

“THE ART OF THE HUMBLEBRAG”

A SERMON BASED ON THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOK OF GENESIS (45:1-15) AND PRESENTED FOR ORLEAN UMC ON AUGUST 16, 2020----- (THE ELEVENTH AND FINAL MESSAGE IN AN ELEVEN WEEK SERMON SERIES THAT WILL TAKE US THROUGH SOME OF THE MAJOR THEMES AND STORIES IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS)

MOST OF YOU PROBABLY RECOGNIZE HIS NAME AND LEVAR BURTON CERTAINLY DOESN'T NEED TO REMIND YOU THAT HE'S FAMOUS..... HE BURST ONTO THE SCENE IN THE 1970S WITH HIS PORTRAYAL OF A YOUNG KUNTA KINTE IN THE HISTORIC MINISERIES *ROOTS*, PLAYED THE SIGHT-ENHANCED ENGINEER GEORDI LA FORGE IN *STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION*,

AND IS KNOWN TO A COUPLE OF GENERATIONS OF KIDS AS THE HOST OF *READING RAINBOW*.

HOWEVER ---WE LIVE IN A TIME AND A CULTURE THAT SAYS WHEN YOU'RE FAMOUS YOU JUST CAN'T HELP BUT SUBTLY REMIND PEOPLE THAT YOU'RE KIND OF A BIG DEAL, AND SOCIAL MEDIA LIKE TWITTER HAS PROVEN TO BE A GREAT PLACE TO DO THAT..... A FEW YEARS AGO ----WE ARE REMINDED ---- THAT LEVAR TWEETED "IT'S A GOOD NIGHT FOR NATURAL LIGHT IN LA," FEATURING A PHOTO OF A FIRE IN HIS FIREPLACE..... ON THE MANTLE ABOVE, HOWEVER, CONSPICUOUSLY PLACED, WERE HIS TEN EMMY AWARDS.

**THREE DAYS AFTER CHRISTMAS, HE TWEETED
"STOCKINGS STILL HUNG" WITH A PHOTO OF
SAID STOCKINGS HANGING ON HIS AWARDS.**

**WE CAN'T BLAME LEVAR, HOWEVER..... AS
MUHAMMAD ALI ONCE PUT IT-----AND HE WAS
BORROWING FROM BASEBALL PHILOSOPHER
DIZZY DEAN (WHO I JUST LOVED AS A KID) AND
OTHERS:**

"IT AIN'T BRAGGIN' IF YOU CAN DO IT."

**BUT IN THESE DAYS, WHEN YOU CAN LET
EVERYONE KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR
LIFE IN 140 CHARACTERS OR LESS, IT'S EASY TO
BUY INTO THE MYTH OF ONE'S OWN
IMPORTANCE, EVEN IF YOU WANT TO DO IT
SUBTLY.**

**ENTER A NEW TERM IN THE DICTIONARY OF
URBAN SLANG: THE "HUMBLEBRAG." -----**

A HUMBLEBRAG IS FALSE HUMILITY COUCHED IN "WOE IS ME" COMPLAINING OR SELF-DEPRECATING HUMOR THAT'S DESIGNED TO REMIND EVERYONE THAT YOUR LIFE IS STILL MORE AWESOME THAN EVERYONE ELSE'S, AND IT ALLOWS THE SELF-IMPORTANT PERSON TO BOAST ABOUT HIS OR HER ACHIEVEMENTS WITHOUT ANY SENSE OF SHAME OR GUILT. PEOPLE ARE BECOMING SO GOOD AT THIS THAT THERE'S ACTUALLY A TWITTER FEED TO EXPOSE THEIR SHAMELESS BOASTING. HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES FROM SOME FAMOUS AND SOME NOT-SO-FAMOUS PEOPLE:

- "I JUST STEPPED ON GUM. WHO SPITS GUM ON A RED CARPET?" (CAROLYN FELL).

