fact is that very few of us believe that. That's why so many of us have real problems with "Who am I and, what am I here for", and then all kinds of problems with paranoia. We can all identify with each other that we are very insecure in many ways -- we do put up a front -- but we are very insecure in many different ways. We don't know exactly where our life is going, but we're kind of doing the best we can. We believe we're on the right track, but we are very uncertain about many things. That's why we're uncertain, do you see that? That's why.

Of course we have to deal with that in some way and what most of us do is we try to do a good job. Because if you do a good job then at least your seniors and those in authority over you will appreciate you, and approve of you, and that'll give you some sense of security. And as well as that your friends can admire you for, "He's a good gardener," or, "He's a good welder," or, "She's a good computer tech" and you kind of feel, "Well, I have a place in the world; they do think I'm worth something." The tragedy is, of course, as the years go on you get more and more dependent on that kind of input. So more and more of your security does tend to hang on your job, doesn't it? That's why for so many of us guys retirement, or any change in job situation, is so traumatic; because so much is attached to the way we perform in our own minds and unfortunately in other people's minds.

The ladies are supposedly to be made to feel secure by the way we (men) treat you, though all that's changing and you're coming into the same kind of syndrome that we men are; that you have to prove yourself and keep proving yourself year after year after year. That's the killer -- it actually doesn't get easier. That's how we eventually rise to the high point of our own incompetence in companies, but we keep going up because who would dream of stepping back? If you step back, that's the end of your sense of security. So the great part of the world lives like that. I suspect more of us live that way than would care to admit who are here tonight. But the world lives that way: the world lives very dependent on the way the rest of the people in it treat them to give them a sense of security.

Now that's called the life of the flesh, you see. The life of the Spirit is living the way we talked about at the beginning; where you really would get hold of the God who made you, and you really would begin to establish a quiet friendship with him, and you would begin to know why he put you here. That's the way of the Spirit. The way of the flesh is the way, dear help us, most of us are living. Even those of us, I'm afraid, who call ourselves Christians. So many of us are living in the same kind of situation as what we call the "worldly people" or the sinners, except that maybe ours is a kind of religious approval system -- we do things that the religious people around us think are good, and that makes us feel secure. But actually it's a terrible slavery.

Of course, what happens in the midst of it all is, you begin to lose the ability to act from within, on principle, as your own man or your own woman. You begin to lose the ability to actually do anything because you think, alone, on your own, that you should do it. It gets more and more difficult. That's why so many of us, I think, are concerned about America, so concerned about the society, so concerned about the emphasis on Gallup polls, so concerned about all the preoccupation with exactly how many people are going to vote for this person at the moment, or that person.

That's why we're concerned about these things; because we know that most of us are miserable little

blotters that just soak up the ink as it comes in. We want to do what the majority want to do, because many of us have lost the ability to do anything because we really believe it. That's why, it's strange, but that's why we admire the people who are prepared to go their own way. We don't understand them at times, but we admire them because they are determined to say what they think, and so many of us have almost lost the ability to do that.

Now, we do make token gestures, you know, because if we get a little crowd, or a minority and they're saying what they think, well, we'll add our voice, as long as we're part of a little crowd. We don't mind actually being persecuted as long as there's some others with us. But it's very, very difficult for many of us to actually live one day based on what we believe from within we should do.

We all say "Oh, no, no, you're wrong, I have my principles." Yes, but most of them are principles that our group believes, or that somebody else believes, or that we all accept. But this idea of living individually with your God, with a sense of him saying "This is the kind of thing I want you to do, this is it" not voices -- I'm not talking about voices coming in from all directions but a sense inside, "Lord we've spent time with each other. I know why you've put me here. I know the kind of thing I should be doing day-by-day, and that's why I'm doing it. Whether this person agrees with it or not, whether it brings me failure or success, this is what I'm doing."

Actually, for most of us, we have died inside and that's the situation with most of the world: most of the world is dead inside; the real person inside has died. The real living individual has died. That's why Joel is so good in that picture (he creates). Most of us are no better than the horse: we just do what the herd does; we go where we're shepherded; we go where we can get the best food or the best fodder; we go where people give us a lump of sugar; we do what pleases other people and what gets us rewards and that's the way most of the world is. That's what the Bible means when it says, "You're dead in your sins." That's it, you see. Most of us have died inside; most of us are just curled up, warped little nut kernels that used to actually be great, healthy fruit. But we're warped little nut kernels that are dead and dry, and all we actually are, are robots.

