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THE SCRIPTURE
Acts 16:9-15

During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

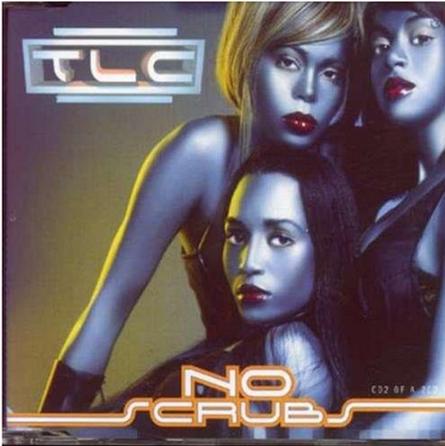
THE MESSAGE
"No Scrubs"
Mark Briley

Scrubs. Do you know this word? Most of us do, I would guess. The word probably conjures up a connection of some kind. Some think of the medical attire introduced in the 1940s when sterile surgical rooms were deemed necessary. They were the comfy-looking uniforms of t-shirts and drawstring pants worn when a staff scrubbed up clean before a surgery. *Scrubs.* I've still got my pair of scrubs that I wore home from the hospital when Morgan was born.

Maybe you loved the sitcom, *Scrubs*, which aired in the early 2000s. It was a medical show, and its title played on what the characters wore but also played on the low-level meaning of the word as the main characters were interns – or lowest employees on the totem pole.



Some of you have been singing '90s R&B group,



TLC's, hit song, "*No Scrubs*" since I first said the word. They played on the same meaning of scrub being someone who was considered low level. They told us, specifically, that a scrub, also known as a busta, was someone always talking about what he wanted but never doing anything about it. It became a popular degrading insult that a person would holler at a person or a group they felt was beneath them: "*Bunch a scrubs*," they'd yell.

But long before T-Boz, Left Eye, and Chilli brought this to the forefront of pop culture, cattle were paraded before a "*Court of Bovine Justice*" to determine whether a bull should be deemed a pure breed or a scrub. Is there *anyone* in the house that first thought of this practice when I first said the word, "*Scrubs*"? There's always one. I see you and respect you.

I may have heard my grandfather talk about Scrub Bulls once when we were driving around the farm, checking cattle, in his beat-up pickup truck he called, "*Old Blood and Guts*." But I can't really remember for sure. So, 100-years ago, a Bovine Judge would hold court, and the town would come out to watch. It was a whole spectacle – prosecuting and defense attorneys; witnesses; the whole thing. It was endorsed by the United States Department of Agriculture, and the hearings became quite popular across the country. Pure breeds were lifted up as the best breeding bulls, and Scrub Bulls were discarded as worthless and certainly not to reproduce.

As strange as this practice was, it was reflective of other horrific practices in our country. During that same timeframe, "*Historians estimate that more than 60,000 Americans were sterilized in the decades leading up to the Second World War, with many more persecuted under racist immigration laws and marriage restrictions.*" Thirty-twostates had laws that made this sterilization legal for any person deemed a

scrub, unworthy of reproducing.¹ Society was interested in determining who was pure and who was not... who was worthy and who was just a scrub.

The early church faced these same dilemmas as the movement grew and found its way into Gentile (*read Scrub*) territory. What transpired was enlightening. Can it enlighten us still?

Under is our “UN” word in part two of our UN-Series – a series of eight weeks of **unique** worship gatherings that each have their own special focus of the day **unrelated** to the rest – the anti-series if you will -- and yet also with a highlighted “UN” word that may be worth **uncovering** a bit further. Paul, and the early church leaders who were writing this story as they went, were **under** a lot of stress and finding a lot of closed doors along the way. People weren’t all that interested in buying what these door-to-door salesmen were selling. We’re a skeptical society, too. We scroll quickly through the ads and fast forward through the commercials... unless it’s Liberty Biberty. Can’t quit saying that. But Peter, Paul and Mary are out there trying to spread the Gospel and ... specifically at the point in our text for today, Paul is hitting dead end after dead end. He wanted to preach in one direction and the text says, “*The Holy Spirit shut it down.*” Another attempt was met with the phrase, “*Spirit of Jesus did not allow it.*”

Sometimes we talk about this in our own lives as the time, “*God closed the door on that...;*” on that “*call, opportunity, deal, move, relationship, etc.*” Maybe the timing’s not right. Maybe our spirit is not in the right place to handle it. Sometimes, it may be our own quietly selfish wish to go the easy route. I don’t want to be challenged. I want it to be easy work.

Paul’s looking for his people and he’s getting shut down. And when we hit these walls in our own lives, we can make excuses or make a difference, but we can’t make both. Paul stumbles into a vision that opens his eyes, his mind, and his heart. It’s a dream of someone from Macedonia – a gentile, a scrub, saying to him, “*Hey – you keep hitting dead ends? Come over here to Macedonia and help us.*”

Now not only was a Macedonian going to raise some red flags to the comfort of the movement, but it was physically a haul to get over there. It wasn’t an Uber across town. It wasn’t borrowing Grandpa’s Chrysler to take the extended trip because your wheels are unreliable. It wasn’t even a plane hop across the country. It was shippin’ up and shippin’ out and maneuvering your way into new territory among people you’ve always been told are scrubs – not like you; not your race; and not worth including in your movement.

