

**The End is Not the End:**  
**August 28, 2022**

**[1 Jesus]**

**[Have pianist play Lenten-ish song.**  
**Have reader read the following verses.**  
**When it's all done... say... ]**

The End.

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Have you ever seen the movie... Big Fish. **[2 Big Fish]**

It was directed by Tim Burton...  
And his wife is a witch. **[3 A Witch]**  
In the movie I mean...  
I don't know about real life.

She a witch...  
With an unusual power.

Rumor was... that she had a glass eye...  
That contained a magical ability...

If you looked her directly into her glass eye...  
You would see how you were going to die.

Everyone was afraid of her.  
Except the main character...  
Of the movie.  
He was not afraid.

His name is Edward Bloom...  
And when he was 10 years old...  
He and four friends...  
Went to see the witch with the glass eye.  
Of course... they had to go at night...  
And the house was old and scary.

But he walked right up to her door...  
Knocked...  
And said...  
I want to see your eye.  
She nodded...  
And showed him.

Later in the movie he ex[plains why he did it...

He said... I was thinking about death and all.  
About seeing how you're gonna die.  
I mean, on one hand,  
If dying was all you thought about,  
It could kind of screw you up.

But it could kind of help you, couldn't it?  
Because you'd know that everything else you can survive.

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Makes sense... right?  
Because if you know the end of the story...  
Then it frees you up...  
To live confidently...  
To live fully...  
To live unfettered by fear.

Hold that thought.

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The overarching problem... **[4 Humility]**  
Of this gospel lesson is obviously...  
A lack of humility.

Jesus gives us two examples....  
Based on his real life experience...  
What was happening in the moment...  
He was at a dinner party...  
And people were being... well... people.

So... don't tell me...  
About the good old days...  
Don't tell me...  
People used to be nicer.  
Don't tell me...  
Anything about human behavior...

Because God's Word teaches us...  
In the book of Ecclesiastes...  
There is nothing new under the sun.

Anyway... don't be shocked....  
When I tell you... a lack of humility...  
Is not a modern invention.

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The first problem was...  
People were taking seats of honor.  
Now we have place cards...  
At weddings... that tell you where to sit.

And yes... the pastor always gets sat...  
Right next to the extremely religious family member...  
Who wants to talk about Jesus...  
All night long.

Just so you know...  
The pastor would rather sit...  
And the loud obnoxious fun table...  
For future reference.

But this taking of unassigned seats of honor...  
Is what I would call...  
The Problem of privilege...

A sense of privilege convinces us... **[5 Important]**  
That we are important... special...  
More special than most the other people...  
Around us. THEREFORE...

Our ideas carry more weight...  
Because we are smarter.

Our opinions are more important...  
Because we know more about...  
Well... just about everything.

Our desires have a higher priority...  
Than other people's priorities...  
Just because of who I am...  
I deserve... more...

I deserve to sit...  
At the best seat at the table.

I deserve to assume a position...  
Of prominence and honor.

I deserve to get my way...

BECAUSE I AM IMPORTANT.

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One time Janet and I... **[6 Billy Goat]**  
Went to eat at the Billy Goat Tavern...  
It's under Michigan Avenue in Chicago...  
It's a cool historic dive bar...  
Made famous by Saturday Night Live...  
Cheezburger... Cheezburger... Cheezburger...

Anyway... in the back there's a sign... **[7 BG VIP]**  
That says, VIP ROOM...  
But there's a little surprise...  
For anyone pretentious enough to sit there.

On the back side of the sign... **[8 Insecure]**  
It says... A VERY INSECURE PERSON.

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And maybe that's one of the causes...  
Of a lack of humility...  
And a lack of awareness...

Maybe it can all be traced to...  
An abundance of insecurity.

And with all the recent events...  
In our world... and our country...  
It seems like so many people are insecure.  
Right? I mean... lashing out...  
Acting like ill-behaved children.

Everyone thinks they're right.  
Everyone thinks they know best.  
Everyone thinks they are more important...  
Whether they say it or not...  
They act like it's true..

Aren't you tired of it.  
Aren't you tired of people behaving badly.  
Aren't you tired of bad news.  
Aren't you tired of people venting...  
On every single form of social media.

Don't you just desire...  
To quietly live in peace.  
And wholeness.

And not get wound up...  
By every little stupid thing...  
That comes down the pike.

Oh. Sorry. Don't mind me...  
I just have to get off my metaphorical soap box...  
And back to the sermon.

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The second lack of humility problem...  
In the gospel lesson...  
Pointed out by Jesus...

Is surrounding ourselves...  
With fancy important people...  
Who hopefully...  
Will pay us back.  
For being nice to them.

I think I told you this before...  
One time... at a national conference...  
I was on an elevator... **[9 Millard]**  
With Millard Fuller...  
Who along with his wife Linda...  
Founded Habitat for Humanity.

Oh yeah. I was on the elevator...  
Waiting and minding my own business...  
When the doors opened...  
And Millard Fuller himself...  
Confidently came into the elevator...

But instead of rubbing elbows... with him...  
Or networking...  
Or whatever I was supposed to do...  
In the presence of greatness.

Instead of all that... Millard Fuller...  
The man who started Habitat for Humanity...  
Hit me in the knee with his briefcase. Hard.  
And he didn't even say he was sorry.  
He didn't even notice...  
What he had done...  
Or that I was hurt...  
Or that I was on the elevator with him.

That's how important I am.