That's what it means, loved ones. And of course it has affected our whole being, it has affected our whole personality, because our whole personality is utterly contorted and twisted and that's why so many of us have such difficulty in acting on principle, or acting from within -- we have terrible problems. I put it to you: if there is some problem in the office and the boss is going one way, how many times have you been with people in your office, and everybody has agreed this is wrong; everybody has agreed this company policy is wrong, and unfair. Have you ever got tired listening to people blabbing away and doing nothing? Have you? I've heard it for years: everybody says, "Oh, well, this is wrong and they shouldn't do this." But not a soul, not a soul will go to the wall -- not a soul will go to the cross on it. Not a soul will risk their job for it. Not a soul will say, "I'm going to do this, whatever, because this is wrong."

It's amazing, isn't it how very few of what we would call people of principle there are nowadays in our world. And the reason is because most of us have died inside and we don't even know any longer who we actually are. That's why Jesus didn't say you had to be born again because a second life would be interesting; he said, "You must be born again because you're dead. You're dead as a doornail inside. You appear to be alive, but as far as any individual relationship in a living way with your God is concerned, you're dead inside and you need to be born again" -- loved ones, that's the difference between the spiritual life and the fleshly life.

We have diagrams that we use here in the evening services to explain it, but they're just visual images. The important thing is that you would grasp that that is the difference between the fleshly life and the spiritual life, and that you yourself would be able to decide where you are in the whole thing. Because, I think the tragedy is that so many of us got caught up in the same thing: we got caught up in, "Oh, I asked the Lord Jesus into my life" we do that, and we go through the motions and we never really see that what we're being asked to do is get in touch with the God of the whole universe who put us here. After all, he put us here; it's his fault we're here. He wants us to know why we're here and to get in touch with him and to begin to sort out with him, however slowly we have to do it, why we're here. And that's really what the new birth is; beginning to do that.

Now, we talk about it in all types of terms. The Bible talks about an "outer man" and an "inner man". And it talks about the importance of standing up in your "inner man". And that's what some of this means: standing up in your inner man and finding that life that is inside you, and finding yourself inside, and beginning to act from that inner man to the outer man. Most of us act the other way: we act from the outer man in. The outer man utterly dominates us.

I've joked about our little dog; he will do anything for chocolate chip ice cream! He's a little Yorkshire terrier, weighs about five pounds and he will do anything for chocolate chip ice cream and for ordinary cream and for whipped cream -- and that's what it is; we'll do anything for a raise. We'll do anything for a little bit of praise from somebody; anything for a little bit of popularity. We'll do anything if somebody gives us something. Most of us live from the outer man in. "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours", that's the setup, and that's why many of the older people in America are concerned. It's not just that they're old fashioned, or they think, "Oh, everything's going the wrong way," but they're concerned because so much of society now is based, not on men and women of principle who know what they ought to do and do it, but so much of society consists of men and women who will do whatever promotes them in the eyes of their friends, or their neighbors, or their bosses. There's very little heroic living today; very few people who live heroically and, of course, that's the only way to live. It's the only way to have fun in life, it's the only way to have excitement in life, and it's the only way to live; to live heroically.

But so many of us have died inside so that we couldn't live heroically even though we might want to and that's why many of us have that kind of nostalgia when you see some guy living heroically at times, maybe not even a Christian, but we see some guy, or some girl doing what she thinks is right, even though she goes to the wall on it, and we kind of yearn for that -- we would like to be like that. We would like to be -- but the tragedy is that our whole personality apparatus has become so contorted that we just make efforts at it.

There are times, I bet, in your office, or in your work, or in your school where you sense, "This isn't a big deal, it isn't a question of a great right or a great wrong, but I know that this is what I should say and this is what I should do." There are times when you sense almost a little voice inside you saying, "Say that," or, "Go this way." But you know the agony you suffer. You know your old personality is used to working all the time, and it's not long before you've worked up five good reasons to avoid that voice: "Well, let me not make a stand on this issue, it's pretty stupid. No, no, I'll wait till something really important comes up where I can nail my '95 theses to the door at Wittenberg (like Martin Luther)." And we wait, we'll wait for a better time to make a better stand.

