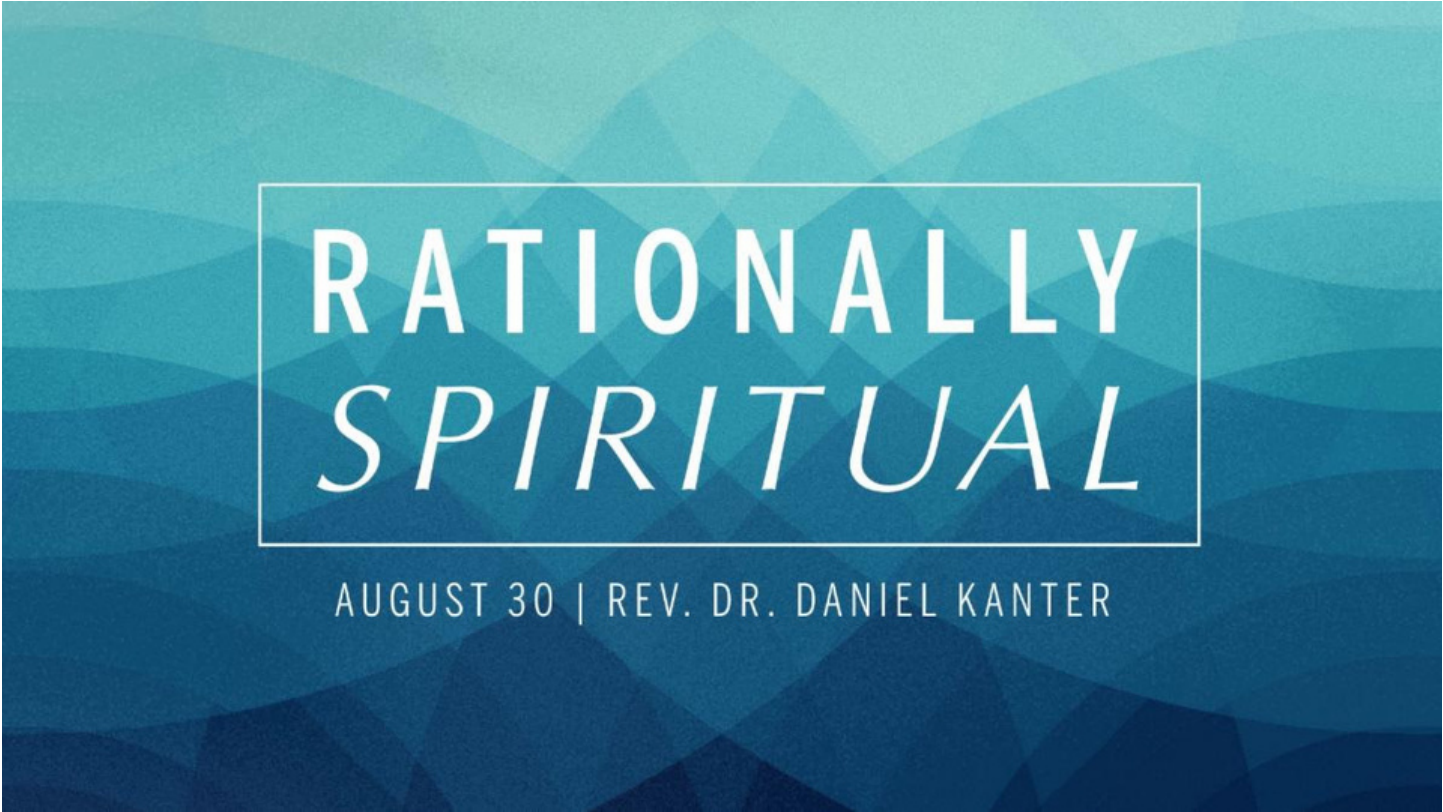




RATIONALLY *SPIRITUAL*

AUGUST 30 | REV. DR. DANIEL KANTER

Well, if you've been hanging around here for a while, you've heard the reading that I read to you today before. I used it maybe 10 or 15 years ago. And I know that hanging around here and paying attention to readings aren't always the same thing. I get that. So a good refresher course.

