



Unity Church of Christianity
A Spiritual Stretch
August 21, 2010

Howard Caesar

It's been said that one of the roles of the minister is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. What that means is--beyond comforting those who are in pain and struggle and suffering--we should be calling people out of their comfort zones. Most people like to be comfortable and they do a lot of things in their life to try and stay comfortable. Some people don't even like to exercise--don't want any part of running, walking, bicycling—as a matter of fact, the word “gym” is an evil word and “treadmill” and “pain” are synonymous, and things like that. So some people do not want to take part in anything that has to do with removing them from physical comfort zones.

Some people also have their mental comfort zones, of course, clinging to mental ideas and thoughts and what the ways of thinking and perspectives and sometimes we would label that person “narrow-minded” or “closed-minded.” So consciously or unconsciously the person can be saying, “Don't bother me with new ideas.” “Don't go asking me to exercise my mind.” So there are those who have a need, actually, to be called out of their physical comfort zones. There are those that hang out in mental comfort zones. There are those who hang out in emotional comfort zones and basically try to push away all of the feelings that are trying to be felt, and in the courses we're learning that one of the most important things, rather than repress and push away is

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to actually lean on into your feelings. It disbursts them. It's a healthy thing to do, to move beyond them in this way.

Then there are those who have a religious comfort zone and this is where people are basically reluctant to rethink or relearn or expand on whatever it is they were introduced to as a child or in their youth in terms of some of the ideas around religion, and that that becomes scary, because it's like this is their foundation and they hold on to it, and it's frightening to let go of that. And it's uncomfortable. It's more comfortable to hang on to what we once were told, maybe easier than learning something else.

So today, what I'm asking and inviting you to do is—all of us—is to have a spiritual stretch, okay? I'm suggesting that you look at what is—what it is and where it is that you are in your life—kind of in a comfort zone, and maybe stuck and maybe stagnant, and maybe lethargic and not really wanting to exercise the onward progress of movement and motion that is characteristic of life. And so, you know, the nature of life is that we're all being asked to stretch, and we're all being asked to expand and to broaden—to broaden in our spiritual understanding and in our experience and our experience of God. It's so important.

You see, for most of us, our first step of religious spiritual development is a step into a belief and a concept. And a concept can be rather cold and impersonal, even though the concept may be about God or about Jesus. And in our progression, we're all really called to stretch and to move from an understanding of God, just as a concept, and to move toward conviction. And conviction is born of experience, and so one wants to lean on into experiencing God, as opposed to just having had knowledge, concept of what God is supposed to be. It is really so vital, so important, so powerful in terms of developing and deepening a relationship with the divine to move toward conviction born of experience, and that personal experience. It opens a person up to whole new levels of understanding and new depths of being. A person may have grown up with the concept of God, that God is to be feared and it becomes a stretch then for a person to move from that idea that God is to be feared, to God is to be loved. And certainly here at Unity, that's something that we have again and again and again taught—that God is wanting to be love. God is love. And God wants to be loved and God does not want to be feared. God wants to be loved, because God is love and to know love is to know God, and that's an experience. The more that you're into the energies and the vibrations and the frequency of love, the more you are feeling actually your connectedness to the divine. Those are the energies. They're high and pure, and where the Scriptures talk again and again about being pure in heart and coming from that place, so vital and important. And so, it's always understanding that God does not want to be feared. God wants to be loved. And out of being loved, thereby experienced.

And so, we can look at all of life and we can realize that there is a progression of understanding, basically, that goes on in every field, this progression of understanding, deepening, expanding, broadening your understanding. And you could look at the field of education for one—it's very

obvious there. You started out in preschool or kindergarten, and then you graduate and progress on to grade school and then on to junior high, and then high school, and then college, and then you may move on into a master's program and PhD, and from there, out into practical experience and continued learning, and as you continue, things may develop in their complexity, but you tackle it. You learn, you progress—it's an ongoing thing. Even my father owned his own business and he had a plumbing, heating, and sheet metal business, okay? And back 30 years ago or 35 years ago—I don't know how it is today—but back in Wisconsin, you had to go apply, take a test to become a plumber. And then you went into what was called an Apprenticeship Program and you worked four days a week and 1 day a week you would go to school. And then finally, you'd take a test after five years to become a journeyman and to get your journeyman's license, and then you were required to work at least three years before—and take a test—before you could apply for that Master Plumber status, and you were required to have a Masters—be a Master Plumber—if you wanted to run your own business. And so that's the way it was. There's a progression in everything where we're called to expand and broaden, and it's also the idea that—in spirituality at least, and in all areas and aspects of progressing and understanding—you have to basically master, “First thing's first.” You see, you have to grasp and understand and live and apply, “First thing's first” before you go on to deeper things or you're lost.