And it's interesting -- how we just sell our souls. We give our souls away, as sordid boon.

Wordsworth says, "We have given our heart away- a sordid boon." In other words, inch-by-inch, bit-by-bit, we sell ourselves down the river until we no longer even feel we could take the initiative to make a stand. Now that's the tragedy, you see. That's the tragedy; not only that most of us are dead inside, as far as that vital connection with God is concerned, but most of us are now burdened with a personality that is so contorted and so perverted that it actually acts as a prison whenever we do want to do something on principle, or because we believe we were made to do it.

The tragedy is; we're a bunch of boring stereotypes; we all say the same thing, we all read the same books. If you believe this, then you support this political candidate. If you go to this church, then you sing this way. If you do this, then you pray in those terms. If you're this kind of a person, you'll take this kind of an attitude to the political or the commercial situation in the world. We're a bunch of boring stereotypes because we're all dead. And of course if we were alive we'd be as varied as nature -- not two daffodils the same, not two beech trees the same, not two mountains the same, not two rivers the same -- everything different. Swallows, boy - flying in all kinds of curves any old way! Birds, rats, squirrels, all of them do it differently and they go in different ways. There's a diversity that is exciting and that - it's strange -- that's often what keeps some of us sane. It's the diversity in nature that keeps some of us sane, because all that men touch seems to end up as a boring kind of stereotype.

Now loved ones, that's why it's vital to be born of God. That's why. Not to fit in with some religious experience that we're all supposed to have, but because that's why we were put here on earth. And a spiritual life is living from within; a fleshly life is living from without, as we described. Now, just in a couple of minutes (life will pass that quickly), you're going to meet your God at the end of this life, and if you have become a boring stereotype robot that is no different from thousands of others in the world, he will call you to account for that. He will, because he has made you different: you have had thoughts inside your head and you've had feelings that nobody else has. You have. It doesn't make you any better than the rest of us, but it does make you different from the rest of us and it does mean that there are some things that you're to do in this world that none of the rest of us can do.

Now loved ones, this has nothing to do with who is up here on this stage, or whether you're famous or I'm famous, or anybody else that knows us at all. It has nothing to do with that. Nothing to do with whether my job is to scrub this floor, or to repair these chairs, or whether your job is to paint these walls, or to count money, or to type. It has nothing to do with that function of business. It doesn't matter what you're doing, it doesn't matter at all what you're doing in this world. It doesn't matter if you're on the most boring production line in the automobile industry, it has nothing to do with that. It's your whole person.

It's your whole person that God has a beauty to bring of himself through; your whole person at work, and in your home, and when you're playing games, and when you're on vacation. There's a whole person, you see, so don't keep tying it down to this business of, "Oh what you're saying only applies to if I'm a missionary, or if I'm a preacher, or if I play the organ." That's stupid. It has nothing to do with the thing you do. You could simply put a bolt into the same piece of metal hour, after hour, after hour, for 40 years and you could be a picture of God that nobody else could be.

I'll just tell you about my dear old friend. I'll be very quick, because you've heard me tell it before. In Ireland when I was growing up we still heated our homes by coal, by open fire. So all our homes had open fires, which you all think is very picturesque, but if you have to heat your home

by it, it's miserable! The coal was delivered on carts drawn by horses. And they came around the little streets where we lived and the coal man, we called him the coal man, would lift the bag of coal off the cart, onto his shoulders, and he would carry it into our little yard at the back of our houses and he would throw the coal into the coal bin.

Now you can guess, it is tricky to throw coal into a coal bin without getting some coal dust on you. So these poor guys were the dirtiest men that you could ever see. I mean, they were worse than people who cleaned the chimneys -- the chimney sweeps. They were covered in coal dust and coal dirt. And they sat on these carts, drawn by these large drays (horses), which all seems very picturesque and romantic to you, but was miserable, really, with the Irish rain beating down on them. And you should see the faces streaked with coal dust and with the rain running down them and running down inside their clothes, over the clothes, they were the most miserable sight that you could behold.

