

One Wish Granted

Every so often I will pull up on Netflix an old episode of Twilight Zone. It was and still is so different than what is mostly on our television. Short plays where what were hoped for, dreamed of is overturned into horror or tragedy. Many of them morality plays, but with macabre twists. Who hasn't looked out on the wing of the plane to see of a gremlin isn't pulling apart the engine?

“There is a fifth dimension, beyond that which is known to man. It is a dimension as vast as space and timeless as infinity. It is the middle ground between light and shadow, between science and superstition, and it lies between the pit of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge this is the dimension of imagination. It is an area which we call the Twilight Zone!”

There are so many great episodes that immediately come to mind. The eternal youth of kick the can, the unsuccessful surgery that when revealed does not make a beautiful woman look like a person with a pig faced snout, or that terrifying doll that comes to life. Many of these episodes dealt with issues untouched by most of television at that time. Racism, death, loneliness, nuclear holocaust, selfishness, cultural norms of beauty,

Everyone who has watched this show has their favorite. Online there are endless arguments as to what are the best episodes.

A Nice Place to Visit, The Dummy, Two, Five Characters in Search of an Exit, or To Serve Man are episodes that have entered into this eternal debate and some of the best Television art of all time. I am no different and have one that I come back to all the time.

In “Time Enough at Last” Henry Bemis is played by Burgess Meredith brilliantly. He is a mousey bank teller with a crumpled suit, a

moustache, a stern boss, an overbearing wife, and thick pop bottle glasses.

Henry tried to sneak in reading Charles Dickens at work, but instead shortchanges his customers. He is lectured by the Bank President about being a poor employee because he is a “Reader!”

His wife is perpetually angry with Henry for trying to sneak reads of the newspapers or books of poetry because he is diminishing the “art of conversation!” She even defaces an entire book of poetry and rips it to shreds in front of his face.

Henry has a propensity during his lunch break to sneak into the bank vault during lunch to read the paper and books. Just as he puts down the book he is reading, Henry turns the headline of a newspaper toward him that reads “H-Bomb Capable of Total Destruction” and the scene is cut to a book on the floor next to his pocket watch. In the next second the pages flip and the glass face to the watch shatter. The room shakes and Henry is knocked out.

When Henry awakens, he is in a much different world. The world has been blown up by one of these cataclysmic bombs. His boss is dead, and Henry wanders across a post-apocalyptic landscape.

Henry has plenty of food, but he desperately searches for someone else. Every day is filled with the sameness in the loneliness he is now faced with day in and day out. As he desperately stumbles across the rubble he comes across a handgun and decides that he will end it all.

Just as he raises the gun to his temple Henry spots the Public Library. Henry realizes that he is now able to read anything he wants, whenever he wants. He stacks books up according to the month he will read them. Sitting down in front of a large clock Henry laughing states he has “time enough at last” to read.

Distracted he sees a book that is at his feet which catches his interest. Leaning forward to pick it up his thick glasses slip off his face and shatter on ground in front of him.

His final lines are, "It is not fair, it is not fair" he says sobbing.

Rod Sterling ends with a postscript saying "The best laid plans of mice and men...and Henry Bemis. The small man who wanted nothing but time. Henry Bemis now just a part of a smashed landscape, just a piece of rubble, just a fragment, of what man has deeded to himself. Mr. Henry Bemis, in the Twilight Zone."

What Henry Bemis desires, mirrors the desires of security through the détente of a nuclear weapon. They both must also deal with fate and tragedy. The unintended consequences of what we think will be good decisions, sometimes turn out to be far worse than the present reality.

It is an old storytelling trick. Be careful what you wish for, you might get it. Whether it is a genie in a bottle granting three wishes or Ross dating Rachel in Friends the story always ends in ways that the protagonist never intended.

That is the surprising overturning of this story devise in today's text from the chronicles of the Kings. Solomon, the wise one, is asked by the creator of the universe what is wish is and it will be granted.

Solomon responds, "Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

God is pleased that he has thought, not of himself, but of the nation. Solomon has chosen right. God is delighted that Solomon did not ask

for riches, or the delivery of his enemies. Not a great plot twist, but a great truth. God wants us to serve others.

Our spiritual landscape is littered enough with daily choices of the consequences of spiritual selfishness instead of selflessness. I know because I have trafficked in it myself. We have all been selfish instead of selfless from time to time. Sin is real.

“Wearing a mask infringes on my rights!” “I hope they catch the virus for not wearing a mask!” “I hope they are put in jail for what they have done to this country.” “Come down to my bunker filled with toilet paper!” “Don’t tread on me!” “We don’t want someone to make more money on unemployment than when they work.” “I say we sacrifice the elderly for our economy.” “Southerners are so stupid” “New Jersey people are weird.” “Nebraska people are dumb hicks.” “Police are fascists.” “Black Lives Matter is a bunch of communist Anarchists!”
Enough!

Wisdom is not the duality of a hard set of rules, it is the understanding of how to live in a world of changing circumstances and a variety of people. During this Coronavirus we have seen the worst and best of what humans can be. The worst is our most selfish, back biting, greedy, and back-stabbing selves. The best is the choice to be selfless and think of others in love of others.

I don’t think I have to tell you which choice will delight your creator more. This virus, our economy, and perhaps our society will definitely have the convulsions of frightening realities. We can choose to gather in our bunkers, with our hundreds of rolls of toilet paper or we can choose the path of wisdom. The path that considers our neighbor and shows that we know what love is, because God first loved us.