Gordon Atkinson, who wrote it, was once a minister in the San Antonio area. He went by the name of Real Live Preacher, and he wrote some pretty fabulous essays about being faithful to his religion while questioning a lot of its behavior around it. He was a Baptist, so he had a lot of material, and he was good at synthesizing it.

When I used this reading, I got an email that week from him, which can go a couple different ways. He said, "I heard you use my reading. Thank you." Turned out someone in the Church knew him and told him a Unitarian was preaching off his stuff, and he wasn't offended, which was really a success. And I think he said something like, "If I lived in Dallas, I would come to your church," which meant a lot to me.

I think Atkinson would fit in here because he figured out pretty quickly that besides the Trinity versus unity of God issue we would have, that we're pretty much on the same page on a lot of things. The primary one is that the Church should be a place of authenticity. It should be a place where people could bring their struggles and hopes and often be let down, but held up at the same time. It should be a place where people aren't performing their faith in front of you or flaunting their accomplishments. It should be a place where people want to hang out with one another and a place where the preachers aren't fake, aren't on stage flaunting their beautiful tattoos or amazing ability to memorize or speak in platitudes.

It should be a place where children are loved and taught to love themselves and not feel condemned. And it should be a place where we disagree, but agree on the important things and sing hymns and light candles on Christmas and give generously and sit quietly and where we don't need all the answers when life is really hard or the world seems hell-bent on its own

destruction.

It should be a place where some people say amen and others wonder why they're doing that. And no one knows why we clap for anything except we like to express our inner emotions, and people who don't like clapping complain to the preacher and say, "Why are people clapping?" And the preacher says, "I'm not going to legislate emotion." Clapping is the way we say amen, I guess, but I didn't listen to last week's sermon, so apparently we don't clap before the prayer anymore. Probably good policy.

A church should be a place where you don't leave feeling worse than when you came in, but you also don't feel fake better when you leave. It should be a place where you feel like something important is happening and you're part of it. And all that is what the Real Live Preacher and this real-life preacher in front of you believe is important when you're looking for a church because this preacher is describing this place, a place where you can bring your doubts and not feel stupid and you can bring your intellect and not be shut down and where you can ask questions, lots of questions and get few answers in return, and that's okay. And this preacher believes that in this place you can come in here and know that we are saving lives but not offering salvation with some statement of belief, but rather by loving people into being themselves and helping real people, especially those on the margins of society deal with real issues.

And you can be assured that here we practice what we call a religion that is rationally spiritual. You see the sermon series means we're going down the list on the front of the order of service and today we're at rational spiritual. And what does rationally spiritual really mean? It's time to start taking notes right now because I'm about to hit you with some big stuff, okay? Rationally spiritual, in my mind, comes to three things.

One of them is that human reason is not opposed to divine revelation, but is a God-given faculty through which spiritual truths can be discerned, examined, and more deeply understood. I'll say that again in a different way. Human reason is not opposed to divine revelation. So we're not pitting God against free will and your mind. We're saying it's all part of the same.

And two, that an authentic spirituality is not merely emotional or mystical, but demonstrates an internal coherence, a moral consistency and an intellectual integrity. So being authentically spiritual does not mean you feel something all the time. It means that what you believe and what you practice are coherent. The aim of rational spiritual life is just that, number three, to practice ethical living that reflects both logical moral principles and spiritual convictions. You got all that? I'll repeat them to you if you ask me. The aim here is that we use our minds, our hearts and our souls to create coherent lives. We don't believe something in here in the sanctuary and then go home and do the absolute opposite. We try to find ways to live out the core of our faith, not just here, but in every aspect of our lives.

