

SANCTIFICATION
"Endless Felicity"
(Lecture #3)

I have spent a few minutes before we gathered talking to some of the people who were down in Room E working on this course over the last week. One young lady said that she was the type that had to draw that line at planning the participants' mood was going to go. And so she decided that one thing she was going to prove was that she was not going to follow that chart -- in fact, her mood was going to be exactly opposite the way the mood of the course was going. I said, "Well, what happened?" She said, "I could not do it. I was swept along by what was happening."

And I do not know how you get into a third lecture in a course like this. There are things happening that are far beyond my ability to teach or, to pull them together. I am clear about the rational categories up there on the board. And I am clear how they relate to each other. And I am clear about what is scheduled for tomorrow morning. And I have read St. John of the cross a few times myself, but when all of this gets put together, when we have decided to subject ourselves to this structure as a controlled body on behalf of the Church of Jesus Christ, we will be marked people in a strange and phenomenal way. And I am frightened. So I am delighted to be here in this building, in this configuration of humanness, and talking about and being about whatever we are trying to find out that sanctification is inside of a body like this.

This morning we started out with Universal Benevolence. And, quite frankly, that was very tiring. I can understand that, because it involves my integrity. Just what is happening there did not hit me until twenty minutes before the end of that St. John study, and I still do not think we have got that lecture right on target yet. They are both too tangential to what I am talking about. But in this room when those two events started getting through to our being, we began to discover what it meant to be persons of depth integrity. For the first time in my life in one sense, at least for the first time in five years in another sense, I became alive this afternoon as an old healed human being. And I became the way I remember myself being when I first started to spark with Tillich in the Christ section in that old RSI course. It seems like something that was out of a book one hundred fifty years ago. I understand now about what happened in that course, and from my teaching: that people have become aware of their wholeness as human beings. It was delightful.

I am assigned to talk about the Fulfilled Life this evening. And that is a hard subject, because I am convinced that my life is not fulfilled. Which is to say that, on one level, I've got a lot of living to do. Now, I think that kind of poem has to be there for sanctification. Whatever sanctification is, it is not something that happens now the way it happens in RSI courses, the way it happens in the theological courses of justification. This is a process that is a dynamic, this is never finishing. This is continuation. This talks about the continual being of your being in a way that RSI could only hint at. And at the moment I do not think that we can dare freeze any of this we talk about. My tendencies are to do that, to plot this out in some nice rationale or to get it together in some kind of fine diagram that explains everything. But every picture I draw to try to hold this together, doesn't fit with any of the other pictures that I draw. Do you find that is the case with some of your lecture illustrations and some of your board work that just does not somehow mesh, that there is always a little bit left out? And when I look at that, and step back from it, and put the notes away and come back, what I find is: my God, it is my living that is struck through in a way that RSI never was.

And then the second thing that you want to say, and you have to say this too, is that I have performed my life. I mean I am a fulfilled life. Or, I have struggled to understand RSI. I am struggling to be the fulfilled life that I am at this moment. And that is part of what I meant when I said I have not fulfilled my life yet. And in that duality, if you can contain it within yourself without spinning off into a reduction of one aide or the other, you begin to get the feel of what we are doing. I do not think we should even call it a course. We have got to call it a course because otherwise people won't come. My word, there are 80 many perverted things going around on weekends with large bodies of human beings that we have to call it a course. And yet it is not the same. It has a different feel. And I confess that I am excited by that feel. It has taken me two weeks to say that. I wee on the dread pole much more three weeks ago than I am tonight.