And so there's an evolution of understanding that goes on, and the first concept that humans formed, for instance, of the earth—it was based only on what they could gather from their five senses, and so they concluded that the earth was flat, because their five senses told them that the sun came up over here and went down over there, on that horizon. And therefore, the earth was stationary and the sun must revolve around the earth, and they felt that it was flat. No one could possibly conceivably imagine that the earth was round, that it was a ball. I mean, how would people stand up on the other end? You know, they'd be standing on their head or whatever, and it was just insane. And of course, they didn't know and understand at that time about the principle and the law of gravity, and so as science developed and progressed, so did humanity's learning, therefore, his understanding, and therefore he went deeper and there was a progression and an evolution of understanding, which is the case in all fields, okay? And people are often afraid of what they don't understand and so people were afraid of coming to the ends of the earth and falling off. And so, everyone stayed in their comfort zone—which, they stayed home or close to home. You know? They didn't want to venture too far. They didn't take trips to Brazil or anything, you know?

But as we said, a concept basically has to be transposed into a conviction, and thereby becomes an experience, and experience is lodged in you and is carried with you, and nobody can talk you out of what it is that you have experienced. People can talk all day long about a concept, you know? But until you have an experience, you haven't been there. You see? And that's what we are trying to move and stretch always toward. A person has to believe a thing in order to investigate about it. And if a person is satisfied only with the belief, then it becomes a dogma, because they're in their head with concepts and they create a box around it, and they almost are--

to some extent--denied the experience on the basis of being lost in a concept of dogma. And so it's important to recognize that distinction.

Now, Jesus came into the world and he sought to clarify some of the existing dogma, some of the concepts that were off. And so he didn't come to necessarily add new truths, but he did come to try and explain and clarify and deepen existing beliefs and concepts so one could thereby move into an experience of the divine like he knew and had. He wanted that for everyone. He didn't want us to get lost in a lot of doctrine and dogma. He tried to move beyond that and move us beyond that, so we brought a new point of view and so no longer was it a God that was terrible and jealous and vengeful and cruel and unjust and merciless. A God that with a decision could exterminate masses of people with one swoop that you can still read about in the Old Testament. But instead he brought us a clarification. He brought into view a perspective on a God that is kind and just and good and that is of love and forgiveness, and he brought this new understanding along with it of spiritual laws and principles so that a person came to learn that it's not God punishing you. It's basically man's falling out of or ignorance of being in harmony with spiritual laws and principles. So you fall off a chair—it wasn't God that did it. It was gravity. Alright? So we need to get away from being afraid of God. God's nature is good and God is only there to love us and move us forward. And so, Jesus understood this and he understood this progression of understanding and he understood the idea of “First thing's first.” And so, it's important to live what you know--to this point--before you're going to be taken deeper. You don't get to move beyond where you are unless you have this willingness to move beyond the experience of God as a concept and move into a space of having a sense of conviction born of your own personal experience.

And so Mark—the Gospel of Mark, Chapter Four, Jesus states, “To you who hear, more will be given.” What he means by that is “To you who really understand and live what you have thus far learned, more will be given, and then you'll go deeper and be taken deeper to understand more.” In Matthew 13, he talks about “Therefore I speak to them in parables,” and he says, “because seeing, they do not see; and hearing, they do not hear, nor do they understand.” And so he had the veil of parables, so that is a person who grew and progressed in understanding those parables would speak to them at new and deeper levels. Otherwise, they were in the dark. In fact, the Disciples themselves had to ask at various times about a parable and what it meant. One being the parable of the sower, as it's shared in the Scripture. And so, in verse 17 of Matthew 13, Jesus says, “For assuredly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desire to see what you see and did not see it, and hear what you hear and did not hear it.” You see? So there are levels of listening that we bring to our spirituality or any mode of life, and there are levels of hearing and levels of understanding, and there are points at which we all close off and we're not ready to understand. Not everyone is ready to understand every bit of level, because “First thing's first.”