¹ The Court of Bovine Justice piece was gleaned from Bob Kaylor’s effort in “*Scrub Bulls of Macedonia*” as shared in homileticonline.com and grounded in today’s Scripture text.

We still brainwash folks this way. How else does a white, 18-year-old teenager, plot and plan and find the means to drive four hours to Tops Friendly Grocery in East Buffalo on a hunt to kill Black people? He'd been planning this for months, researching highly-populated areas of our Black brothers and sisters. ZIP code 14208 had a higher Black population than other areas he considered, and he scoped out this grocery store referring to Google's "*popular times*" graph for the Tops Friendly Market, determining when it would be its busiest, shooting 13 and killing ten ranging in ages from 20 to 86 – at the **GROCERY** store.

We all know this is terrible. There's no justification. But there are many, who will still say this is an isolated incident – a troubled and bad egg doing a single terrible thing. But how do these ideologies get perpetuated? These ideas trickle down because they are prevalent. Racism isn't the shark in the water; it's the water.

Jillian Hanesworth, the 29-year-old Poet Laureate of Buffalo, invites us to *lean into* that pain. She was raised on the east side and offices just a mile from the Top's Market. She was asked to speak into the moment and racked her brain trying to figure out what to say. #BuffaloStrong popped up quickly in the vernacular of the city, and Hanesworth understands this is how people try to rally together, but she's taken issue with the social media hashtag #BuffaloStrong because it could trick people into thinking that survival is the goal, when people really deserve to exist and thrive without the fear of being hunted down in a grocery store.



She said, "We don't need right now to be told that we're strong. We need to be told that we're right." She goes on to say, "Black people in this country have lived through so much. So many people hate us just because we exist, and we experience that at different levels on a daily basis. So, we're strong. We know that," she said. "My main objective right now is to validate emotions. This is real. We can't let society gaslight us into thinking that there's no racism."

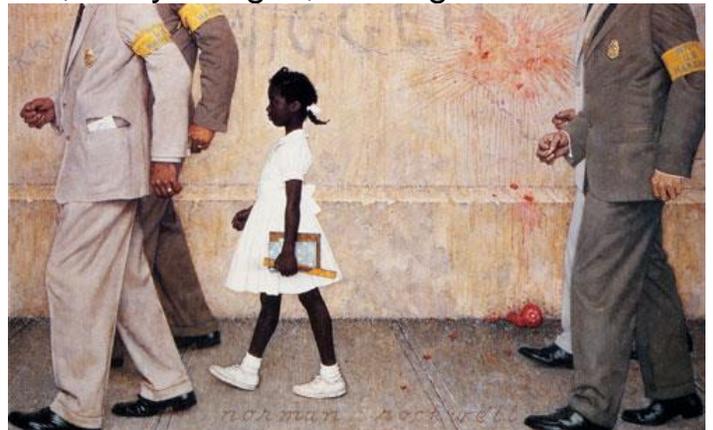
She says what her city needs right now is honest conversations. When she spoke at a vigil this week, she asked mourners who had used their GPS devices to get to the site of the shooting to raise their hands. Most of the people who did were white, which she says is the nature of segregation in Buffalo. They don't even know each other. She's

asking her white friends who have reached out to share support to simply have honest conversations with themselves and their families about racism. Instead of #BuffaloStrong, Hanesworth is proposing the hashtag #BuffaloHonest to promote conversations about white supremacy, racism, and violence.² *We can make excuses or make a difference, but we can't make both.*



Norman Rockwell is best remembered for his iconic 1943 painting “*Freedom from Want*” depicting a smiling white family gathered around a Thanksgiving turkey. What is less known is that he decisively turned a corner later in his career, rejecting the airbrushed image of a nation implicitly populated with only happy, white, middle-class families. He left his employer of nearly 50 years, *The Saturday Evening Post*, in large part because the magazine wouldn’t let him broaden the picture of America and only allowed him to portray Black people in subservient positions. These instructions clashed with his conscience, so he left, joined *Look* magazine, and proceeded to paint some of the hardest-hitting, most widely seen visual attacks on racism in the nation’s history.

His first illustration for *Look*, published in 1964, was titled, “*The Problem We All Live With.*” You’ve seen this, I’m sure. It showed the torsos of four suited U.S. marshals escorting a 6-year-old Black girl in a white dress, Ruby Bridges, to integrate an all-white school in New Orleans, with [a racial slur] scrawled above her. Although Rockwell and *Look* received a torrent of angry letters, the magazine stood by him. When one approving reader wrote, “*You have just said in one painting what people cannot say in a lifetime,*” Rockwell wrote back: “*I just had my 70th birthday, and I am trying to be a bit more adult in my work.*”³ Ruby Bridges, now 67 -years-old, reminds us that, “*Racism is a grown-up disease.*” Babies don’t enter the world racist – they learn how to hate. And Bridges says, “*So they can learn how to love, too.*”⁴



² <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/17/1099541558/buffalo-poet-laureate-calls-for-change>

³ —Andrew L. Yarrow, “Why Norman Rockwell left Thanksgiving Americana behind,” *The Washington Post*, November 24, 2021. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/11/24/why-norman-rockwell-left-thanksgiving-americana-behind/>.