But I am looking forward to meeting a coal man who was a saint to me. He went to our church. Joe, his name was -- Joe Jenks -- and that's the way he lived his life. Do you know how he -- he was gassed in the First World War, and you know how he died? He died when he was going through the shipyard. There was a large steel door, and he was going up to it, and a guy opened the smaller door from the other side and killed him. That's the way; couldn't be a more ordinary, insignificant, unimportant way to die. Couldn't be a dirtier, more miserable kind of life. But I still remember the way he prayed for this corner of God's vineyard. He made an impression with his whole life upon all of us young people in the church, that I remember now, so many years later. That's what it is, you see.

It doesn't matter about what you do. It doesn't matter about your job, it might be terrible, it might be miserable, but God Almighty has a picture of himself to express through you that he cannot express through anybody else. You won't know that unless you get with him, unless you get together with your God. And that's what it means to be born of God. So I just ask you: what is your life at the moment? Is it a Spiritual life or is it a fleshly life? And if it is a fleshly life, for Jesus' sake, for God's sake, and for your own sake, make a stand tonight. Even if it is as simplistic or naïve as Joe (in the audience) says his was.

Make a stand tonight; go to the prayer room, and pray. Say that to God, "God, I want to know why I am here. I know you might not be able to answer me tonight, but I want to begin now, to find out from you why you have me here, and what you want me to do." And then begin to say that each day, because loved ones, until you know that, until you have some kind of touch or contact with the dear God that put you here, you're wasting your time. You're wasting your life. It doesn't matter if you become the richest man and the richest woman in the whole world, it doesn't matter how successful you become with your job, you're wasting your life unless you know your God, and know him as your dear Father, and begin to do what he wants you to do. That's what it is to be born of God.

Sorry I didn't get on to the (study of) emotions, but I thought that it was better to show you the distinction between a Spiritual life and a fleshly life, and then for you to sort that out. And I'd ask you to do it so that in these coming Sundays we can go on into what are exciting and deep things that God has to show us in connection with being that kind of person. But really, far better, far better to be a miserable old Irish coal man, whom everybody despises as far as your job is concerned, and then to be waking at the gate to meet those who saw God in you. Better to be that than to be an animal that has become well known or pleased everybody, really.

I know it's hard to switch over to another subject, but I wouldn't suggest that everybody comes up and listens to Grace tonight. I think those of us who have a burden for the ministry abroad -- a real desire to get out there, I think it'd be good if we gathered round and talked with her a bit. I think if God has spoken to your heart tonight, boy, I'd stay here or go into the prayer room, or there are plenty other places in the building where you can deal with God. And some of us here will be glad to talk with you. But I'd start getting onto the right track. Let's pray.

Dear Father, we do see there's a great difference between knowing you and knowing about you. And there's just a vast difference between knowing why we're here and this business of just doing our best. Lord, we see that. We would ask you Father, in your graciousness, to begin to show those of us here tonight who do not know it, show us why you've put us here. Lord, we don't want to let the most precious part of us die, and we see that that's what's happening. And we see that's why our life is often so unsatisfying. Lord, we want that most precious part of us, the bit that makes us us, the bit of us that is me alone, Lord we see that that's the bit you want to revive and regenerate.

That's the bit of us that is our spirit, not a great ego that wants itself elevated, not a great selfishness and egotism, but just a part of us that is us -- that is different from everybody else, and that you have made for yourself. Lord, we want that bit revived and we know that you alone can revive it. You alone can bring it into existence. So Lord, we would ask you, in your goodness, to revive us and bring us into new birth. Renew us inside so that we can come alive again and begin to find out what this is all about.

We ask this, dear Father, because of your good love to us, and because we know that this is what is right for us, this is what comes home to us as true. We thank you Lord, and ask you, Father, to be with Grace as she shows us these things about Afghanistan. Help us tonight, each one, to do what we really believe we should do. If we shouldn't go up and see these things, then we should stay here and do something else, or go home tonight and do some thinking. But Lord, give us each grace and strength to act with integrity now after this benediction; not to please people, not to do what others think we should do, but to do what we really believe you want us to do. We commit ourselves to doing that, Lord.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with each one of us, now and evermore. Amen.