

So, this drunk walks into a bar..

I bet you've never had a sermon start that way before. We'll get back to the joke in a second. But first, let's start where we left off at last year's recovery Sunday, with the *so what?* question. Why are we having this day? To answer that quickly, could everyone whose life has been affected by someone with an addiction please raise your hand.

There you go. That's why we are talking about addiction. It's everywhere. But so is recovery. That demonstration also shows that no matter where you are in that struggle – you are not alone.

Okay. Back to the story: a drunk walks into a bar. There's a huge banner above the bar that says *Tonight's Special – All You Can Drink For A Dollar*. The drunk walks up to the bartender and says *"I'll take two dollars worth."*

I've been around recovery for twenty-five years, and that is the most telling joke I've heard about addiction. Every alcoholic understands completely, and every non alcoholic says "wait, what, why would he . . ." But we know. There's no such thing as just one. If one's good, two's better. That switch normal folks have that tells them when they've had enough – we just don't have it. Doesn't matter if we're talking about chemicals, food, gambling, sex, whatever. And no matter how much it is, it's never enough. If you think that doesn't make any sense, you're absolutely right. It defies logic, which is why we addicts can never think our way out of our addiction. We have to have the help of a Higher Power.

Step One, that we are powerless and our lives are unmanageable, seems like the bad news step. We can't win this fight. All of our best efforts to stop, or control, or change the alchemy, or negotiate with the disease have failed. It's actually just the honesty step, the get real step. If I climbed into the boxing ring with Mike Tyson, even now, I would lose every time. Every time I tried to go toe-to-toe with my addiction, I lost. There isn't a shred of evidence that it would be any different should I try it again. And I have tried it again (it wasn't good). It's time for unconditional surrender. The only way to win is to not start.

But after that difficult admission, we move immediately into the hope step, Step Two. *"We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."* Three parts. First, that there is a power greater than us, secondly that He/She can and will restore us to sanity. Thirdly, there is another admission there—that we've been insane. For new folks, that's a tough pill to swallow, no pun intended, and no one likes the idea. But if we can agree that the definition of insanity is repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results — and all addicted people are guilty of that — then all addicted people are insane. So, we are powerless and more than a little crazy, (pause) . . . but we are not hopeless.

For many newcomers the challenge of Step 2 is coming to believe in anything at all, Godwise, or even being willing to believe. Often for Christians the challenge is, *I do believe, but God isn't listening. I prayed, and nothing happened. I made bargains with God to no avail. I keep fighting and asking for help, but the help doesn't come.*

The AA literature is clear about this one (and I am quoting and paraphrasing pretty liberally here): The answer has to do with the quality of faith rather than the quantity. We supposed we had humility when we hadn't, supposed we had been sincere in our devotions when really we had been superficial. Or perhaps we wallowed in emotionalism and mistook it for genuine spirituality. In either case, we had been asking something for nothing. The fact is we hadn't cleaned house so the Grace of God could enter us and expel the obsession. We hadn't taken stock of ourselves, or made amends to those we had harmed. We hadn't given to another human being without expecting reward or at least recognition. We hadn't even prayed correctly — we had always said *'grant me my wishes,'* instead of *'Thy will be done.'* It's the difference between treating God as the Great Bellhop in the sky, and being in partnership with Him. So we remained self-deceived, and therefore incapable of receiving enough Grace to restore us to sanity. We were impatient, wanting an event, not a process. We wanted magic, and not a real miracle, which sometimes happens in slow motion.

But true humility and an open mind can lead us to a faith that works. Being broken, we can let the Light and love of God in. There is a prayer called the set-aside prayer, in which we ask God to help us set aside what we think we know before we enter into, say, Bible study. I would suggest that any person of faith approaching the 12 Steps, consider this prayer. Set aside your preconceived notions, embark on this journey with open ears, fresh eyes, and open hearts. — there is much to learn from the 12 Steps, and there is nothing to fear, only things to discover.

Today's reading from Colossians, translated in The Message, says: *"Christ brought you over to God's side and put your lives together, whole and holy in His presence. You don't walk away from a gift like that! You stay grounded and steady in that bond of trust, constantly tuned in to the Good News, careful not to be distracted or diverted."*

Well, I can't imagine a stronger distraction than addiction. Our whole life can be consumed in thinking about the object of our addiction, practicing that addictive behavior, & recovering from the hangover. That's our whole life.

In my living room, I have a framed movie poster. It's a French poster for the film *Clean and Sober*. I don't particularly love that movie, but in French the title is *Retour A La Vie*, which means return to life. I think that's exactly what recovery is. Addiction is a near-life experience. It kinda looks like real life, I mean you get up in the morning and do most of the stuff people do, but it's not genuine. When someone is in their addiction, that's not really them, but a sad, distorted reflection of who they were and who they're supposed to be. Recovery allows us to return to life, to be reconciled to our family and friends, and to God. To enter fully and unimpaired into all life has to offer.

If statistics are true enough, and I've worked in addiction long enough to believe that they are, there are a couple of people in this room right this minute who needed a drink or a pill just to get well enough to come this morning, to keep up the front, to patch it together one more day. A couple of people who can't imagine a life without that little extra something that they think makes life tolerable. If that sounds like you, please hear this again: you are not alone. There are at least a handful of people here who have been where you are, who have felt almost the exact way you are feeling right now.

To demonstrate, I invite anyone here who is in recovery, and is comfortable enough with their anonymity, to please stand up for a second. (*thank you*)

Although we all have different stories, we all share the truth that our lives have been transformed. And for all of us, it started simply with a phone call or a conversation that began "*I think I need some help.*" There is an ocean of support out here for you. It has worked for us and it can work for you, if you make use of what the 12 Step fellowships have to offer.

If you have a problem, there's help. If you don't want to walk up to one of us in Recovery Ministry here today with our nifty blue buttons, or visit our recovery table upstairs, we get that. We put some AA schedules up on the tables in the hallway next to all the other churchy pamphlets. No one will notice if you just take one. If you don't want to do that, call the AA hotline. Or the Narcotics Anonymous hotline, or Cocaine Anonymous, or Gamblers Anonymous, or Sex Addicts Anonymous. If your problem is dealing with an addicted person, call the Alanon hotline – there's all kinds of help. But you have to make the first move. We are caring and compassionate people, but we're not psychic. Speak up. Reach out.

You don't have to be an alien in your own life anymore.
Recovery is a reality. A return to life is possible.
Don't walk away from a gift like that.

— Phillip Blomberg
Saint Michael & All Angels