

Illusions of Grandeur

Eph 2: 1-10

Toy Story

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Ephesians 2:1-10

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Poor Buzz. He knew himself to be a real space ranger, one who could fly and had special lasers and gadgets to use to defeat the evil Emperor Zurg. He finds himself crash-landed on the alien planet of Andy's Bedroom where he works to fix his spaceship, unaware that he is a toy, and that his damaged spaceship is actually a cardboard box excitedly ripped open by Andy on his birthday. There are plenty of toys on this alien planet who try to teach Buzz who he really is, but he cannot accept their words. He knows himself to be a real space ranger, and does everything to reinforce that idea to Woody and all the other toys.

It is not until a misadventure when Buzz has been taken by Andy's mean neighbor Sid, who cannibalizes various toys and creates new ones in a true Frankenstein style, that Buzz is forced to finally see things as they really are. Now with his hands on Buzz, Sid has new idea. He will launch this toy space ranger on a rocket. As Buzz spends what appears to be his last night, he is already tied to the rocket awaiting Sid's morning launch. As time ticks by, a commercial comes on TV advertising 'Buzz Lightyear' toys. The camera pans rows of the boxed toys, and every single one looks exactly like Buzz. Their boxes are the same exact spaceship that Buzz has and has been trying to fix. This is the ultimate crisis moment in the midst of a different crisis.

Buzz is strapped to a rocket and about to be blown to kingdom come, but his greater pain is emotional. He's devastated. He's overwhelmed. The whole storyline of his life, everything he knew to be true about himself, was wrong. He is not a space ranger. He is simply a storyline for a TV show designed to sell toys. He is one of thousands of 'Buzz Lightyears' that line store aisles. Buzz is heartbroken as all he knows himself to be is destroyed. Suddenly being strapped to a rocket isn't so bad. His whole life is without meaning, without purpose. His very identity is gone.

We see this story unfold, in the book or in the movie, and we are drawn to this fictional character and his woes, his angst, because we have all been there at one time or another. We

have all had an idea, an image, of what we thought we could do or be, and then there is a Sid in our life, a moment as sudden and unexpected as a new TV commercial, and our image of ourselves, our abilities, our strengths, suddenly is ruined. Our illusions become delusions.

Perhaps it was the dream job when you felt you were the perfect candidate, but you were passed over. Perhaps it is the way you thought that you would parent in a particular situation that turned into a painful, emotional disaster. Perhaps it is all the energy and commitment you put into a relationship that turned out to be one-sided so you were left alone. Perhaps it was years spent writing a book that you envisioned seeing in Barnes & Noble or an Amazon, but all you have to show for your effort is a stack of rejection slips. Perhaps you've worked and practiced hard to become a professional athlete, but you blow out your knee in your first season on a minor league team. That tender part of you is right there with Buzz, strapped to the rocket, devastated, overwhelmed, with reality, trying to reconnect pieces of meaning, purpose and identity.

It is Woody who comes to Buzz's emotional rescue in a prophetic way as he finally convinces Buzz that his purpose, his true identity, is far grander than defeating Zurg.

"I can't help anyone... I'm not a Space Ranger. I'm just a toy. A stupid, little insignificant toy," says Buzz.

"Whoah, hey, wait a minute. Being a toy is a lot better than being a Space Ranger," Woody exclaims.

"Yeah right."

"No, it is. Over in that house is a kid who thinks you're the greatest. And it's not because you're a Space Ranger, pal. It's because you're a toy. You are his toy."

Woody redefined Buzz's meaning, restored his purpose, and revealed to him his true identity. No longer does his false identity revolve around catching the evil Emperor Zurg. Instead, it is to be the beloved toy of a little boy. There is nobility in being a toy, and that can be found only when the illusions of grandeur, false illusions of grandeur, are let go of.

"I'm just a toy. A stupid, little insignificant toy," says Buzz. "I'm just..." Labeling ourselves, our work, our self-identity, as "I'm just..." is to belittle ourselves, to set false limits and value, to overlook what and who we really are. Ultimately, it is a form of repentance when we can accept the reality and nobility of who we are. "I'm just not good enough" becomes, "This was not right for me." It is a process to deal with reality on its own terms, to look at our expectations in the shadow of our inadequacies. Until Buzz saw the value in being a beloved toy, he ignored reality to be an imaginary super hero. Until we see the value in being a beloved child of God created with a unique God-given purpose to claim for ourselves, we falsely limit our abilities, gifts and reality to a less-than of, 'I'm just....' We deny who God created us to be. The first step to an authentic life is to see things as they really are, to see ourselves as we really are.

The dream job that you were passed over for-- did something even better come along, or over time did you see that it would not have been a good fit after all? That emotional challenge as a parent—did your child come to you much later on in life and tell you they now could

recognize and appreciate how the situation had been handled? What wonderful relationship came about only because you were able to let go of the unhealthy one? If your book never made it to print, did you still enjoy the creativity of writing and find other ways to small publications? Did your love of a sport take you from the locker room to the coach's box when you could no longer play?

Paul's letter to the Ephesians, and to us, reminds us that we are lost and dead when we cling to the false ways of authentic living. A false identity diminishes who we really are. God's love and immeasurable grace has made us alive with Christ for good works to be our genuine way of life, a life that is a gift from God that is freely given.

Fred Buechner offers this insight, "The grace of God means something like: Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are because the party wouldn't have been complete without you. Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us. It's for you I created the universe. I love you. There's only one catch. Like any other gift, the gift of grace can be yours only if you'll reach out and take it. Maybe being able to reach out and take it is a gift too."

Reach out and take what God has offered uniquely to you, accept the belovedness and nobility of who and whose you are. Amen.