

On Race – Where Are We In 2021?

From my view, there were some very positive developments in the Springfield area with regard to race relations in 2020; not the least of which was the PAG sermon series (during Black History Month) entitled “Love Is Understanding”. I believe that God used that series to touch lives, open up dialog, and broaden and deepen the knowledge, understanding, and sensitivities of many people in our PAG family, and beyond.

I was encouraged by the fact that, despite the turmoil that engulfed the country over the course of a very turbulent year in racial, social and political issues; for the most part the Springfield area remained above the fray of violent and destructive activities. I think that much credit for that goes to those in the personal, social, political, and law enforcement arenas who recognized the importance of acknowledging, listening to, and working with those voices seeking and needing a listening ear.

There were numerous open forums conducted (primarily remotely by way of Zoom or Skype) in the Springfield area by different organizations and groups, bringing together people of different racial and ethnic identities and persuasions for constructive dialog. These kinds of settings provide a great opportunity to enhance knowledge and gain better understanding. As has been said, when people come to the table with an open mind and a genuine desire to learn, much can be accomplished.

All of that being said though, I am reminded of one of my favorite expressions: “Best is the enemy of better”. What does that mean? Simply, that when we reach the point where we convince ourselves that we’ve done the best that we can, know all that we need to know, or are as good as we need to be, we disqualify ourselves from doing better. A case in point: Tom Brady, quarterback of the Super Bowl Champion Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Had he decided several years ago that playing in five super bowls was good enough, needless to say, the 43 year old would never have just recently played in his record setting tenth super bowl.

The point here is that we can do better! Several weeks ago I wrote this: “We are living in an age when far too many people are programmed to respond to information; far too few programmed to process information. Unfortunately, it is the processing of information that is the key to understanding”. When information crosses your path, take time to absorb, reflect and meditate on it before responding. Just as true enlightenment may not occur in an instant, wisdom is seldom going to be found in a quick response.

It never ceases to amaze me how much there is to learn. I am making new discoveries and enhancing my knowledge continuously. If we are to continue to improve race relations in this country, the key will be to establish enough people willing to engage in a deliberate and proactive quest for broader and deeper knowledge. This will include a genuine knowledge of ALL of the historical events that shaped where we are in this country today; not just the ones

that sound good or make us feel good. There is a lot of “ugly” out there in this country that has not been acknowledged or dealt with. Keep in mind that we cannot fully understand or properly respond to where we are unless we know fully where we came from, and how we got here.

I believe that one of the greatest threats to Christianity and to our democracy today (as in the past) is encompassed in one word: compromise. When the tenets of the U.S. Constitution were compromised to allow for slavery, it didn't just compromise the constitution, it compromised the Ten Commandments as well as the Christian faith. With that in mind, here is a question to ponder: “Where do the souls of men reside today who donned hoods and lynched their fellow humans on Saturday night, yet greeted their fellow congregants as church deacons on Sunday morning?”

In Matthew 7: 21-23 Jesus tells us this: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘LORD, LORD,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘LORD, LORD, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

In what seems to be an increasingly volatile world, I believe that it is incumbent upon us as followers of Christ to examine ourselves to determine whether we are filtering properly and thoroughly the information that we are bombarded with daily, hourly, and minute by minute; even to reexamine some of the information that may have established our belief systems earlier in life. Our challenge is to be a calming light, rather than an agitating poker in a world that desperately needs enlightenment.

Prayer, meditation, and fasting can open the door for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives and thereby bring clarity to how we are to respond to the information that swirls all around us, as well as to the information that we discover through our own initiative.

In conclusion: The key to continued improvement of race relations is a willingness to build on what understanding that we have. That will undoubtedly require that we move out of our comfort zone, seek broader, deeper and more comprehensive knowledge, analyze more thoroughly the information, and avoid compromising our faith. We can and will do better if we keep in mind that “BEST is the enemy of BETTER!”

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