

A soul-searching time as a nation

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These past weeks, a number of things have happened in the United States that signal to me a critical soul-searching time as a nation.

We experienced the administration's hardened position regarding those who are entering our country, even those seeking asylum. For a time, it included separating children from their parents and placing them in detention centers without any plan of reuniting them with their families.

We heard President Donald Trump insult our closest neighbors and strong allies—Canada and Mexico—even speaking of Mexicans as “infesting” our country. We watched as Trump separated himself from our Western allies and sought closer relationships with the dictators of Russia and North Korea.

Who the United States has been, both nationally and internationally, is being turned upside down. Although some of us may not totally agree with how things have been and desire change, the actions of Trump are focused on appealing to his political base, a minority of people in the U.S. The good of the whole is being ignored.

There is a heartbreaking silence from members of Congress—both Democrats and Republicans. Party politics and the next election are paramount, regardless if, in the process, the basic values for which America has stood are violated.

We don't all agree about our future. The divisions we experience, the cultural war waging in our country, did not happen overnight. The cultural, social, economic and political shifts over these past 50-60 years have been experienced by us in very different ways.

For some, having policies that support the free exchange of goods and services across national borders is part of trying to create a global community. For others, it is the taking away of jobs that devastates one's local community.

For some, acceptance of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer community is a natural extension of one's own belief in human rights, for others, it signaled another stripping away of the moral order.

For some addressing racism and sexism in all of its insidious forms is necessary to who we are as a country. For others, it signals political correctness and bias against white men.

For some the immigration issue is about obeying the law and securing our border, keeping us safe. For others, it is a humanitarian issue calling forth compassion and openness for those who are fleeing violence and persecution.

Many situations we face as a people touch on issues of culture, identity and meaning, and we experience them differently.

These divisions are deepened when the rhetoric stokes the fires of anger and fear among us. This is complicated by the way that truth and actual facts are being manipulated so as to sideline rational debate, appeal to emotions, use negative stereotypes and erode standards of mutual respect.

These techniques often lead people to be deceived from seeing what is in their own best interest, and in a world of social media and 24/7 news cycles, they can cement world views and create unswerving loyalty to one's tribe or political base.

Can this be the moment to pause as a nation and enter the "space" that seems to divide us and converse with each other in new ways? Can we ask what our common humanity is trying to call forth in us? Can we reclaim the best of who we are as Americans and who we want to be in the future?

When I think about what is needed to do this work, I realize it demands great courage and understanding. Courage—in facing my own biases and assumptions, operative worldview and the way I have changed and developed. Understanding—in opening myself up to the worldviews of others so as to recall and appreciate the values inherent in other stages of development.

It is the practice of contemplation that moves me toward this action. Through contemplation, one can become aware of how one sees the world. One realizes that everyone views reality with blinders on, and over time, through the development process, those blinders can be cut back—broadening the worldview from which one engages reality.

As Christians it is the process of "putting on the mind of Christ" or seeing from the heart of Christ. Contemplation helps you become your truest and best self.

I believe we can only enter that "space" between us deeply sourced by the inner presence of God, urging us to embrace all with love, compassion, and justice.

I invite those of us who have a contemplative practice to take seriously the invitation to enter the space to begin conversation with our families, co-workers, Church members, and political leaders.

What shall we talk about? Perhaps we can start with....

What makes us proud to be an American citizen?

What kind of future do we desire for children?

What is our role within the world community?

What are our hopes about the future?

Then move toward...

What are our fears about the future?

What values do we want embodied in our elected leaders?

How might we close the gap that has been created among us as a people? How might we address the issues that seem to divide us?

Hopefully, such conversations will be enlightening as we probe some of the values which are contentious from a more neutral direction. Perhaps a greater wisdom will emerge that will invite further discussion and even some practical action together.

We are in a precarious position as a country. We cannot be silent. Action will be taken. In addition, another more time-consuming action is needed. Some of us need to enter the space between us and speak the truth in a loving way to each other.

I believe that if we don't try to do that, the space will continue to widen and deepen until the chasm is so great it will sever us as a people.

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