

## Write your Eulogy

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New York Times columnist David Brooks just published a new book, The Road to Character. I haven't read it, yet, but I do know a little about it because Brooks described his thesis in a recent column.

Brooks had noticed that about once a month, he would run across a person who seems to radiate this inner light. He became curious – why some and not others – would have that – plus - he would like to access that same light.

After all, Brooks is successful, but the light is different. The light, he believes, has to do with character. He goes on to describe two types of virtues: resume virtues and eulogy virtues.

Resume virtues speak to your capacity for hard and insightful work.

Eulogy virtues, on the other hand, reflect the person you've actually *become* – inside. Schools teach resume virtues, but pay little attention to character. That's why in this Type A run hard and fast America, we're particularly good at the resume virtues. We prize success... Enjoy recognition, and treasure esteem... But we're not so good at eulogy virtues. As a result, many people wake-up in mid or late life to discover a gap – between who you are and who you wish you were.

But there are those – the handful – who pay attention early enough. *“They [are] deeply good. They listen well. They make you feel funny and valued. You often catch them looking after other people and as they do so their laugh is musical and their manner is infused with gratitude.”* If I could plagiarize David Brooks, I'd steal this description for Earth and Altar – because he is describing philosophically what I have tried to express theologically.

When I speak about living closer to the earth – I'm speaking both literally and in metaphor. Literally, we really don't need all the whiz-bang gadgets we have developed – And there is no good reason for us to rape and pillage the earth the way we do – But the harder part of Earth and Altar is learning to live an authentic life. Focusing on what really matters – the good you do, the kindness you extend, the relationships you develop – But these values do not plant themselves inside you; like you do the garden, you must cultivate them. Eulogy virtues are cultivated. Indeed, the earth itself seems to possess a soul – a spirit – and almost like blood in your veins this spirit connects and brings a type of life to every person – The question is, how much of this spirit will you accept? Do you extract?

It's up to you. Growing veggies, you see, in your backyard is the metaphor for the spirit you extract. Just like a successful garden requires intentional work quiet patience, and unseen miracles – So it is with the soul: intentional work, quiet patience, and unseen miracles.

\*\*They say that even the gifted preacher has only five *real* sermons in her – she keeps preaching the same thing over and over - If that's true, and I – a mediocre preacher at

best - have only three sermons left to preach from this pulpit - Well you can pretty much guess by now what you're going to hear over the next few weeks!

And Sermon One is this: It is Earth and Altar – discover what's truly important in life – and then *please* live it. \*Jesus' disciple John – the one who wrote two of today's readings – is characteristically obtuse – I am the vine, you are the branches. Abide in me, and I in you. Love is a choice, he says, yet it is something that happens to you. And which is it? Love - Do you love by choice, or does love choose you?

People hear that God loves them - but they confuse that love with pubescent feelings of Romeo and Juliet love – *I don't feel God's love*, they say. And of-course John wants you to *feel* something – but the love of God is so much more than Romeo and Juliet love. Abide in that love, as in make your home there, dwell in that house.

It's a choice, whether or not to live in love. Only – and here is the irony – you have no choice at all, John intimates. You can only love because God first loved you. But how will you ever know God's love if you remain aloof to God? Which is the point – It's all about posture... About the daily posture of your soul. To whom do you devote yourself? ...Intentionally, day after day? Just like the branch of the vine must remain connected to the trunk, you must remain connected in faith. To have faith, to have love.. Brother Andrew called it, *Practice the Presence of God*. Abide.

\*When all is said and done, the contemporary quip, *I'm spiritual but not religious*, is nothing but an oxymoron – You can't be spiritual if you aren't equally religious. Yes, you are spiritual by birth, we're all spiritual beings, connected mystically to God and earth ... but the strength of your spirituality depends completely upon you, and your posture. If you don't exercise – practice, as in religion – your spirituality like a muscle will atrophy. If you only live the outward life, for success alone, your soul will wither.

\*In the movie, The American President, Michael Douglas talks about liberty and democracy, and says you can't just expect it to happen by itself, you have to want it, and *want it bad*. You have to want God. Bad. So many people say they *do* want God, but don't give God the time it takes. And that's where choice comes in... Your daily posture... The physical and spiritual devotion of yourself to the Divine – who really only has one thing for you: love.

\*In Ancient Rome, there were temples that had no roofs – open to the sky above – hypaethral – where worship literally becomes a matter of earth and universe. You the worshipper become boundless, connecting transcendently with heavens and God. Thoreau called Scripture the hypaethral book, equally open to the sky. And I would call true faith to be the same, hypaethral. For there is no roof to love. So – that means only one thing, you have a spiritual muscle to exercise, Or as David Brooks might say, a *eulogy to write*. Better get busy.