I want to speak about the fact that we are alive and that we are fire, those two things. We have to begin to think substantially, as people did in the past. What John was talking about with that log was that the log was fire, that the log was not being fire until it was enkindled and became fire. And that was not mystical poetry. That was hard-headed science. That log was fire. Somehow fire was not raised out of a lot of old junk. When that log became alive, it became fire. Now, that is what I think this is talking about. It is fulfilling that spirit that we are as human beings on this planet. There are only two categories, it is a four-point lecture, but there are only two. There is a long introduction, and thank God someone had sense enough to put the introduction down as point one on the lecture. And then there is a medium size conclusion, and thank God someone has decided to put that down as the fourth point on the lecture so we do not have to spend a lot of time getting the thing introduced. I want to talk about "consuming action" and "endless adventure;" and for those of you who are sneaking looks at your four-by-four, they are the middle two. But that first one, that first long column that they call "final certitude" is really an introduction that has to do with where you stand. Or it has to do with the question, "What does it mean to live a full life?" And the answer to that we wrap up in that little song we sing, "I am the one set free to embrace the world." That is what it means to live a full life. And you have to say, "I am the one set free" first before you get to the fulfilled life part which is the "set free to embrace the world." I am the one set free. I am the one who stands in the final certitude. I am the one who stands at the center of being itself. In your imagination, go back, to that lecture that some of us have heard and some of us have not heard but live out of anyway, about the journey to the center of your being. Because that is what I am talking about. It is what happens when you are able to crash through that skin of self that blocks you from the deeps of life that you have lived out of and have nurtured your being out of ever since you were created, to where you have the facility maybe for the first time in your life to see that you are a person who is alive. It is then that consciousness of consciousness breaks through as a category, that RSI gets stuffed in your being, or there is a wrench and a tear and you discover that you are in the process of becoming a human being. You begin the journey that might take ten minutes, that might take two hundred years, to the center of your being. You travel down through those levels of purgation we are talking about this summer. One summer we talked about them as aridity and blindness and burning and the purging of going through understanding yourself as a person that was really caught in no meaning. You discover your impurity is being burned away, but you are aware, that you are the greatest Apostate. Apostasy is something that is not even a strong enough term to describe the kind of unfaithfulness that you and I are. Going through that kind of desert, is devastating save you touch the center of being and discover there the Word that grounds your life in life itself. There you see, on the face of that one, the face of the one that is the center of life: not only the face of everyman, and not only the face of Jesus the hero of our community, but your own face; and discover that the center of your being is your being, that the center of your being is being itself. And then finally there is the darkness that is light: you work down to see that at the center of yourself is your awe. If you have never been underground in a cave or a mine, where all of the lights have been out, you never have really experienced blackness. No where else in my life have I been in that kind of situation, where literally you could feel your hand in front of your face because light was not a category. And if you can remember, that journey of searching for self, where you reached the state that yourself was lost in that much darkness, in that darkness you discovered the fact that you lived out of the Word that pronounced your life good. You understand what the poetry of "I am the one" talks about. This is the journey's end. You are home when you get there. The question of what are you looking for you could hardly answer, because it comes in the wild excitement of discovering what you are looking for you have been carrying around with you ever since you were born. One of the deeply shocking things that happened to me on a trip I took in '68 through South East Asia, and that I was not able to explain until a couple of years afterwards, was that on the surface I was not at home, but down underneath none of that finally was alien. Something had happened to me in my life, grounding me at the center, and no matter where I showed up in life, there was nothing finally that shook me from that center of being. I was home wherever I was and whatever I was about. Now there are a lot of perversions on the other side of that, but I think you want to say that first.

We have talked about one who is there at the center being able to bleed the meaning out of every event in life. Those conversations began to get started at our community. I felt very strange because my mind always turned to the bizarre. The only time I could ever really report on situations where my life was filled with meaning were rather bizarre circumstances. And my colleagues would look somewhat askance at that and say, "Now Fishel you are supposed to bleed meaning." They never said it but it was always implied. You were supposed to bleed the meaning out of the everyday things, like cups of coffee. Stuff like that. How to get to the bottom of a three hundred foot pit underneath a waterfall with five kid explorers on your hands, that is when life is meaningful. I always felt guilty about all that. Now, I discovered that the guilt may be misplaced. Because, you see, in those bizarre circumstances you are still in life. When you bleed the meaning out of a situation it is not that the peculiar circumstance" confronting one coffee cup or one particular relationship or one individual-exploded with meaning,