I'm grateful for the effort Broadway is invested in to teach love – especially in this vital area. Don Day leads *Race Onward* – an ecumenical group that is battling racism daily. Cami Jackman, one of Broadway's youth, is heading up CoMo's *Youth for Peace* initiative to address gun violence following a number of shootings of her classmates at Battle High School and within the community.

In just a few weeks, on Juneteenth, which is a Sunday and also Father's Day this year, we will host one worship service outdoors at 10:30 a.m. The message that day is entitled, "*Black Dad. White Dad,*" and will be a sacred conversation between DeMarko Coleman and me. We're engaged and are called to be. *We can make excuses, or we can make a difference, but we can't make both.*

And... this was the long way of getting into Paul's mindset as he's being rejected and redirected and now faced with heading to Macedonia. Like Norman Rockwell, Paul's been around the block a bit now and is wondering if this is the next level of his faith walk – to broaden his vision of God's love and welcome the ones many of his peers were readily rejecting. It was his *#BuffaloHonest* moment.

"*Should I go to Macedonia?*" It's a Roman colony run by a bunch of Gentiles, who were seen to have little respect for the laws and traditions of Israel. The businesspeople there were cutthroat, and the secular spirit wasn't a fan of the religious folks. It was not only different, but it was also hostile – followers of Jesus were easily arrested, flogged, and imprisoned. Paul looks at Tim and Silas who were likely uncertain and he says to them, "*There are no scrubs. Let's go.*"

It is these moments of stretch that often open you to the truest calling of your life. A Broadway friend reminded me this week that "*opportunities have expiration dates.*" We tend to put off these moments in exchange for the easier choice, the comfortable choice, even if it's not the call-of-God choice. Have you ever taken that stretch-choice? Did it grow you in some transformative way?

This move for Paul introduced him to Lydia – who was open to the stretch herself. She was responsive to the message of Jesus and becomes the very first-recorded European convert to the faith. And? She was received with zero concern about her genetic purity. There are no scrubs. And what happens? Paul trusts her. She says, "*If you trust my heart to partner with you, come to my place – let's set up home base and work at these grown-up realities together.*" They do.

Every person you meet is a once-in-history, never-to-be repeated reflection of the image of God. You are that valuable. Look at the person next to you and say, "*You are*

that valuable.” Now, turn to your other neighbor; your second choice and tell them, “*You are that valuable.*”

This changed the ministry and direction of the church. It started with setting hate and fear aside. I wonder if we can do that, too.

James Baldwin, not one of the acting Baldwin brothers mind you, but Harlem-born, beautiful writer and activist, James Baldwin, poignantly said, “*I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with pain.*”

This is part of the healing, however. Friends – what hate are you holding in your heart? Maybe you’re afraid of letting it go because of the pain of grief that you fear will fill its place. This is part of growing up our faith.

So, whether it’s a group of people you’ve always rejected or it’s an individual that makes your write-off list, open yourself to some healing that will, in turn, start to heal this grief-stricken world we live in. Maybe you feel you’ve held that hate or ill-will, fear or disgust for too long to give it a second look. Why now?

Norman Rockwell finally shifted at 70-years-old. We’ve had breakthroughs at our “*Feet Under the Same Table*” monthly dinner chats about race and difference. They may seem small, but every aha moment takes the healing a little further down the road.

C. S. Lewis gifted us with this line: “*You can’t go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.*” Paul started out a Christian hater and killer. He ended up not only becoming a follower of Jesus but claiming, “*If I’m no scrub; if I’m welcomed in; then let’s fling these gates wide open.*” Maybe, my friends, that is our calling, too...

SONG OF FOCUS

“Revelation 7:9-17”

WORDS AND MUSIC BY ED VARNUM

1. John imprisoned on the isle called Patmos
in a vision of what was to be,
saw who would be welcome
to God's throne room in heaven
to praise Creator through eternity.
2. A multitude so great no one could number
singing praises with palm branches
in their hands.

They're from ev' ry tribe and nation
to praise the God of all creation,
welcomed in the grace of Christ the Lamb.

Refrain:

**So, on this earth let no one be excluded
by color or by language or by kin.**

**With God, we welcome all
(that's the essence of God's call)
from ev'ry country, culture, hue of skin.**

3. From the time we heard God's call,
the church has faced
temptation to just welcome folks
who look just like we do.
But like Paul who had a vision
of a man from Macedonia,
there are many crying help us, too!

Refrain

BROAD HEARTS BROAD MINDS BROAD REACH