

FADE IN:

EXT. CHURCH - MORNING

Cold and institutional. An Orwellian house of worship for the faceless masses.

The pale sun struggles to illuminate the well manicured gray lawns and bursting beds of ashen marigolds. It's as if God turned the world's hue setting to "low".

CHARLIE, mid 30's, pasty and pale in his drab unkempt church uniform, stares depressingly at the gloomy structure. Oh to be anywhere but here.

A disconsolate sigh, then he steps toward the front doors.

Dead man walking.

INT. CHURCH LOBBY - MORNING

An old punch card time clock.

Timecards are methodically fed and punched.

Kachunk

Kachunk

Kachunk

A line of church drones, each sporting a creepy Stepford-like plastic smile, snakes its way past the time clock and into the sanctuary. Each drone is meticulously dressed in drab church clothes similar to Charlie's. A large black pew bible rests comfortably under each arm.

Kachunk

Kachunk

Kachunk

Charlie resigns himself to a place at the end of the line.

A drone steps up to Charlie and gives him a condescending smile. His name badge reads "Deacon".

Charlie hustles to tuck in his shirt and straighten his tie. He then presents a small pocket-sized bible for inspection.

The Deacon produces a small tape measure and checks the height and width of Charlie's bible. Not even close. The deacon takes Charlie's bible and irreverently tosses it into a box marked "missions". He hands Charlie a sturdy black pew bible. Much better.

Kachunk

Kachunk

Charlie reluctantly takes his timecard from the rack. Do I really want to do this?

A girl giggles. Huh?

He looks down the line as a young girl skips her way past the drones. She wears a brilliant red dress to match her cheery complexion. A colorful oasis in this dreary desert.

The girl springs past Charlie and into the sanctuary.

As Charlie processes this odd occurrence a hand taps him on the shoulder. The lady behind him indicates with a leering grin that he should move along.

Charlie steps up to the time clock.

Kachunk

INT. SANCTUARY - MORNING

Bleak and uninviting. A mausoleum with pews.

Charlie searches the aisles for a free seat.

Taken.

Taken.

Reserved.

Taken.

At last he spots an empty seat in the center of a pew. He shuffles over to it, inconveniencing several seated drones along the way.

He spies the next section over, entirely deserted apart from the young girl. Weird.

As Charlie takes his seat the church organ grinds to life sending the entire congregation to their feet in concert. Charlie scrambles to join them.

The song is a depressing dirge of a hymn that drags on.....

and on.....

and on.....

and on.....

and on.....

please just let it be over....

Charlie glances over at the girl. Eyes closed and swaying with the music she appears to glow, closer to God than Charlie could ever hope to be.

With shoulders slumped Charlie soldiers on.

The song ends and the congregation transitions to the traditional meet-and-greet. Charlie reaches out to the various shaking hands that crisscross his pew, but they all ignore him.

A small dainty hand reaches in and shakes Charlie's hand. It belongs to the little girl. She looks even more alive and vibrant up close.

CHRISTINA

Nice to meet you, I'm Christina.

Before he can reply the girl bounds away.

CHARLIE

Charlie, my name's Charlie.

He notices he is the only one still standing and quickly takes his seat.

Ushers step to the end of each pew and come to attention.

The collection plates are presented.

With Pavlovian efficiency checkbooks are whipped out, filled in and torn off.

Charlie digs into his pocket and pulls out a ticket stub and a receipt. He fumbles for his wallet.

The collection plates fly down the pews in a choreographed movement of arms that resembles synchronized swimming.

One plate stalls at Charlie.

With the plate in one hand and the wallet in the other he struggles for some cash, but accidentally drops the wallet into the plate. Before he can object the plate is whisked away.

Charlie slumps back in his pew.

Bibles are immediately cracked open around him. Charlie reaches for his bible and in a fluster tries to flip to the correct verse.

He flips and flips and flips. He finally gives up and checks the index.

All around him notebooks snap open and pens are poised.

Charlie pats himself down then inconspicuously reaches for a sermon note pad and a pencil from the pew rack. He fumbles the pencil and watches in horror as it sails to the floor.

Clink clinkity clink.

The entire congregation stares as Charlie sheepishly bends down to retrieve the pencil.

The sermon begins.

An indistinguishable warble of a voice wafts in from the pulpit. It's as if Charlie Brown's teacher was preaching.

Charlie slumps and sighs. This really sucks.

LATER

Eager pens transcribe into notebooks never-to-be-read-again-notes.

Charlie doodles on his note paper.

He notices Christina, listening with rapt attention as if she was seated at the feet of some master storyteller.

He looks around at the drones scribbling away then shakes his head. Why are we even here?

Charlie stands up, tosses aside the note paper then shuffles his way inconveniently to the end of the pew. All eyes are on him as he strides over to the empty section and takes a seat next to Christina.

Then it's all eyes back on front and the sermon resumes.

CHARLIE

What do you--

CHRISTINA

Shh. Can you hear Him?.

CHARLIE

The preacher?

CHRISTINA

No silly. Close your eyes.

Charlie hesitates then...

CHARLIE

OK, they're closed.

CHRISTINA

Now just listen.

The sermon drags on.

CHARLIE

I don't hear anything different.

CHRISTINA

It needs to be quiet. In your heart.

Charlie takes a deep breath and settles back in to the pew.

The sermon warbles on for a moment, then slowly fades away to silence...

Charlie's eyes pop open and he stares in a breathless wonderment.

The Church has been transformed. It is now full of color and life. Light streams through a majestic stained glass window depicting a glorified Christ ascending into heaven.

Charlie looks down and notices a change in himself. His clothes are bright and lively, no longer the drab uniform of the church drones. His skin no longer pasty sports a healthy vibrant tone.

The preacher's voice erupts with authority.

PREACHER

Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in

PREACHER (CONT'D)  
heaven and you are on earth, so let  
your words be few.

The drones, still bleak and dreary, scribble away oblivious  
to what they are missing.

Charlie looks for Christina, but she is gone.

He gazes at the image of Christ in the window and beams like  
a man headed to glory.

CHARLIE  
I thought you would've sounded more  
like James Earl Jones.

FADE OUT.