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But Jesus is confronting...  
Our tendency to make...  
Our relationships... based on transactions...  
**TRANSACTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS... [10 Transactional]**

You know... you scratch my back...  
And I'll scratch yours.

If you do something nice and good for me...  
Well... then I guess..  
You have value... to me...

And someday...  
If you play your cards right...  
I might even do something...  
Nice and good for you. Maybe.

Transactional relationships are built...  
On the expectation of reciprocation.

Which is fine...  
If we're talking about the grocery store.  
We give them money...  
And those nice people...  
Give us food.

But it's not good...  
When we talk about relationships.  
Have you ever been in a relationship...  
In which someone keeps score?

This is what you have done wrong.  
This is what you have done right.  
AND therefore... this is how I will treat you...  
Based on what you have done...  
Or left undone.

That is a heartbreaking way to live...  
You're always afraid...  
That you won't do enough...  
Won't be good enough...  
Won't deserve the persons love.

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And then sometimes...  
We apply it to our relationship with God...  
As if God needs us...  
To do something...  
To earn God's favor.

Talk about lack of humility.  
God does not need us...  
To do or be anything.

And when we assume God does need us...  
To be good or perfect or lawful...

We always end up... with questions...  
That we can't answer.

Why did this bad thing happen to me?  
Doesn't God love me?

Why did my significant person die?  
Did God punish them... or is God punishing me?

How can I ever be good enough...  
To deserve God's love?

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See... what happens is...  
We forget about Grace...  
We forget that God loves us.

We forget HOW MUCH God loves us.  
We forget what lengths...  
God has gone to...  
To reveal that love to us.

And we wrongly assume...  
That God is transactional.

God is not.

This is sneaky.  
This is dangerous.  
This leads to really bad theology...  
And really bad relationships.

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So. Remember way back at the beginning...  
Of this sermon... when I said... **[11 The End]**  
The End.

I wasn't talking about the end of Jesus.  
I was talking about the story...  
about how he died on the cross...  
About how he humbled himself...  
About how much he loved.  
We know the end of the story.

And knowing the end...  
Should somehow impact...  
The way we live our lives....  
In the here and now.  
In the present.

We know that our Lord... our Savior... Jesus...  
HUMBLED HIMSELF...  
To the point of death.

We know that the example he gave us...  
The example he lived...  
Is the same example he called us...  
To emulate...

We are to humble ourselves... to the point of death.  
Which seems like a too big of a demand.  
Too much to ask.

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You know how sometimes people say...  
You know... that Linda Holcombe...  
I just love her to death.

Well... if we stop and think about it...  
Probably not.

I mean... Linda is really neat...  
And talented...  
And sparkly...

But I don't know if I love her to death....  
I don't know...  
If I would die for her.

I don't know if I would have the ability...  
Within myself... to give my life in exchange for hers.  
Maybe I would.  
Maybe I wouldn't.  
You never know...  
Until you're in that situation.

But I don't think...  
That's what it means...  
For us... to humble ourselves...  
To take up our cross...  
To die to ourselves.

I think it means...  
We need to understand...  
Who we are called to be...  
In this world...

That we... like Christ...  
Have been called to love and serve...  
And humbly sacrifice... for each other.

I think it means...  
That we are to live our lives...  
With an appropriate humility...

Not like a big frumpy dumpy Eeyore...  
I'm not good... nobody loves me...

But to remember that God does loves me...  
Right now... right the way I am...

And not only me...  
But God loves the person right next to me...  
And God loves the person across the room...  
Across the country...  
Across the aisle...  
And around the world.

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And to me...  
It means to constantly point...  
To what Jesus has done for me.

You know... giving me hope...  
When their was no hope.

Giving me life...  
In the face of death.

Giving me love...  
When I didn't really deserve love.

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Because there is absolutely no doubt...  
That JESUS... gave his life for Linda.

He loves her so much...  
That he bore her sin...  
Her brokenness...  
Her distance from God.

He took all that on...  
Into himself.  
And bore the punishment...  
She deserved.

He literally... LOVED HER TO DEATH.



But... that's not the end. Is it? No sir.  
He loved her to death.  
He loved her to LIFE again.

See for us... THE END IS NOT THE END. **[12 Not The End]**

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The most basic foundation...  
The one idea that we cannot compromise...  
The one attribute that defines us...  
As a CHRISTIAN church...  
As opposed to any other kind of church...

Is that we believe...  
That Jesus died... yes...  
But he was raised again...  
From the dead.

We know the END OF THE STORY...  
IS NOT THE END OF THE STORY.

We know that death does not win.

We know that we don't just...  
Lie in our graves until the emptiness of oblivion...  
Swallows up our humble little planet.

We know that because he lives...  
We will live too.

And because of his humility and his sacrifice...  
We don't have to justify ourselves...

Because of his love...  
We have been set free from...  
From trying to convince other people...  
That we are worth loving.

Or proving to the world...  
That we are important.

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SO the GOOD NEWS for today is...

We don't have to be important.  
We don't have to have the best seats...  
We don't have to hobnob with the rich and powerful.

We don't have to make transactions...  
To take care of ourselves... to ensure our future.

We don't have to be important to the world...  
Because we are important to God.  
Not because of what we can do for God.  
Not because of how wonderful we are.

We are important to God.  
Because God loves us.  
Period.

There is nothing you can do...  
To make God love you more.

There is nothing you can do...  
To make God love you less.

It's just a fact.  
You are loved.

So now.  
What will you do?  
How will you live?  
Who will you be?  
Now that you are free.

This is the End... but it's not.

Thanks be to God.  
Amen!