And in fact, Jesus understood this and spoke to that in the Gospel of John, Chapter 16. Jesus said this, he said, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” And he said

this near the end of his ministry, and so he was saying, “There are spiritual things that you're not ready for,” okay? “You wouldn't understand them. It would be premature in your progression.” And so Jesus felt that there were certain depths to these spiritual truths that would be—should be left veiled, until humans had the capable comprehension to be open and to understand and to embrace. And so by his own admission, basically, his teaching left some things out, alright? In terms of the depth of full explanation.

So in this world, you know, we basically have people who use fear—they use fear to separate us from each other—and they play on people's spiritual immaturity. Things that we don't understand, we're afraid of. And so in this world, you have people that play on your lack of understanding and take a position of authority like they know, and frighten you. And fear is not creative and productive, and what the world needs to be healed of is fear, and be moved more towards love, of course. In many ways, Jesus would be appalled or at least saddened by what some aspects of Christianity has become. You see, because sometimes man takes something and distorts it. And so Jesus came, delivered a message, and then that message over time—2000 years—lost some of its essence, its purity—at least its focus, you see? And anything and everything can be distorted or used and abused.

There's an article that somebody sent me, written by Leonard Pitts, Jr. and it was—had some interesting points, and some of it might be taken negatively if you want to—but it has a point, and I thought it was worth sharing. In the article, it quotes a lady named Anne Rice, who is a well-known author, and she was ten years ago an atheist. She had been brought up in the Christian church and then she turned atheist, and then ten years ago, she returned—it was a much-publicized return of sorts—to Christianity. And now, ten years later, she has announced that she has had her fill of organized religion. And she said, “Today I quit being a Christian. I remain committed to Christ, as always, but not to being Christian or being part of Christianity. It's simply impossible for me to belong to this quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious”—it means full of dispute--”and infamous group. For ten years I tried,” she said. She said, “In the name of Christ, I refuse to be anti-gay. In the name of Christ, I refuse to be anti-feminist. In the name of Christ, I refuse to be anti-artificial birth control, anti-Democrat, anti-secular Humanism, anti-science, anti-life.” She's observed things happening in humanity and it troubles her. The article speaks—written by Mr. Pitts—it makes the point that the Christian bible contains numerous exhortations to serve. To serve those who are in pain or wretched and poor, or to anger slowly, to forgive promptly, to walk through this life in humility and in faith, and somehow, you know, it writes, “hostility to science, to gays, to Muslims and immigrants became the very meaning of faith.” Somehow, that became the meaning of faith? You see? And somehow, Christianity became or at least came to seem--he writes—“a wholly owned subsidiary of one of the political parties.” The article points out that though this an extreme, after the election in 2004, there was a church in North Carolina that made news for kicking out nine congregants out of its church because they committed the unchristian act of voting Democratic. So that's an extreme, but these are some of the things that are going on. When you take something pure and beautiful, like a

Christ message, and politicize it. It was never meant to be politicized. I'm not Republican or Democrat, but I'm telling you that it's not to be meant politicized. And so, I side with Anne Rice in her statement, I can understand her, at least, saying Christ didn't fail her—Christianity did in some of the directions it goes. Not all—still a lot of good. We're not saying that, don't go to extremes with me, and “Howard said,” and all that.

The point is, if people can't live some of the basic principles that Jesus made very clear and simple, how is it that they can open up to deeper levels of understanding of truth that need to be lived next in a progression to move the world forward? We might say, “Jesus was right, most people aren't ready.” So the answer lies in moving from that first stage of having a belief in a concept only and sharing of concepts only and moving towards helping people to have a conviction of an experience.

You know, in the past four or five years, I've tried to stretch myself and I've moved seemingly to some extent outside the box of what I may have created for myself. We all create our own boxes, and I've gone to some deeper places that some would perhaps judge me for, but because it doesn't maybe fit another's box or dogma or whatever—but I chose to go to places. Like I went to India because I was drawn there in 2007 and 2008. I wanted to explore something I learned about and experienced, actually—about Oneness. And there's a Oneness University there, and it was beautiful and it was wonderful and it furthered me and deepened me, and it gave me an experience beyond concept.

And then last year, I went to Brazil to a town called Abadiânia, where there is a man there referred to as “John of God.” That is in a healing ministry and doing healing work, and it's somewhat unconventional, out-of-the-box, but they insist that everyone maintain their conventional treatment while accepting whatever they're offering there, and I decided to return this year—just returned with a group of 20 people, and it is a very Christian activity. It is almost very Catholic. It's very honoring of Jesus Christ, very honoring of Mother Mary, and the best way to describe it is that they make use of the invisible world, to bring forth into the process of healing and transformation for a person. They access spiritual energies, the unseen world. And this is not new to Christianity, really. It's just been forgotten, overlooked, or not talked about.

