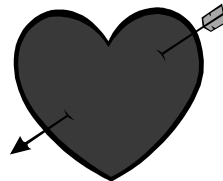


EAT, PRAY, LOVE



"To lose balance sometimes for love is part of living a balanced life."

"If you want to control things in your life so bad, work on the mind."

"You gotta stop wearing your wishbone where your backbone oughtta be."

-- Quotations from "*Eat, Pray, Love*" by Elizabeth Gilbert

THE BALANCE

Labor Day causes us to reflect upon the reason we work. This summer I found a movie and a book that had a perspective on that. Work is part of the balance of life. And when we have a chance to think about the meaning of our lives, or when sudden changes require that we do, we can reduce our existence to some very basic needs. And that is our sermon today.

***EAT, PRAY, LOVE* MOVIE**

If there had been another gentleman at the theater the day Cheryl, Jessica and I saw the new Julia Roberts movie, *Eat, Pray, Love*, then there would have been two. Otherwise this was a theater filled with women, some of whom had seen promotions of this story by Elizabeth Gilbert on the Oprah show. Standing in line to get in I could hear people discussing the book that most had read. Some of them had favorite quotations, like the three which I put with our title today.

The story of a divorced woman who went on a world tour to find herself has been the subject of more than one movie. But I found a "grail quest" in this film that was a search for the truths of life, and the reasons for which we live.

So, first I want to tell you a short version of the story. And then I want to connect with three

fundamental themes of scripture that will give us a shorthand way to remember some of the basics of our faith.

One more thing I'd like to do with the three words: I'd like you to experience them, not just hear them, so I have broken this into three segments with some music to let you think about what these three basic truths mean to you.

SO HERE'S THE STORY

At thirty-two years old, Elizabeth Gilbert was educated and had a home, a husband, and a successful career as a writer. However, she was unhappy in her marriage and often spent night after night crying on her bathroom floor. And that is where she met God. Finally, she separated from her husband and initiated a divorce, which he contested. It was a bitter divorce and when it was finally done, it left her devastated and alone. While writing an article on yoga vacations in Bali, she met a ninth-generation medicine man who told her she would come back and study with him. After finalizing her difficult divorce, she spent the next year traveling around the world.

She spent four months in Italy, eating and enjoying life (Eat).

She spent four months in India, finding her

spirituality (Pray).

She ended the year in Bali, Indonesia, looking for "balance" of the two and there she found love (Love) in the form of a dashing Brazilian factory owner.

I -- EAT

*"To lose balance sometimes for love
is part of living a balanced life"*

I told you last week that I believe our problems are God's gifts to us, so that we can discover who we are. Certainly this was true to Liz.

Elizabeth was sad, lonely, and hungry when she set out on the first portion of her journey. So she set out to eat. Where do they make the food we all love to eat? Italy. She went to Italy for a month of feasting. She sampled it all, and she fattened herself up for her journey. Do you remember the instructions before your airplane takes off? "If we lose pressure, oxygen masks will descend from the ceiling. If you are traveling with a child put your own mask on first and begin breathing, then attend to the child."

Liz needed to attend to herself. She wasn't ready for advice, she just needed oxygen.

FOOD FOR THE SPIRIT

When the crowds gathered around Jesus at the lake, he fed them. If you are physically hungry you are in no condition to receive a spiritual message. In a similar way, Jesus healed their bodies of physical disease, knowing that survival precedes spiritual reflection.

When we receive communion, as we have done today, it must feed real human hunger. From time to time I hope that you will not eat before church on a Sunday when communion is served. Do any of you do that already? Come to church hungry. And you will be fed.

For one-sixth of the world's population, hunger is not a choice, it is a way of life. One billion people are malnourished. They either do not have enough food, or the food they eat is the wrong kind of food. In American we have discovered that we can be both obese and malnourished. We tank up on sugar and carbohydrates. We drink too much alcohol, and don't balance our diet.

Spiritual lesson one is:

Eat and be well.

Eat and be generous.

Eat and be a gracious host.

Remember that all food comes at a price. Where do we obtain fresh meat? Where does the grain come from? We must plant, fertilize and water, weed, harvest, mill, mix, bake, and finally serve. We need the blessing of God at every stage of the food process so that we might have the conditions necessary, together with the skills, and finally the social enjoyment of eating. Food shared enriches it flavor and meaning.

So here is what Holy Communion means: A generous meal is lovingly prepared and set before you requiring no effort on your part. The generosity is not in volume, it is in value. A free meal is life's greatest luxury. The lion kills its pray. The farmer grows and processes his crops. The fisherman journeys out into the raging ocean waters, the archer fish lures in its dinner. But then someone offers a meal that we did not have to buy or prepare. They paid the price for us. Jesus paid the price for you.

Luke 10:8

Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you;

And he also said.

Luke 15

²⁵Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

"PARLA COME MAGNI".."SPEAK THE WAY YOU EAT."