but that all of life explodes with meaning. It is not just this cassette tape recorder that is filled with meaning, it is life that is filled with meaning. All of creation bleeds meaning to the bottom, because somehow you are the pivot: your life, your living, your flame, your spirit is the pivot around which all of this space revolves. And, my God, once that happens to you, you are changed forever and forever and forever. And it is not a matter of not being able to bleed the meaning out of life after that, it is a matter of lighting a flame. It is a matter of blocking out the meaning that you can hardly stand. We trick ourselves when we try to whomp up meaning, trying to discover meaning. Meaning is not a damn imperative event. To be one who has stood at the center, who stands at the center, is to be one who lives in meaning, period. And you do not have to whomp it up; it is there. All you have to do, I guess, is relax and enjoy it, the way St. John was talking about it. We have to get those teachers together. I hear some men tried to teach that section. I think they could, but they sure would have to have some good pedagogue to get them ready, because that is a hard, hard section.

One more thing and I am going to start the lecture: "My cup runneth over." That is the last category of being filled with final certitude, or being one at the center. Now, the only illustration for "my cup runneth over" that seems relevant is the last three weeks of my life. I put them down as "the last three weeks equals impossible." That, literally, is the case. Not the kind of impossibility that I have lived out of before, including the summer programs and ITIs you know, you had some kind of job you had to get done and you could not get the job done, it was just impossible. And by staying up all night and working and burning your mind up and taking and beating your colleagues and everything like that, you got the job finished; an impossible job was somehow whittled down or else you were able to beat it. But no more. I am telling you about the fact that what has happened this week and the two weeks before that is literally impossible. There is no way to contain it. You cannot be a cup big enough to hold what is happening. A lot of us were caught by the security people, wandering around the building at two and three and four o'clock in the morning. We said we can't sleep, or we are afraid to sleep, or something like that. And that the reason is that life is falling so thick and fast around this place, we literally cannot stand it. It is almost as if going to sleep would be immoral. Once I could go to sleep and cut it off. That used to be a gift of mine, but I lost the gift. I wander, I walk around. I keep trying to find a way to expand this self that I am, to stand here at the center, while that is the center of life. When you are there you do not contain it. It is continually running over with more and more and still more life. D.H. Lawrence knew a lot about that .

We are going to talk next about "consuming action." And that is exactly what it is. Your action consumes you, consuming action talks about how you stand. It is the stance of authenticity. Authenticity and consuming action are the same thing. You are talking about being totally engaged. That means acting way beyond, not acting, creating way beyond with your action, whatever you thought you were called to do out of some imperative. Way beyond any kind of authoritarian certitude. Way beyond any one particular attachment. You stand there with one foot over your grave, and understand consuming action to be literally action which consumes you. It burns you up into wherever fire goes when fire goes off. It means suffering, and the metaphor "suffering servant" is not a bad one if you get clear that you are not talking about particular suffering, suffering about one thing or one place or one event, but all the particulars that you stand before in life. What really consumes you is taking that particular thing that confronts you in its utter uniqueness, and through your being turning that into the universal. You take the marriage that you are in and decide, no, not decide, know, that marriage to be a marriage for this planet, for all time and all space. That is consuming action. It means taking that local church you are in, which is a rat's nest of particular contradictions, and with your spirit and nothing else in the first instance, turning it into the universal church for all space and all time. Now, when you understand action as that kind of activity on a spiritual level, you know what I am talking about to be suffering servanthood.

My assignment is in Manila. The clergy there are no better off, no worse off, than anywhere else on the planet. You get into these horrendous conversations where the death is so thick you feel like you are almost smothered in the room. And they just pour out the pain of being the church in this time in history, in this particular spot. To talk about living a fulfilled life means to take that particularity, that pain, that horror, that terror of death, I am not playing games, it is rude death, to take that into yourself until it lives, across the universe with as much life as any man can have. It is taking that damn paragraph some idiot has assigned you to write in the next five minutes before it has to be shipped off to the typists downstairs. It is sparking that little bit of death into life, so that some life goes down the page and a guy just sits there and reads it, and he is frozen for eternity by those words that you have poured your life through. I am not saying you should do this. I am saying this is what is happening. This is what is happening. This is not what should happen. This is what is happening here. And it is what has happened in the church throughout history; and it is what has conserved humanness on this planet. It is why we can use categories like life and awe.

