

I want to speak to you as if you are destined to do something remarkable with your life. Some of you will or have already in an obvious way, others have or may in a small quiet way.... I want to speak to you as if you are "called" to do something and you know it, you feel it. If you don't believe this about yourself, well,... you will just have to overhear.

When we think of calling here in Ukraine, we think of cell phones... Everyone uses cell phones, there are several different companies that sell minutes.... In America, we have AT&T, Nextel-sprint and Verizon; In Ukraine, we have Kievstar , MCI and once called, LIFE, Whenever you meet someone, you trade cell numbers... you can text msg the cell number...

When I think of calling, I think of vocation, jobs and careers,

I hired a secretary... her name is Annya, but I call her Ann. She is part time, well supposed to be, 4 days, 4 hours a day, \$50 a week; she actually worked quite a bit overtime. She's between jobs and going back to school. I met her at church, she volunteered for a day on Sunday and then I asked if she would come to work with me until she started another job.

At the end of the first day in the office and it was quite an eventful day with kids on the street and buying clothes... she sent me message, "This is my Life."

Oh, I thought, how nice of her to say this ... she must have had some epiphany about work and vocation... she's leaving the business world forever and spending the rest of her life in nonprofits helping children...

So I sent a text msg back. "Welcome to my life!"

But then she came over to my desk ... "Robert I was just sending you my cell phone number with the network called LIFE"

We joked about it.... later the story got turned around ; she started kidding me...."Robert, you are the only person who really understood me.... Everyone else thinks im just a secretary,

Ukrainian humor can be quite subtle sometimes.

What's your life? ... I hope you are alive.... I am sure you know what I mean when I say, you can be living but not really alive.. Life is out there waiting for you. I don't care how young and inexperienced you are or old and tired you are. I meet people who say, oh down the road some day I will do it... or if only... and so many people whose lives are a cycle of work, the grocery store, home, eat sleep, get up and do it all over again.

When I come back to the states, I feel the urge to upset the routine, I want to poke people, stir them for a moment...

Jesus did that. If you read the opening chapters of the gospels you will see this phrase repeated, "The Kingdom of God is near." Jesus disturbed people with that notion. Scholars argue about what he said. What does that mean to say the reign of God is "at hand." Does it mean he knows something we don't know? Is something going to happen? Im going to suggest that Something needs to happen, can happen... inside you.

I want to disturb you with the notion that there is something you do not have, and it's not a minicooper, It's not a mac air, that fits in an envelope, it's not i-phone or a Blackberry, (dear Lord please give me a Blackberry) its not something you can buy, or grasp, or own.... It's a way of living. It's a way of feeling about

your life... and that's a problem in America: the way we think and feel about our lives.

Here's an interesting truth: In America, everything is large. We have big cars and houses and highways and buildings. In Ukraine, the roads are narrow and cramped, the apartments small. People squeeze into buses.

But in America, our lives can be narrow and cramped. My life was getting too small, even as the pastor of a large church. I felt squeezed by forces I could not identify. By contrast, in Ukraine I live in a one room apartment, I ride on smaller streets, cramped into buses and trains.... But my life is large. My life is huge. There are no limits or boundaries to what can be done.

I don't watch television. The Discovery Channel came three weeks ago, the whole idea was show people the glamorous side of some eastern European cities and then a look at what tourists don't see. I took them to the place below a local Bank where 8 kids were living. And this is a very interesting thing, because I used to watch that channel. In a couple of months, I'm going to be on the Discovery Channel.

The world is shrinking; I mean we are getting more and more closely connected, and that's a really interesting thing because at the same time, it means that opportunities are expanding. You don't need to travel to Ukraine like I did. but the whole world is out there, it's at your fingertips; it is live on the monitor of your laptop and in your ears with a headset and microphone. Read The World is Flat by Thomas Friedmann. Just read the first chapter, stand there at the bookstore and read it. It was just multinational corporations, but now individuals are acting *globally*. It's the internet, of course. Try Idealist.com. I'm on there along with thousands who are doing something interesting with their lives.

My life is probably not what most of you are interested in doing... Who wants to go to Ukraine? What I am saying is that there is life out there... What I am probing you with is the question, How much would you give to have a life that is large? How much would you pay to have a life you feel that way about? If you saw that film, and it is a dark film, "Revolutionary Road," you heard Leonardo Di Caprio say that line, "I want to feel really, really alive..."

Well you can... feel... really alive.

Now we have to shift the conversation.... Let's assume you want this life that is large... you have something you wish to do with your life... and you don't feel prepared to do... more than that, you feel you haven't the energy to do... . you want to do this thing, but... it just seems too fantastic. What do you need to do? go back to school? Or just change your routine so that you start volunteering somewhere... or you want to start a new business or non profit or be an artist or a writer. I'm just throwing things out there... whatever... it's massive when you look at it.

We had these huge sand dunes on the California beaches. it's not hard sand; it's soft deep sand and you are walking up and looking at the distance you have to go, you are saying... I'll never get there. It's the first year of college and you look at the schedule and all the classes you must finish to graduate and it's impossible.. . or you want to leave your construction jobs and be an artist... You want to make a significant change in your life, new job, new career, new everything...

How can I do this?

You have to believe something....