- "THEY JUST ANNOUNCED MY FLIGHT AT LAGUARDIA IS NUMBER 15 FOR TAKEOFF. I MISS AIR FORCE ONE!" (FORMER WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY ARI FLEISCHER).

- "I JUST DID SOMETHING VERY SELFLESS. BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, IT WAS GENUINE & I KNOW IT MEANS A LOT TO THE PERSON IN THE LONG RUN." #SOWORTHIT (ENTREPRENEUR CHERYL YEOH).

- "HOPE AND DESPAIR ARE BORN OF IMAGINATION. I AM FREE OF BOTH" (DEEPAK CHOPRA).

- "RECOGNIZED A GAGILLION TIMES TODAY ... EVEN TWO CASTING DIRECTORS SAID THEY WERE FANS" #THISNEVERHAPPENS (MODEL JANE RANDALL).

- "IT'S AN EVENING WITH THE HOFF! *BRITAIN'S GOT TALENT* FOLLOWED BY MY LIFE STORY ON PIERS MORGAN. HOPEFULLY YOU WON'T BE SICK OF ME!" (ACTOR DAVID HASSELHOFF).

- "THE FACT THAT WIKIPEDIA LISTS ME AS A NOTABLE ALUMNUS OF MY COLLEGE SPEAKS ILL OF THE RELIABILITY OF CROWD SOURCED INFORMATION" (WRITER JOHN MOE).

YOU GET THE IDEA. IF REGULAR BRAGGING IS DESIGNED TO INSPIRE AWE, HUMBLEBRAGGING IS DESIGNED TO INSPIRE AWE AND SYMPATHY.

NOBODY LIKES A COCKY BRAGGART, BUT A HUMBLEBRAGGER GETS BY WITH LETTING PEOPLE ATTEMPT TO FEEL THEIR PAIN.

**WHAT'S MISSED IN THE EXCHANGE, HOWEVER,
IS THE REALITY THAT HUMBLEBRAGGING IS
ANOTHER WAY OF SAYING TO THE PEOPLE IN
YOUR SOCIAL NETWORK, "YOU'RE MY FAN, NOT
MY FRIEND."**

**IT WOULD BE EASY TO THINK OF JOSEPH AS
ONE OF THESE HUMBLEBRAGGERS, ESPECIALLY
WHEN WE READ ABOUT HIS CHILDHOOD
BEGINNING IN GENESIS 37.**

**HE IS DADDY'S FAVORITE AMONG ALL OF HIS
SONS, AND HE'S GIVEN A COAT WITH LONG
SLEEVES -- THE KIND OF COAT RESERVED FOR
ROYALTY AND, IN PRACTICAL TERMS, A COAT
THAT COULDN'T BE WORN WHEN WORKING.
JOSEPH HAD EVERY REASON TO BECOME THE
ULTIMATE SPOILED BRAT, AND IF HE'D HAD A
TWITTER ACCOUNT BACK THEN WHO KNOWS
WHAT PHOTOS HE COULD HAVE BEEN
TWEETING: "NEW COAT. DAD THINKS I'M ROYAL
MATERIAL BUT GOTTA FEED THE SHEEP FIRST!"**

NOT ONLY WAS JOSEPH THE FAVORITE, HE'S ALSO TWEETING OUT HIS DREAMS TO HIS BROTHERS -- DREAMS IN WHICH HIS BROTHERS ARE BOWING DOWN TO HIM AS HIS SERVANTS RATHER THAN HIS SIBLINGS (37:5-11). IT'S NO WONDER THEY UN-FRIENDED JOSEPH BY STRIPPING HIM OF THE ROBE, DUMPING HIM INTO A PIT AND SELLING HIM AS A SLAVE TO SOME MERCHANTS ON THEIR WAY TO EGYPT (37:12-28).