I want to talk about cruciformity just a little bit, because if you take that "suffering servant" one more step, you talk about how it is not just living so that life breaks through to every part of the universe; it is about dying, too. When we read Eliade we found him talking about how the symbol of the cross was at the center of the universe. That was so macro-wild an idea, I could not put it into any diagram, so I just filed it away in the back of that computer I carry around between my ears. Now I see the life that he means when he talks about the cross being at the center of life! It is around the cross that the whole universe itself turns. You understand that if you live out of the cruciform principle, it is your death that turns the world -- more than the world, it turns the galaxies themselves. We go on around, you lay down your life on behalf of all; and the awe now suddenly breaks through with an entirely new meaning.

I have stood up at that blackboard and drawn the wedgeblade a thousand times. Now that diagram seems like a scribbling that young children in preschool might talk about. That is the crucifix. But it is only a crucifix in time, our old category. The problem with just that tip of the wedgeblade is that it is an easy out for the stoic tendency that we all have. The stoics love that cruciform principle. Do you understand that? All I have to do is hang here and grit-my-teeth, and sooner or later history will change. If I can just get up enough stoical courage to hang here long enough, the future will come in through my act. It will be a better future. And if it is not a better future, than at least it will be a better suffering here on this cross. That is stoicism; it is stoicism to the bottom. And it is death. But if you take that wedgeblade and you encircle space around it, the stoic goes home; because you see to lay down your life on behalf of all does not mean on behalf of all the future and all the past, but it means on behalf of all of this thing that we are in right now. I mean all of the now, all of this space given to us. And there is no action around that circle that symbolizes this universe; rather, there is a big cleft right down the middle. This is broken life. This universe is torn apart. This log is sick and broken. And what you do with that, is take that brokenness and die that brokenness to the bottom. I did not say heal it. You take that brokenness that you are and you-celebrate every week, and you break that bread and take that brokenness into yourself. And you not only live that brokenness, you die that brokenness on behalf of all men. One thing happened to me in all the time that I have been away. We were on a trip to an ITI and we had just finished dinner. Dinner consisted of some cooked goat with a little rice, backed up with banana leaves, called mutton buriyani. We were all in the bus in the park eating this stuff, and when we got done we just threw the scraps out the window. I had taken my banana leaves and goat bones and dropped them out the window, and there was a scuffling underneath the bus. I looked out the window and there were three lepers fighting over my banana leaves. Brokenness became a real category to the meaning of my life at that time; I watched that and turned around and crunched down in the seat. And then felt something rubbing my cheek. I turned around and there was a stump of a hand of a guy who had been under the bus, rubbing my cheek with the end of that leprous stump. And I do not know what he was saying, but it was death staring me in the face. I mean it was death brushing my cheek. And it was not death in the abstract category. Nor was it just my death. But it was death calling for life, any life. It was calling for somebody to take this spirit that we are and consume the brokenness of this world, so death can be at peace again.

I do not know. When you stand as the fulfilled man, you find yourself in slavery to the universe. You see, you have all this at the center. Once you touch here, you see that this is where you stand, at the center of life itself. That means that you are transformed, and you stand at the center. You are the center of the all-in-all. What I have been talking about is the stance of a man; how you stand when you see. Not just the wonder of being a whole, healed person; not just being the excitement of the justified life; but being at the same time the one who is at the center. We all know that once we begin the march, the return goes to the one, not the one that is here at the center of your being, but the return to the one which hounds you all this time. You understand yourself as a slave for the first time in your life. When you have decided to march, you are a healed, whole man, enslaved by that which is.