I'm a Presbyterian, and I highly recommend the Presbyterians.... but whatever belief system you have, it helps to believe something. I encourage you to believe God gets involved. I encourage you to believe in yourself, there is something at hand, near... the time is at hand, and opportunity.

I am talking about faith. That sounds trite, but I don't think you have to be this tower of faith. You don't need the faith to believe it's all going to happen. All you need is enough belief to take a little step in that

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direction. Just enough faith to make a phone call. Just enough faith to do a google search or buy a book Just enough faith to sit down with pen and paper and write down five things you would need to do.. not actually do them, just to write them down.

Frederick Buechner has a beautiful line in his sermon "A Sprig of Hope" in which he describes the call of Noah then gives us the picture of Noah standing there after the conversation with God, the wheels in his head turning... ."and then Noah took a few steps," Buechner writes, "in the direction of... the lumber yard."

When I knew it was time for a change in my life after being the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Daytona Beach for 9 years, I knew only that I had to have time to think. I needed a sabbatical. University professors get a year, I just wanted three months. It was a very difficult thing to ask for, but I was desperate. I didn't need the faith or believe in myself or courage to make a change in my life, just the enough of the above to say, "Can I have three months for study and thought." I asked and I got it.

Then enough faith to buy the ticket to Ukraine

Then enough to get on the train to Odessa, Ukraine where I knew NO ONE. And then on the first day there in the lobby of the working man's hotel where I was staying, I met a woman. When I told her I was interested in working with children in orphanages, she took me to the people I work with today, The Way Home.

Just enough faith, just enough, just enough... and then Things begin to happen... and pretty soon you can't stop it.

I don't know where the threshold is, when it is that you stop climbing and climbing like everything is a struggle, but at some point you start sliding forward, or skiing or sledding.... Riding the wave... if you surf during a storm in Florida, you know that you have to fight the waves to get out. But when you get on a wave... there's nothing like the ride you get back in.

Just faith the size of a mustard seed. Jesus said.... And in another parable, the farmer plants the seeds and then rains and sunshine come the seed grows, first the bud then the stem , then the kernel , the farmer knows not how....

Now I want to shift your thinking a little from "how can I do this thing I want to do?" to "What can we do?" Because this is where I am at right now.... You will get there too.

Sometimes, it seems, there is nothing you can do. You can make a person, by force or money, do what you want them to do, but you can't make someone love you. You can't make them believe what you believe. You can't make them make the right choices in their own lives. This is the frustrating thing about work with street kids, they constantly disappoint you. Even when you say, "tomorrow, I will be here and bring you food, or buy clothes for you," often, they don't show up. They choose the streets, they choose to this downward lifestyle, no job, no education, no future, and one day they are no longer a child begging for change, they are an adult, a homeless adult. They chose an early death.

Alla is a psychologist who works with me. She is an Evangelical Christian.... She's been Othodox, Catholic and now goes to the Pentacostal church. And normally, in the states we might not talk about these categories, but in Ukraine, they become more important to understanding someone. Alla is wise person. Unshakable in times of crisis.* She knows kids. I trust her and her commitment.

We were sitting in a café; we were at a point in the conversation about street kids in which there seemed to be no answer. These kids often will not leave the streets, will not take care of themselves, they can live like animals. We bring them into the shelter and they run away. What are we going to do? What can we do? I said.

What she said was, "We can be near."

This word, "near" in Greek comes from a primary verb ...there's a humorous side to it, "to squeeze or throttle." You're that close... but it also means, "the curve or inner angle of the arm, anything closely enfolding, as the arms of the sea."

Sometimes it is all you can do, it is enough for the time, just to be present, just to be near. Be those arms, enfolding, like the sea.

And when have been underground, down the man holes or in abandoned buildings, and we are walking away and nothing got fixed, no kids changed their lives, I have to remind myself that for a little while, we were there, we were near....

This takes us full circle. Back to the reign of God which is at hand, back to the thing that has to happen inside you. And how you make that change in your life and do this thing that seems on the front end impossible. Think about nearness. Those near to you. Those you can be near to. The nearness of God. I leave you with the words of a man named Paul about nearness and living a life that is large.

Phl 4:4-9

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, sisters and brothers whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me-put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

*Once, early in the morning, we were underground in the darkness, under a bank actually with 8 kids who still sleeping, Alla, myself, a producer and cameraman from NBC. The police came down. We stood against a wall, Alla first, me then the two from NBC. We didn't speak or move or use our cell phones for light. The police were shouting, cursing, telling the kids to come out. There was a little passageway to get into the room, you must bend over and it's just wide enough to squeeze though. A policeman came in shined his light, the first face he saw was Alla's. "How can talk like this to these children!" she barked. She shamed them for the way they spoke to street kids. Outside, on the street, the three of us men quietly walked away from the scene and stood across the street, leaving Alla to deal with the police who were taking all eight kids into custody for questioning, We men, of course, were like disciples fleeing in fear.

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"Aspire not to have more but to be more"
Oscar Romero

We do not Believe in
Ourselves until someone
Reveals that deep inside us
Something is valuable,
Worth listening to, worthy
Of our touch, sacred to our touch.
Once we believe in ourselves we can
Risk curiosity, wonder, Spontaneous
Delight, or any experience that reveals
The human spirit.

e.e. cummings

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