

“Falling Upward: Discovering Your Script (Part One)”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, GA

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, June 3, 2018

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Genesis 27: 18-29

¹⁸ So he went in to his father, and said, “My father”; and he said, “Here I am; who are you, my son?” ¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, so that you may bless me.” ²⁰ But Isaac said to his son, “How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?” He answered, “Because the Lord your God granted me success.” ²¹ Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.” ²² So Jacob went up to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” ²³ He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him. ²⁴ He said, “Are you really my son Esau?” He answered, “I am.” ²⁵ Then he said, “Bring it to me, that I may eat of my son’s game and bless you.” So, he brought it to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank. ²⁶ Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come near and kiss me, my son.” ²⁷ So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said, “Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed. ²⁸ May God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. ²⁹ Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers and may your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you and blessed be everyone who blesses you!”

Luke 2: 41-52

⁴¹ Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³ When the festival was ended, and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ⁴⁴ Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day’s journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.” ⁴⁹ He said to them, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he said to them. ⁵¹ Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

Falling Upward

Mary and Joseph were well on their way back home to Nazareth
when they realized that their 12-year-old son Jesus was missing.
They asked everyone else on their caravan along the road if they had seen Jesus;
no one had.

So, they hustled back to Jerusalem,
where they found him, at last, safe and sound in the Temple.
He was calm, cool and collected,
asking the Elders questions, and answering them as well,
and they were in awe, amazed at his understanding.

Was Jesus was left behind by parents
who assumed he was with friends on the caravan home?
Had he snuck away on purpose?
Was he so engaged in the conversation and exploration of his soul,
he got caught up in a Kairos moment?

We have before us a recapturing of his response to his parents.

He said to them, "Why were you searching for me?"

Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

"But they did not understand what he said to them."

You know, speaking as a parent, this is one of those moments
when you're torn between wanting to hug and spank your child
at the same time.

Afterward, Jesus "went down with them and came to Nazareth
and was obedient to them.

His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor."

Falling Upward

This tale is unique to Luke's Gospel.

It's a unique offering to the whole people of God

an open script of how Jesus became the Jesus we know as the Christ.

The Bible is like an open book that gives us the script, scene by scene by scene,
of Jesus' spiritual and experiential formation.

Our discovery of His script

gives us a deeper appreciation of his roots and how far he came to be.

This unique tale has legs and lives on,

giving followers and seekers, believers and searchers

a glimpse into the spiritual formation of Jesus of Nazareth.

This experience might have been lost to the ages, gone like dust in the wind,
had the child not grown to become a man, a mentor, a messiah,
a pastor and priest and prophet,
a victim of unjust harassment and corporal punishment,
a victor over death and sin.

This Child of God became a resurrected, restored soul
who lives and loves to redeem us, as well,
who points us toward the will and grace of God.

Falling Upward

Richard Rohr speaks of the two halves of life.

When I picked up Rohr's book *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*,
I had imagined when he spoke of two halves that he meant in time, years, family
life,

before or after a certain age or academic achievement,
accomplishment in work, or pre- and post-retirement.

Not quite.

Richard Rohr speaks of the two halves of our spiritual life.

The first half is when we are formed and forming;

the second half begins after trials and tragedies,
trauma and temptations push and pull us

into reforming, renewing, restoring, rewriting our script and
story.

The first half includes what God provides what we need to survive.

The second half begins as God guides us forward to thrive.

"The message of *Falling Upward* is straightforward and bracing:
the spiritual life is not static.

You will come to a crisis in your life, and after the crisis, if you are open to it,
you will enter a space of spiritual refreshment, peace and compassion
that you could not have imagined before." (*Christian Century*)

Falling Upward

We understand Jesus' early stages of life and spiritual formation far better
when observed through the lens of his later stages.

Because we know his end story, what he overcame and thrived over and against,
we care, celebrate, and cherish

that there were Elders, wise sages and loving parents around Him.

We appreciate that he had a caring community of faith

to nurture this beloved Child of God,

a faith community to raise up and train a child in the way he should go.

Jesus' life was full of "I" moments as his identity was crafted.

Over time and experience and encounters with God and God's people,
his True Self was honed and formed.
He is a wonderful example of a soul who made the effort to discover his script,
to create an inner blueprint, to discern an answer
to the question, *Who am I?*
When you are clear on who you are, with a solid grasp of Whose you are,
the follow up question, *What should I do and become?*
becomes clearer, less opaque.
The clarity of our vocations are illuminated;
the world can see your little light shine.

Rohr says, "The first half of life is discovering the script,
and the second half [of life] is actually writing it and owning it."