The second half of the lecture talks about the Endless Adventure to fill that space full. The question to answer is not "What does it mean to live a whole life?" but "how do I live this life full of meaning?" How is this life full of meaning? This is to talk about motivity. I do not understand quite what that word means, but I sense it means being conscious of that which pushes you and binds you through life. And that is one thing you are clear about when you struggle to fill that life full with meaning on the Endless Adventure. But there is a zest-filled drive within your being. You love that life. I do not know how to say this: I am on my way. You have got to say at the same time, I am on Yahweh. I am my way, I am on Yahweh. I am commissioned on the holy journey that sanctifies this universe with my being. And this is not anything that I have dreamed up nor is it anything that I decide about. It is something that I will or do not will to put my life behind. There is a drive, a spiritual drive, back toward the all-in-all. How do you do it? Your whole life is made up of a strange kind of boldness that first comes as

a kind of shock. You are shocked at what you find yourself doing. In the first place, it is utterly shocking that you are doing things that you always wanted to do, maybe. Or it gets a little deeper: you are doing things that you always wanted to do but were afraid somebody would catch you at. And then it gets even deeper: you are doing things that you never wanted to do, and you are wondering about. And then it gets still deeper: you are doing things you never wanted to do and you were sure you would never be caught doing. This is the law within the law. The boldness takes that category of morality and smashes it until there is nothing left except the indicative ontology of life. You do not have to whomp up St. John and his wild esoteric imaginings of just how that comes. It's the little simpler things. It is sitting down and having conversations with other human beings in which both of you come alive for the first time. Little simple things that you would never dare do before, and you would be damned if you ever did -- I am talking theologically, you would be damned if you ever caught yourself doing. Now you are bold enough to be your being in conjunction with another human's being; life comes alive for the first time. That is what I mean by utter boldness, and being surprised by life. You are on your way. Life is struggle. You are willing to risk. It is the courage dead men have. But it is not living out of some kind of final eschatological courage born of seeing that the next instant you are going to be gone, so you might as well expend yourself totally with full self-conscious decision. Almost all war stories have at least two or three episodes about guys who know they have had it: two screams and they are dead. But I am talking about living the day-by-day-by-day.

I do not know who is running that kitchen down there, but somebody is willing to be dead in that kitchen this summer. Now we have glitches and problems, but there is life coming out of that place down there. I have never seen that before in my association with this body of people. Someone is alive, and twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, pouring his life down the drain as a dead man so that the flame of life burns in that place. That is what I mean by daring to risk. You find yourself on this Endless Adventure doing the same kind of thing. God gives us a trick to play on ourselves and never really be clear about how much we are risking when we go into it. At least I hope that is the case. But always on reflection you see, "My God' if I had known I would get to be this, I never would have joined this outfit!" I used to say, "My God' if I knew it was going to get to this I would never have started this seminar." And yet that boldness is there. The problem now when everybody is doing the research is that fewer people are tricked. Before, the prior would come out knowing what was going to happen, and he would spin a little bit and the fog machine would get going and you were all listed in the troop ship before you knew that it was not a picnic you were going to. I find I pick up some of these guild documents and they say, "we do not know, we are trying to find out." You know that everybody knows now. Everybody knows what we are getting into. And yet the body as a whole is willing to risk that. Most people in this room are willing to risk even what the guild experiment represents: the total transformation of the human categories of life itself on this planet. It might not happen for a thousand years, but we are willing to bet our lives on that. And yet you know it is only a bunch of crummy spirit, and you know it is crummy because it has come out of us and our colleagues.

The last category talks about Perpetual Creativity. I say I am an artist. I understand that. I am an artist and I have not picked up my tools in seven years. But I am an artist. And that means being one who dares to make life out of nothing, to take the nothingness there and turn it out in black and white and send through little numbers on the side with a black border around the edge. It means daring to stand and see that this universe stays in creation because of you. That this universe is held in being by your being, your being. And was I offended the first time I heard, when I got to the center and met Jesus, and shined my little pencil flashlight to see his face, since the dark could not be darker, whose face that is, -- that offended me. I am delighted about that. Now when that heavenly king sits on his throne and looks out across his creation and happens to glance in the mirror, and your face glances back, I mean that is offensive. And yet that just is a real reality.

