

November 26, 2023

## LIVING FOR YOUR RESUME OR YOUR EULOGY?

Matthew 25: 31-40

“Should you live for your resume or your eulogy?” That is the title of a talk given by David Brooks, author and political and cultural commentator who writes for The New York Times. David Brooks was born in Toronto but lives in the United States. In his talk, he suggests that within each of us, there are two selves: the self which craves success, recognition and advancement; the self that wants people to know the skills it possesses and what it is capable of; the self that is ambitious and calculating and is focused on getting ahead. That is the self that is more focused on its resume.

Then there is the more humble self that seeks connection and community, that wants not only to do good but to be good. To live in a way that honours God and others. Those are the values and virtues that make for a good eulogy.

The question is: What is the primary motivation for how you live? Your resume values or your eulogy values?

David Brooks is of the view that even though most of us would say that the eulogy virtues are more important, the truth is that it is the resume virtues that we think about and pursue the most.

As a minister, I have done more funerals than I can remember or care to remember. At every funeral, I pay keen attention to the eulogy and the tributes that are given in honour of the deceased, and there is one thing that always stands out: that is the emphasis that is placed on values and virtues such as love, kindness, generosity, faithfulness and gentleness that the deceased demonstrated and lived by. And it's not by accident that it is so.

It is so because just as we go through the belongings of our departed loved ones and sort out the things that we want to keep - things that have more than monetary value, things that we cherish because they remind us of our loved ones and of times shared together, the things that make us feel that we are still connected; in the same way, we look back at our relationships with our loved ones, and sort out those memories and moments that we value and cherish.

Those memories and moments of love, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness; those memories and moments of acceptance and support. We hold on to those memories because those are the things about our loved ones that we value the most. Those are the things that will continue to inspire and comfort us, to challenge and shape our own lives. Those are the things that make us remember our loved ones with gratitude. Those are the memories that keep us connected, that form a bond that neither time nor death can break.

It is those memories and moments that our eulogy seeks to capture and express, and it is our eulogy rather than our resume that survives death. It is our eulogy rather than our resume that has

lasting value. The value of our resume ends with death, and for many of us, it diminishes significantly long before death. With age and change, we discover that our resume can no longer take us to places it once was able to, nor can it open the doors it once did.

That is not to say that building our resume is not important; what we have accomplished matters and should be celebrated. What we can contribute to life is important and should be pursued. Our qualifications and abilities are gifts that should be utilized fully for the good. But the person that we are behind all of our accomplishments and abilities is really what expresses our humanity. Our love and kindness, our generosity and gentleness, our compassion and care are the qualities that define us in life and in death. And we have to ask ourselves whether we are seeking to build those values with the same focus and determination that we showed toward our building our resume.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus sets out the sort of things that will define us eternally, and it could not have been clearer. He says:

*“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.*

*Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.”*

*Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?”*

*And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”*

It is clear, that what ultimately matters is our eulogy virtues, not our resume virtues. It is our eulogy virtues that move us to lift up our fellow human beings, especially the least and the lowest, the weak and the vulnerable, the sick and the needy, the lonely and the stranger. It is our eulogy virtues that make our humanity shine like a light that is set upon a hill. It is our eulogy virtues that meaningfully connect us with each other and with Christ. In the eyes of God, it is our eulogy virtues that matter most.

This month, we donated food to the Food Bank at the Exchange, and we will make another donation next month and, I hope every month thereafter. When we donate food, when we engage in others acts of kindness and care, we do so to give hope to those who desperately need it, not to add to our list of accomplishments.

What is the primary motivation for how you live? Are you defined by your accomplishments and abilities – the kind of things that would be highlighted in a resume, or are you defined by such qualities as love, kindness, compassion, generosity, hopefulness, and selflessness – the qualities that would be lifted up in a eulogy? Those qualities that reflect Christ in you? Those qualities that will survive death?

When we come to the end of our journey in this life, what do we most want to be remembered for by those whom we love the most? What is it that will bring comfort and inspire hope in those who knew and loved us? What is it about us that will live on and be remembered with joy and gratitude long after we are gone? What about our lives will cause Christ to say: *“Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”*?

What is there about our lives that will make it into our eulogy?

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