In this church, being rational and spiritual means things like this, that we read the Bible, but we read it with skepticism and a historical lens. We look in it for metaphors that help us live rather than taking the Bible as a divine download from God. We read the Bible also as much as we read Real Live Preacher essays or Joy Harjo poems that say, "At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray with suffering and remorse. We give thanks. Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite." And we read that poem because we aren't so much worried about the end of the world. We're more worried about those

at the table, laughing, crying, eating and drinking and that there is a place always set for the next person in need and the person who was told to sit outside.

We are rationally spiritual because we believe that every human being is worthy of love, is equal in their creation and can be corrupted by prejudice and hate and violence, but that we didn't start that way. We started in love. And we're not naive about human nature, but we choose to believe in humanity. We choose to believe in humanity's capacity to live by a moral code, even when we don't see that happening. A moral code that considers other people as real, that considers how we work toward equity in every part of our lives.

We aim to do this not just in our personal spiritual lives, but here in the church, in the business of the church, considering things like living wages and contracts for women and minority-owned businesses just the beginning because things like that ask us, what is it that we worship? Do we worship money or do we worship fairness? Do we worship profit or do we worship equity? Do we worship what we can obtain in our lives or what we can provide to those who have less? If you meditate on those three questions for the rest of the year, you'll be something. It'll change you.

What do you worship? These are ethical, spiritual questions. They're guidelines as part of what we do here in worship and the way we conduct business and the way we strive as an institution to be the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of God as we imagine it. And it's our hope that you come here and take these things home to consider how you extend such lessons and questions to your lives.

Rationally spiritual, this church means we don't expect perfection, not from you, and hopefully you, not from us. This church may fail you from time to time, but it might also be a place where a bunch of silly dreamers are prone to mistakes and blunders and misjudgments and are doing the best they can to live holy lives together. And because of that, we're all better for it.

In this church, there's coffee, there's Bibles, and there's way much more. For sure, there are kindred spirits. And here we use our ethical and spiritual lives to do good, to stand up for what is right and to challenge our own prejudices, which is a constant challenge. When we want to call those who we don't agree with, when we want to call them evil, we have to check ourselves. That's not our theology. When we want to prove that we are right over and above others on theological grounds, we have to start asking more questions. When we make jokes about name changes of Great Lakes, it's only to point out how absurd life is and how many more important things there are, things that we can change that we have to give attention to.

So we here in this church, our rationally spiritual church on the corner of Normandy and Preston Road in Dallas, Texas, and now really a global church where people live stream us with subtitles in five languages, we have no idea how far and wide our message can go or what impact it can have. But we're here, and we're here for good. And when our government surveils us, like they did in our sister church in Minneapolis this past month, sending agents to watch what was going on, can you imagine we live in a country that's doing that now because that sister church of ours stood up against ICE in their city? When they do that, we say, bring it on. We're not hiding anything. There are no preachers here with \$200 haircuts. You can tell. I hardly have hair anymore. Trying to grow it, but there are no hidden agendas. There's no other shoe that's going to drop here. We are who we say we are, and we're proud of it.

And there are also no guarantees. There are no rewards at the end of the rainbow. There are no

capital T truths you have to memorize. There are only a bunch of people trying to make sense of this crazy world, committed to love and justice the way we see it, trying to unify our spirits with worship and prayer and song and service with our ethics to consider what is fair, what needs our attention, what hope is worth our lives, what should and can we do in a time of climate crisis and bad politics? How are we going to remain centered through all this as our lives evolve? That's what we're focused on.

Maybe the one answer you're going to get in this sermon is that we have to keep practicing all these things. So relax. It's all good. God might use this journey you're on to teach you something or you might pick up some friends along the way, some kindred spirits here in love.

Welcome to those of you who have just arrived. We hope that you find what you're looking for, and thank you to all those of you who have sustained this place for what it is. I love you. That's why I'm standing in this pulpit. Peace be with you.