

Welp, another era's coming to an end. Some of us made our voices heard. Some of us hoped for miraculous intervention from Congress or the Supreme Court. Even Biden says his hands are tied. It's just not right. I'm talking, of course, about the end of TikTok. Months ago, the House voted to get rid of the app by an overwhelming tally of 360 in favor to 58 opposed. The Senate followed suit 79-18, and the Supreme Court upheld that with a unanimous decision. The Congress you know, the Supreme Court you know actually agreed on something. And the reason they gave was the old standard, "national security." The problem is, they gave no evidence. The dual intangible boogiemens of Technology and China was enough. Now, I will grant that there is a possibility of a true national security risk associated with TikTok. Perhaps they're privy to classified information the rest of us aren't. Could be, but there's been no indication of that. They've just pointed to the monster under the bed as justification enough, and unless something significant shifts soon, TikTok will be no more.

Why should you care? We all know social media is bad, and we know it can be used to influence the American public. But Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter aren't getting the axe even though there's a stockpile of publicly-available evidence showing how all of those platforms do present national security risks. Remember Cambridge Analytica? I will say, if you've never used TikTok, you may not understand why it's such a big deal that it's getting banned. Sure, there's stupid jokes and funny pets and a couple of corners where users share way too much. But there's 170 million Americans on there, at least 7 million of 'em are small business owners that produced \$15 billion in revenue last year, and in 2023, the use of TikTok allowed them to add 224,000 jobs to the American economy. But the problem's deeper than just people's livelihoods. TikTok has been an incredible source of information. It's one of the few places where regular people around the world can exchange ideas very quickly. Israelis and Palestinians talk to each other. Users in Hamilton see what war in Ukraine actually looks like. Journalists shine light into dark places without the restrictions of corporate media. Historians, scientists, therapists, Biblical scholars, experts from any field you can imagine reach enormous new audiences, and regular people learn. Like all social media the opposite can be true, but that doesn't negate the incredible access to information TikTok's provided. The app's even been used to organize for social change, to uncover the improprieties of politicians (like Matt Gaetz), and to pressure leaders to make change. The ACLU calls the ban an unconstitutional abuse of the First Amendment, and many fear that the ban is less about protecting national security from a foreign entity and more about protecting the American government from an informed and organized populace.

Now, I'm not a conspiracy-minded person, but I will say it's mighty strange that at the same time we see a rise of authoritarian leadership and the intentional dismantling of the education system, an app widely used for the spread of information and organization of the people gets banned. Also, confusingly, overnight a message was added when you try to open the app. It says, "You can't use TikTok for now" and then thanks the incoming president -- who started this witch hunt -- thanks him for working to reinstate TikTok. It's now shaping up to be an easy win, and if it does survive it will be forever changed. Still, I am disappointed in the loss of TikTok, but I'm not talking about this 'cause I'm sad. I'm talking about this because of the First Amendment, the same place we're guaranteed our right to practice our faith as we choose. It's what allows me to get up here and say what I say. It's what allows you to sit in those pews and disagree. It's what allows us to fly those flags out front, to believe what we believe, to share an alternative Christianity that actually promotes love and justice. We still have the freedom to say whatever we like about the place our faith holds in this community, and we still have the right to practice that as we see fit. But any manipulation or erosion of that amendment puts the rest of it at

risk, and that's bad news for folks like us. Throughout history, we've seen just how much trouble that really holds.

I'm gonna shift a little bit here, so come with me. In the first book of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, Frodo and Gandalf discuss an emerging terror and the role that seemingly inconsequential Hobbit will have to play. Frodo says "I wish it need not have happened in my time." Gandalf replies, "So do I, and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us." We don't choose when evil rises or who it endangers. What we do choose is how we respond, inconsequential as we may think our little ol' selves in little ol' Hamilton are. We've all got gifts manifested for the common good, and sometimes we've gotta risk using 'em, even if we don't want to or we're not ready. Jesus wasn't ready either, but the time came anyway. For the people there in Cana, it was a big deal, but a wedding party in the boonies didn't mean much to the rest of the world. They ran out of wine, and Mary made sure the party kept going, pushing Jesus to do something. Would that we all had a Mary.

But zoom in a little. The people who actually see this miracle happen aren't "important" people with standing and stature. They're caterers in the back. People that, if they're seen at all, are little more than vehicles for food and drink. They're the ones that witness the first miracle, and starting there the world begins to change. It's upside down. The well-dressed, the wealthy, the ones who are served, they're "supposed" to get access to things like that while the rest of us go unnoticed and unserved. Shoot, even the wine's upside down. As the steward and anyone that's ever hosted a party knows, you serve the good wine first. Once everyone's had enough that they can't tell the sommelier's choice from a bucket of swill, then you break out the cheap stuff. But the wine Jesus makes is so good that it becomes the talk of the party. It's upside down all over again. So much of his story turns us upside down from How Things Are Done. Jesus refuses to let established mores dictate what he does with the time given. He weighs what's good, what's light, what's just and delivers what's needed with special concern for those in the greatest need.

Y'all, we're on the verge of a change so enormous it feels elemental. The whole world's as strange as wine from water but for all the wrong reasons. It's time we turn it upside down, favor the unseen, disregard conventions that abuse what's right. Today some things change, tomorrow even more. Many wish this didn't have to happen in our time, but that's not for us to decide. Look, I don't know if the TikTok ban's the first in a long line of authoritarian restrictions or an elaborate bait-and-switch to woo its users. I do know the world as it is elevates emerging dangers. But this world holds even more beacons of hope that desperately need to emerge, too. It's time we enliven them, even if they languish within us. And we start here. I know, little bitty seemingly inconsequential places can feel like they don't matter. But that party trick of Jesus' laid the foundation for a movement that's still going, a movement that says every person, every interaction, every upside down effort matters. Lord knows we didn't choose to live in this time. We may not even feel ready for what's to come, but the hour is nigh. All we have to decide now is what to do with the time that is given us.