**AS WE READ THE WHOLE JOSEPH STORY,
HOWEVER, WE BEGIN TO SEE THAT JOSEPH
WASN'T ACTUALLY HUMBLEBRAGGING, BUT
FOLLOWING THE LIFE THAT GOD HAD PREPARED
FOR HIM..... HE BECOMES A SLAVE IN EGYPT
AND YET RISES TO A POSITION OF
RESPONSIBILITY IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF AN
EGYPTIAN OFFICIAL. HE'S FALSELY ACCUSED
AND THROWN IN PRISON, BUT EVEN THERE HE
RISES TO THE TOP, EVENTUALLY BECOMING
PHARAOH'S RIGHT HAND MAN..... JOSEPH HAS
EVERY REASON TO BE PROUD OF HIS
ACCOMPLISHMENTS, BUT HE KNOWS THAT HE
CAN'T BRAG BECAUSE *HE* DID IT.**

INSTEAD, JOSEPH'S AWARE THROUGHOUT THE STORY THAT IT'S GOD WHO HAS BEEN MAKING HIM SUCCESSFUL ALL ALONG. WHEN PHARAOH REMARKS ABOUT JOSEPH'S ABILITY TO INTERPRET DREAMS, JOSEPH SAYS, "IT IS NOT I; GOD WILL GIVE PHARAOH A FAVORABLE ANSWER" (GENESIS 41:16).

THIS BRINGS US TO TODAY AND TO GENESIS 45, OUR FINAL TEXT IN OUR GENESIS SERMON SERIES, AND ITS POWERFUL SCENE REVEALING THAT JOSEPH'S CHILDHOOD, GOD-DRIVEN DREAMS ABOUT HIS BROTHERS BOWING DOWN TO HIM HAD BECOME A REALITY.

THIS REVELATION COMES AFTER JOSEPH FIRST RECOGNIZES HIS BROTHERS IN CHAPTER 42. THEY HAD COME TO EGYPT TO BUY GRAIN IN THE MIDST OF A FAMINE IN CANAAN. NOW THE YOUNGER BROTHER, WHO HAD BEEN THROWN IN A PIT AND SOLD INTO SLAVERY, HOLDS THE LIVES OF HIS BROTHERS IN HIS HANDS. IT'S THE PERFECT SCENARIO FOR REVENGE AND THE CLASSIC OPPORTUNITY FOR A HUMBLEBRAGGER TO SAY, "SEE! I TOLD YOU SO!" -----INSTEAD.....JOSEPH TESTS HIS BROTHERS BEFORE TELLING THEM THAT THIS POWERFUL EGYPTIAN OFFICIAL IS ACTUALLY THEIR LONG LOST LITTLE BROTHER.

BUT NOW, JOSEPH "COULD NO LONGER CONTROL HIMSELF" AND HAD TO TELL HIS BROTHERS THE TRUTH. "I AM JOSEPH. IS MY FATHER STILL ALIVE?" (VV. 1-3). THE BROTHERS WERE DUMBSTRUCK, AND IN A CLASSIC BIT OF BIBLICAL UNDERSTATEMENT THE TEXT SAYS THAT THEY WERE "DISMAYED" BY HIS PRESENCE (V. 3).

NOW HERE WE'D EXPECT THAT JOSEPH WOULD SPEND SOME TIME BRAGGING ABOUT HOW HE HAD MADE IT FROM THE PIT TO THE PALACE ON HIS OWN STEAM.

BUT JOSEPH DOESN'T SEE HIS BROTHERS AS GROVELING FANS, NOR DOES HE BARRAGE THEM WITH A SERIES OF SELF-SERVING HUMBLEBRAGS. INSTEAD, HE SAYS TO THEM, "COME CLOSER TO ME ... I AM YOUR BROTHER, JOSEPH, WHOM YOU SOLD INTO EGYPT..... AND NOW DO NOT BE DISTRESSED OR ANGRY WITH YOURSELVES, BECAUSE YOU SOLD ME HERE; FOR GOD SENT ME BEFORE YOU TO PRESERVE LIFE

JOSEPH KNOWS THAT HE HAS NOTHING TO BRAG ABOUT. WHATEVER SUCCESS JOSEPH HAS HAD SINCE THAT DAY IN THE FIELD IS THE RESULT OF GOD'S WORK AND NOT HIS OWN.