That journey outward, that endless adventure, is the process of holding in tension that double feeling of being the bond slave and the audacious king, the creator of life itself. That is the tension that the fulfilled life is really all about. And that is the question that we have to struggle with as a people and as a movement: how we hold that tension between being the slave and the king, the slave of creation and the Lord of creation. You do not need a lot of theological explanation to know what it means to collapse one of those polarities. Go upstairs and talk to Hannah or go back and read your history of the German people, and you will discover what great experiments in forgetting who was king the German people went through in the early part of this century; and they knew how to use cabaret and songs and symbols and everything else. And thank God that happened, because that is one of the temptations that stares us right in the face: to forget that we are slaves. Of course, the other side is much harder to find. It will probably come as just stoicism, forgetting you are a king. And if I had to come up with an illustration tonight, I would not push it very hard, but you only have to look at Mr. Richard Nixon as a man who forgot he was king and became a slave to whatever was convenient. And that is a sign. Both of those temptations are there.

I want to talk about spirit tranquility to conclude this lecture. We talked about how you end, how you finish, what is the end of the fulfilled life. One thing I am convinced about is that when you grasp your kingdom, it seems that your life is the life of the universe; but that never removes the other. That never takes care of getting rid of the objective other in the situation, the mystery is always there. And even when you stand as the one who is the center of the all-in-all and whose being is on fire and consumes the whole of creation, you know that you are finally not all that there is in life-- that there is something beyond your being, beyond your understanding. There is an eerie kind of problemlessness there. It is about ten times more dramatic than this illustration. Do you remember in the movie "Patton," that confrontation during the Battle of the Bulge in that old castle, trying to decide whether to take the Third Army to break through the Bulge area. And it was clear, to all the officers who had done all their homework, that even though the Germans had pushed down on this spot, there was no hurry, no reason, to fight the whole thing out, since there were not any enemies out there, there was nothing to fight at all. It was just a simple matter of time and mathematical projection, and things would take care of themselves. And you know what Patton did: he came in and went psychotic, and got everybody moving again. And when some guy asked him why, he turned to the man and said, "you won't believe it, but we could lose this." Now, that phrase has got to be in your being. No, it does not have to be in your being; that phrase is in your life to the bottom.

The minute Patton said that, you knew it. I do not care how sanctified you be, you know that you could still lose. With all this "there is no fight, and no enemies," you can still lose. There are no problems. You are winning. You do not have to win. You are winning. You are on top of life. You are problemless. But you could still lose. And that is the eerie quality about it. Because you begin to feel then that there is only one enemy that you can lose to. And that is the antithesis of the awe, Lucifer, the one that takes your life away. We are going to have to learn how to talk about that a lot more. Not just talk about it; we'll have to learn how to struggle with that again. Now that we have won, and I mean we have won, we smell that sulfur of a loss that is irrevocable. And we have lost the dark side of life.

Finally, we talk about the Absurd Tranquility. I am supposed to talk a little bit about spontaneous gratitude. I do not think I have to. Just refer back to the style of our living these last weeks. This is a peaceful place and it is full of joy. I can use those words and they do not catch in my throat; and I am not a hippy. This is a peaceful place. It is here, and I am grateful beyond any capacity of whomping up gratitude I have ever had. At the end of this you see God. The end of the fulfilled life is full participation with God. One of the classic stories we used, when we were bound to the poetry of justification, was to talk about what it meant to be the justified one as finding yourself in the grave. There the Lord has got you by the throat; you said the lord gets you, and He has got you. We understood justification as being able to wink at him and grab him by the throat, and say, " I have got you." But I have to think twice to say what it means to be justified. For when the Lord finally gets you, to stand and stare in his face and say, " and I have got you" - that is the justified man. But the end of this is when you stand face to face with the all-in-all, and there is nothing there except you and the mystery and the end. Then you., as the creator and king of all that is and all that was and all that ever shall be, reach out and grab that mystery and say, "I've got you mystery. At last my life is fulfilled. I have got you. Don't forget that that mystery winks back and says, "And I've got you."

Robert Fishel