

## *Being Special*

I was told I was special as a child, and I believed it. I was told I could do anything I wanted to do in this life, I believed that too. I was told that I was wonderful and gifted and beautiful, I believed it all. I believed these things so much that I shaped my life around them. The world, I thought, was for my pleasure. This life was for my glory. The path was mine, and whoever else occupied it must make way for this special person. People were obstacles to be overcome, objects to be moved according to my own purposes. Like rungs on a ladder, they were placed there to assist my upward climb to greatness. These faceless beings were nothing more than threats to my autonomy. Fellow travelers on a path that was promised to me alone. So, I pushed my way through the crowds. I clawed my way through the pack with little attention to the damage I caused or to the pain I inflicted. I would be remembered, they unfortunately would not. Everyone might get a trophy, but there was only one winner, and it was going to be me; for I am special. I come from special people. I am destined for special things.

I was special then, but I was unhappy. I was infatuated with myself, but I was miserable. Like Narcissus of old, I had fallen in love with myself, and I spent the majority of my time staring at my own reflection. I was trapped in a web of self-absorption and vanity, but I knew no other way. My self-love made me cruel and calloused. Unfulfilled and empty. The world offered me no assistance for it continued to confirm my uniqueness. It rewarded my inward focus. I was brought to church as a child, but it had little effect. The dialogue was more of the same. The church and the world said the same thing: be yourself, love yourself, pursue yourself, have it your way. The same redundant message about how even God valued me for just being me. And if God praised me then that must mean I am greater than God. If God served me then what did that make Him?

“Midway along the journey of our life I woke to find myself in a dark wood, for I had wandered off from the straight path” (Dante’s *Inferno*) In darkness, I couldn’t see the forest for the trees. In darkness, I had missed the meaning of all of it. Perhaps, just perhaps, I am not special. Perhaps, just perhaps, I am ordinary and simple. Like a clap of thunder, like a strike of lightning, the message of God knocked me to my knees. I heard God’s voice again, perhaps for the first time, “Who are you, O’ man, who darkens counsel with words without wisdom. Who are you, O’ man, for this is not why I created you? Stand up and be judged. The time for honoring yourself is at an end. Be still and know that I am God. For My greatest gift to the world, you have misunderstood and

abused for your own sinful gain. You have loved only yourself and have defiled the very purpose of My love. Hear again, My Word. Receive once more My ancient new commandment: Love one another as I have loved you". I had spent my life in pursuit of love, but it had been the wrong kind of love. God turned me upside down and set me on my feet again. Where once I saw shadows, now I began to see concrete forms. Where once I saw universals, now I began to see particulars. Where once I saw only red, new colors of the spectrum became visible to me. Faces appeared all around me. I was not alone. These new faces were not my rivals or my enemies, but my neighbors. These were the faces of my brothers and sisters, the faces of God, and their pain and suffering were mine; their destiny was intertwined with my own.

In them, God showed me what was hidden and yet had been there all along. I am not special. Nor do I want to be. This is what God revealed to me, and I wish upon all that is holy, I would have heeded His message sooner in my life. Years of my life have been wasted on trying to be "something". How very freeing it is just to be. God makes us who we are, and unless God makes us something then we are nothing at all. And I will let you in on a little secret, you are not special, either. Nor should you want to be. For the very definition of special means to be unique, set apart, alone. Special implies one rising above the others. But such a notion fragments God's good creation. Such a pursuit splits and cuts up and divides God's oneness. Such a thought is sinful for it is in sinning we become many, cut off from God and divided into parts and fallen away from the unity. This is not the way of God. God is three persons and yet He is one God: co-equal in majesty and splendor. His creation is meant to reflect this plurality in unity and unity in plurality. For to notice another, to love another, to honor another, doesn't make you weak or a lesser version of yourself. Quite the opposite. It is to realize who you are in Christ. In love, we reflect God's communal oneness. For the true and real things of God are always one. The good is one, but the shameful things are many. Truth is one, but lies are many. True righteousness is one, but many are the ways of counterfeiting it. Wisdom is one, but many are the wisdoms of this age, which are doomed to pass away. And the Word of God is one, but many are the words opposed to it. Amen.