

## What We Have Lost

We were headed to a family visitation in Dallas, Texas as Joleen had lost two uncles and an aunt with in a two week period. We stopped in a left turn lane waiting for approaching traffic to clear. As we were in the Civic Hybrid and Joleen was in a heightened emotional state, I was using an extra bit of caution in dealing with the traffic. I noted a black BMW 7 Series to our right waiting to fully cross the four lanes that we were making the left turn from. After waiting for two widely spaced approaching vehicles, I began to execute the left turn; suddenly it was all black BMW side-panels and low-profile tires before us. As we were on the primary road, I legally had the right-of-way. Acting as the typical offended and wronged male, I gave an extended blast of the anemic Civic horn. At the next stop sign the BMW remained stopped and blocked our path through the intersection. Mr. BMW, a short plump fellow with thinning hair, exited the 7-Series and approached the Hybrid to ask if I had “a problem?” I responded by informing him, “I had a problem with unsafe driving as I had the right-of-way.” Mr. BMW began to inform us of how busy he was and he didn’t have time to “wait for us to turn”. Joleen then started by explaining to him that we were headed to a family visitation due to the loss of three family members in a two week period. He apologized for the loss and continued to expound on how busy he was and that he didn’t have time wait for us to turn. The absurdity of the situation overwhelmed Joleen and me; we simply burst out laughing.

How have we gotten to the point as a culture that we are so myopically inwardly focused that we cannot see the innate value of others? The only reason why modern society, and democracies in particular, function is that they are founded, either expressly or implied, on the predication that the rights of others are more important than our personal individual rights. Not only have we, as a nation, lost the importance of deferment to the higher good of others, we have also forgotten that we are all Americans and generally more alike, than different.

In some respects the United States is a victim of its own success. A fully functioning representative democracy requires a sense of personal responsibility and ownership. Our version of representative democracy is quite antiseptic when compared with gritty “roll-up-your-sleeves” version of democracy that once took place on the “Public Greens” of our original thirteen states. The lack of this direct sense of connection is a source of much of the complacency and selfishness we currently see in the United States. It is easier to vote for a government entity to take care of the poor than reach in to our pockets or invest our time in order to assist community members. We no longer are personally called upon to ration for the war effort. Career politicians are not familiar with their constituency because they don’t spend time working side by side with them. We have lost the affiliation we once had with our fellow countrymen. We are no longer “in this together” because there is not a direct connection with our government or our fellow citizens.

It is clear the United States government has lost touch with the citizenry that reside within its borders. Of far greater concern is the fact that United States citizenry has lost touch with one another. We no longer take the time to reach out to each other; if we did, we would likely discover that we are more

alike than we are different. All people, everyone in their most carnal condition, love their family, enjoy life, fear death, and appreciate fellowship involving music and cuisine. Taking the time as individuals to become acquainted with our neighbors by knowing them personally and not as stereotypes would do wonders to foster a true sense of community and belonging across ethnic and cultural lines. Ronald Reagan once quipped “People do not make wars; governments do.”

This non-familiarity with those that populate our immediate community is particularly tragic for those that claim the moniker “Child of God”. How can we as Christians love and serve as the Lord desires unless we first walk across the street. The implication is that if we meet others on the most basic of terms and we set aside externally imposed cultural morays then we cannot help but connect with those whom we share the planet. We can then love and relate to others as God intended.

It is the power of love that diminishes self and naturally defers to others. Love will cause us to look beyond ourselves and our self-imposed inadequacies to reach out to others when it is inconvenient. Love inspires us to step outside our comfort zones and strive to accomplish for another what we would not do for ourselves. Love is a powerful motivation to minister to others because love will cause others to be more important than ourselves. Love has the power to change the world – one heart at a time.

Love is a natural by-product of an honest forthright relationship with another. A relationship requires meeting another face-to-face. Walk next door and befriend your neighbor. Visit with the person parked next to you or on the other side of the fuel pump at the convenience store. Walk across the center isle of the church. You will find individuals who are a lot like you. Build a relationship and, together, go change the world.

“Reminds me of when I was a kid and the world was still round and a deal was still square.” -- Charley Smith.

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