JOSEPH SEES HIS WHOLE LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF GOD'S PURPOSES, AND, IF HE'S GOING TO BRAG ABOUT ANYTHING, IT'S GOING TO BE BRAGGING ABOUT GOD. "GOD SENT ME BEFORE YOU TO PRESERVE A REMNANT ON EARTH, AND TO KEEP ALIVE FOR YOU MANY SURVIVORS," SAYS JOSEPH. "SO IT WAS NOT YOU WHO SENT ME HERE, BUT GOD; HE HAS MADE ME A FATHER TO PHARAOH, AND LORD OF ALL HIS HOUSE AND RULER OVER ALL THE LAND OF EGYPT" (VV. 7-8).

IN OTHER WORDS, IT AIN'T BRAGGIN' IF GOD DID

IT!

IF WE MOVE EVER FORWARD IN THE BOOK OF GENESIS WE FIND THAT JOSEPH REITERATES THIS AGAIN IN GENESIS 50:20, WHEN HE SAYS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT LINES IN ALL THE SCRIPTURES:

"EVEN THOUGH YOU INTENDED TO HARM ME, GOD INTENDED IT FOR GOOD, IN ORDER TO PRESERVE A NUMEROUS PEOPLE, AS HE IS DOING TODAY."

JOSEPH, THE ONE WHO INTERPRETED VISIONS, HAS A VISION OF A GOD WHO WILL MAKE THINGS RIGHT.

**GENESIS BEGAN WITH GOD CALLING HIS
CREATION "GOOD," AND JOSEPH SEES THAT, NO
MATTER WHAT HUMANS WILL DO IN THEIR
SINFUL, SELF-SERVING NATURE, IT IS GOD WHO
WILL MAKE IT GOOD AGAIN.....**

**IN THE END, HUMANS HAVE NOTHING TO BOAST
ABOUT, UNLESS WE'RE BOASTING ABOUT OUR
GOD. IT IS GOD WHO RECONCILES A BROKEN
WORLD AND CAN RECONCILE EVEN A BROKEN
FAMILY LIKE JOSEPH'S.**

ONLY GOD'S GRACE MAKES THAT POSSIBLE.

**AS THE APOSTLE PAUL WRITES TO THE CHURCH
IN ROME: (ROMANS 5:11)**

**WE CAN "BOAST IN GOD THROUGH OUR LORD
JESUS CHRIST, FROM WHOM WE HAVE NOW
RECEIVED RECONCILIATION."**

**WE MAY NEVER BE CELEBRITIES, BUT THAT
DOESN'T PREVENT US FROM STRIVING AFTER
FAME, TREATING OTHERS LIKE FANS INSTEAD
OF FRIENDS AND FALSELY BELIEVING THAT OUR
HUMILITY IS PART OF OUR GREATNESS.**

JOSEPH REMINDS US THAT EVERYTHING WE
HAVE AND EVERYTHING WE ARE IS ONLY
POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF THE GOODNESS OF
GOD. GOD ISN'T IMPRESSED WITH OUR AWARDS,
OR WHAT RED CARPET WE'VE WALKED ON OR
WHETHER WE EVER GET TO RIDE ON AIR FORCE
ONE. GOD ONLY WANTS US TO LIVE WITH HIS
PURPOSES IN MIND. WE SHOULDN'T BE LOOKING
FOR FANS FOR OURSELVES BECAUSE WE ARE
CALLED TO BE FANS OF GOD.

SO, NEXT TIME YOU'RE TEMPTED TO TWEET OUT
A HUMBLEBRAG OR TELL YOUR NEIGHBOR HOW
GREAT IT IS TO BE YOU, SKIP THE BRAG AND
REMEMBER THE HUMBLE!

IT AIN'T BRAGGIN', BECAUSE GOD DID IT!

PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND

FOR ME.....AMEN!