*"The spiritual life has two stages.
In the first half of life, you are devoted to establishing yourself;
you focus on making a career and on finding friends and a partner;
you are crafting your identity.
Spiritually, people in the first half of life
are often drawn to order, to religious routine.
We are developing habits
and letting ourselves be shaped by the norms and practices
of our family and community." (Christian Century)*

Falling Upward

Witnesses have shown us the way to embody both spiritual stages of life.
There is a cloud of witnesses who have illuminated the way.
Consider the Holy Scriptures.
The Bible is a theological document,
a collection of narratives and psalms,
songs and testimonials of the lives of people just like you and me.
Throughout the Scriptures we encounter people whose stories
bear witness to the joys and challenges of moving from surviving to thriving.
With the lone exception of Mary, Mother of Jesus,
every biblical soul who moves from one stage to the next
requires a nudge, a push, a pull, a holy 2x4.

Rohr recognizes that,
"None of us go into our spiritual maturity [the second half]
completely of our own accord, or by totally free choice.
We are led by Mystery, which religious people rightly call grace.
Most of us have to be cajoled or seduced into it,
or we can fall into it by some kind of "transgression."
...like Jacob finding his birthright through cunning,

and Esau losing his by failure (Genesis 27).”

Falling Upward

Challenges are going to happen, so let’s be ready.

“Prepare ye the way of the Lord!”

Be ye prepared as well for the way of the world.

We—the Church of Jesus Christ—are called to invest ourselves

in raising up and training people to have solid spiritual foundations.

Our mission is to make and sustain Disciples of Christ.

The Church is commissioned by the Spirit of God

to empower, educate and engage people to be grounded in faith and reason,

grounded lest we not be ready for the second halves of our lives,

grounded lest we only seek to survive and never get to thrive.

“The spiritual life has two stages.

In the first half of life, you are devoted to establishing yourself;

you focus on making a career and on finding friends and a partner;

you are crafting your identity.

Then—a crisis.

“Some kind of falling,” Rohr says,

is necessary for continued spiritual development.

“Normally a job, fortune, or reputation has to be lost,” writes Rohr,

“a death has to be suffered, a house has to be flooded,

or a disease has to be endured.”

The crisis can be devastating.

The crisis undoes you.

The flood doesn't just flood your house—it washes out your spiritual life.

What you thought you knew about living the spiritual life

no longer suffices for the life you are living.” (Christian Century)

Next Sunday we will go deeper, delve further into this aspect

of the second half of our spiritual lives.

Today we acknowledge and affirm the import of a solid foundation in Christ,

just as Christ had a solid foundation.

“Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.”

Falling Upward

We are followers of a loving God whose ultimate gift is freely given.

Thanks be to God, it’s never too early or too late

to draw—or redraw--an inner blueprint;

to write—or rewrite—our script;

to define—or redefine—our True Self.

This is the Church’s vocation, her calling, her purpose.

The Church should be really, really good
at building solid foundations for stage one
and preparing people for thriving in stage two.
We are a movement of wholeness in a fragmented world.
We excel at following the Changer and the Changed,
worshiping the One who Created and Creates,
being people of the resurrection and resurrecting lives,
re-purposing souls and families, cities and the world.

Yes, yes, I know. You know even better.
We hear tell there are some religious folks and congregations
that are all about the status quo,
maintaining their norm and nostalgia, protecting buildings,
erecting ever-stricter and restrictive creeds, staying stuck in survival mode,
refusing to go through the fire or grow through failure
or follow in Jesus' footsteps
to emerge in the second half of life.
Yet thanks to what Christ is doing in and through you and you and all of us together,
I stand before you as a witness, a living hope of the Living Hope.

Falling Upward

My spiritual journey has not been linear;
cyclical is more like it,
akin to a spiral,
moving through time and experiences,
pushed and pulled along the way,
falling down more often than upward.

I've been affected by the presence of the Holy in momentous moments.
During dark nights of the soul,
the Spirit communed with my quiet center.

I've survived and thrived in the discovery of my script,
going back and forth between the two stages of a spiritual life.

I've been born, and reborn,
and born again, from above, *another*, again and again and again.

I give thanks daily for the elders and parents, young people and a network of folks
who shaped and reshaped the first stages of my faith journey.

I am grateful for the Mystery, the grace,
that made any of this at all possible,
for with God, nothing is impossible.

Who am I?

One with gratitude for the first stage and hope for the next.

I hope you are as well; let's go there together.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Bibliography:

Christian Century, Book review of Falling Upward, by Lauren F. Winner, Aug. 16, 2011.

Richard Rohr, Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life, Jossey-Bass, 2011.