**EAT WELL AND WITH ELOQUENCE.
PRAY OFTEN AND SINCERELY.
LOVE PASSIONATELY.**

II -- PRAY

If you want to control things in your life so bad, work on the mind".

Luke 18

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. ²He said, 'In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. ³In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, "Grant me justice against my opponent." ⁴For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, "Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, ⁵yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming." ' ⁶And the Lord said, 'Listen to what the unjust judge says. Pray continually.'

PRAY -- THE SEARCH FOR SOMETHING SPIRITUAL.

In the book, Liz Gilbert travelled to India to learn how to pray. Liz learns to meditate.

This was not my favorite part of the movie, and it is difficult to depict religious sincerity in others. But the spirit is vital.

When you pray remember this:

Pray with Humility

You are not the source of your own spirit. You are not the only one who hears your prayers. You are not in charge of the world. And you can not control the outcome of complex events.

Pray Regularly

SO PRAY SHORT PRAYERS AND LONG PRAYERS. PRAY FOR YOURSELF, BUT ALSO PRAY FOR OTHERS. PRAY WITH THE EXPECTANCY THAT SOMETHING WILL CHANGE. PRAY KNOWING THAT WHAT WILL CHANGE IS YOU FIRST, AND SOMETHING ELSE MAYBE.

Pray For Good, Not Evil

Don't use God as a weapon to get your way.

Don't frighten children with the notion of a God like supercop who agrees with you alone.

Don't take your solutions to God, only your questions.

Don't expect an answer to every prayer, or that there will ever be just one answer.

Pray as if your life depended upon it.

You don't have to go to India, but sometimes it does help to have a place to "go" to pray. You may not encounter God every time, but you need to put yourself in a position to encounter God, if that is God's will.

Pray always and not to lose heart. A sincere prayer is worth far more than the noise of empty and insincere prayers.

So our movie hero understands the foundation of prayer and that the spiritual life is where you must turn to regain balance. "If you want to control things in your life so bad, work on the mind".

III -- LOVE

You gotta stop wearing your wishbone where your backbone oughtta be.

Real love takes backbone.

Does anyone here think love is easy?

Did we save the soft and gooshy part for last?

Love is getting up before sunrise, it is making things right, it is listening to the heartache of others. Love is walking hand in hand. Love is a warm puppy. Love is hearing more than you speak. Love is seeking justice and peace.

Love is expressed in the prayers of a healthy mind, and the actions of a healthy spirit. It completes parts one and two of this trilogy.

What do we know of love?

1 Corinthians 13 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

Matthew 5 ⁴³"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends

rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? ⁴⁸Strive to be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

IN THE MOVIE AND BOOK LOVE IS A GUY.

In movies you know a meeting is going to work into a relationship when it begins with conflict or challenge. Great loves overcome great things. And who would want anything less than great love?

LOVE IS REACHING OUT

Is there anything more fun for us than to hand over a check to Worth Our Weight, or a counseling agency, or a mission field? Reaching out is a great love too.

THE \$600 BILLION CHALLENGE

Here is one the greatest stories of our lifetime. It has to do with a dinner hosted by Warren Buffett, and Bill and Melinda Gates. And here is who they invited: Oprah Winfrey, Eli and Edythe Broad, Ted Turner, David Rockefeller, Chuck Feeney, Michael Bloomberg, George Soros, Julian Robertson, John and Tashia Morgridge, Pete Peterson.

And here is what they challenged them to do:

Bill Gates, Melinda Gates, and Warren Buffett asked the nation's billionaires to pledge to give at least half their net worth to charity in their lifetimes or at death. If their campaign succeeds, it could change the face of philanthropy. *Forbes Magazine*

Someone once told me, “I’m in between loves right now.” It was a reference to dating, and he had recently divorced.

But I wish I had called him to a higher target. For him, girls came and, sadly, they often went. But love endures. Love doesn’t depend upon another person; it doesn’t depend upon something you can own or operate. Love is the energy of life, and it doesn’t have to be focused in one person, activity, or place.

When Paul wrote, Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude, he wasn’t writing about a person or something fancy.

He said, Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

You and I get to choose all that.

Because of love we get to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things. The book that has been our guide is a neat story about a grail quest that ends with marriage. There have been favorable and critical reviews. But Eat, Pray, and Love, are far more than that.

So for the last part of our story I want to take you up into the clouds, so you can see your life more clearly. EAT, PRAY, LOVE has a clever and accurate formula that we have used to remember in the context of Holy Communion, life in the spirit, and the billionaires who were challenged to give half of it away.

As you look at the earth from the clouds and listen to some reflective music, I want you to do something that no one else can do for you. Look inside.

You need to eat because your body is physical and needs to be nourished.

You need to pray, because you are a spirit, and it is your spirit that gives life to your body.

And you need to love because that is what God created you to do.

How do you reconcile these three basic human needs in your own life?



**Dr. John H. Cushman
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
September 5, 2010**