The stretch is to come to know this experience that God's spirit is everywhere and in everything. God's spirit is everywhere and in everything. I can't say that emphatically enough. All creation is nothing but spirit. Seemingly and temporarily diversified in various creative activity and various vibratory activity, and so the diversification of this vibratory activity is on the visible and the invisible level and realm. In my Father's house are many mansions, many realms, some beyond your ability to see into them. And so what I'm alluding to is that they access spirits, beings, angels--whatever you wish to call them—on the other side—that are evolved and are there to help and that what we're saying is that there are many dimensions available to help you. And you have been helped, even unknowingly, in many instances. And that the Bible talks about the Holy

Ghost or the Holy Spirit and spirit guides and angels and it's endless amounts of things like that. When Jesus was tempted with the temptations—when he was done—the Scripture says “Angels came and ministered to him.” And do you not think that angels have not come and ministered unto you at various points in time in your life? And you may not have thought, “Oh, an angel is here,” but you have. And I have, if you think about it—it's true. And there was a transfiguration, too, in the Bible it's listed in Matthew 17: Jesus took Peter and James and John along with him up to a mountain and he was transfigured and his light—his face shone—and his clothing became white as light, and that wasn't the only thing that happened. You see, it states that Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus. Moses and Elijah appeared and Jesus started talking to them, and the Disciples—those three Disciples—were just observing this whole thing, and on the way down from this experience, Jesus said, “By the way, don't tell anyone what you just saw.” Essentially, they're not ready for this. He said, “Don't tell them, at least until after the crucifixion and the resurrection.” And then the Disciples said, “Well, you know, we have a question here. Why do the scribes”—the scribes study Scripture—“Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? Because it's written that Elijah must come first before you do all this,” and Jesus' answer was, “Well, Elijah has come already, and they did not know him and they did with him what they wished.” And then it states the Disciples understood that he spoke of John the Baptist—that Elijah did come in John the Baptist.

And so right there is a stretch for you people, because Jesus is introducing the idea of reincarnation that Christianity continues to overlook. And there are many other instances in the Bible--like if I had time I could share with you—but basically, John the Baptist was Elijah, from another life. And so, he was there with Moses as well, and talking with them on the mountain. Anyone who believes in reincarnation—often is—from Christianity's standpoint, a heretic. But they don't realize that from an academic standpoint, it is documented that Christianity believed in and accepted reincarnation up until the fourth century, at the council of Nicaea or the Council of Constantinople when politically it was removed. It was a very common and accepted belief in Jesus' time and for four centuries after. When Jesus asked his Disciples, “Who do men say that I am?” and his Disciples said, “Some say Isiah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” Do you not get that his Disciples were responding with he was a return and reincarnated former prophet? He didn't say, “You're nuts! Go sit down in a corner.” It was an accepted belief. There are many other instances—many instances of angels.

RaNelle Wallace was here--had a plane crash--and she saw as she was thrown out onto the wing and her hands were burned, her face was burned, and her husband was in an inferno of fire, and she watched as someone arrived and dragged her husband out of the cockpit. It was an angel--never saw it was there on the side of the mountain. Her grandmother came to her as well, in that whole experience, and told her various things as to now what she was having to learn with all the operations and the things that would proceed in her life, and she said she wanted her grandmother to tell her more. Her grandmother said, “You're not ready. You're not ready.”

So this trip to Brazil was powerful. It really was. There were amazing things that went on, and I could go on and on about that—but what it taught me, again, is that I believe that in this vast universe, God is everywhere and in everything, and do not ever underestimate the ways in which God can show up to help and assist. You see, the same way that there are people in this world in physical form that are there to help—whether they're therapists, doctors, nurses, what have you—there are also spirits that carry an evolved sense of how to help from the other side and that that is going on and that that is work that John of God is involved in—is accessing some of that. Miraculous things happened, and I'm just grateful for having had the experience to open me up, because the experience leads me to a conviction that takes me beyond concept. And so, remember that we're all here to move and to stretch beyond concept, into conviction, based on experience. God wants to be loved and God wants to be experienced, and that is your stretch, and you can do it. God bless you.

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