

God, Life, and Everything
"What Are We Going To Do?"

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We as a nation are at a crossroads, and right now, it doesn't look promising. The last time I remember violence as a regular part of the electoral process was in 1968 with the confluence of two major conflicts - the Civil Rights movement and the anti-war movement.

The last time before that? Well, I suppose the election of 1860....

Today, the atmosphere is arguably just as toxic, and based on conversations with many involved, actual suggestions on how to make life better may not be enough. Policy changes may not even be the point.

As candidates on all sides have acknowledged, there is a lot of anger all around, and it seems to be fairly unfocused. Everyone blames everyone else, and nobody has a clue what to do. So, we yell and scream and call each other names.

Now, like you, I have my own political leanings. That's what makes us a nation - we understand that there can be no nation without difference of opinion and world view. And we can't be a people without respect for those with differing points of view.

Again, that doesn't mean that I won't work hard to advance my understanding of what is best for our country, but I strongly believe that we're all in this together, and we *have* to find a way to work together.

What I cannot condone - and what no American should tolerate - is violence toward each other.

It's at this point where every reader says to him or herself, "Well, it's *their* fault! They are the ones resorting to violence. We're just protecting ourselves."

Baloney.

This all came to a head at the canceled Trump rally in Chicago. In its aftermath, the accusations were flying fast and furious, and everyone painted themselves as victims. Again, I say baloney.

At that rally, anti-Trump protesters showed up in numbers much larger than Mr. Trump had anticipated (his words). This may have been poor planning on his part. He had received invitations to hold the rally in communities more amenable to his politics, but he chose a university campus known for its progressive bent.

Mr. Trump had repeatedly said he enjoyed having the protesters at his rallies because they gave him a foil to highlight his message. But this was something he had not counted on.

The aborted rally turned into a fiasco where supporters and protesters began yelling at each other. Nobody knows who started it. So there. With such large numbers, it's impossible to know who.

But we do know that anti-Trump protesters planned on storming the stage and taking the microphone from Trump. And we do know that violence has been a staple of Trump rallies in the past. Just last week, a Trump supporter was arrested for sucker-punching a protester who was being escorted out by security. He was unrepentant, stating that he would do it again and might even have to kill the protester if he ran into him again.

This can not continue. When we begin to see each other as enemies, we have really become no different from street gangs. When we look at each other with such

hatred, we cease to be a nation and slowly begin the spiral down to dissolution. If this keeps up, there will be no United States of America.

So, what do we do?

I'll tell you one thing we don't do. We don't start pointing fingers. That will not help. And it is actually wrong headed. All that does is take the focus off of ourselves.

What we *can* do is this, as modest as it is.

1) We can promise to reject all violence. We can promise to take part in neither physical nor verbal violence. By verbal violence, I mean shouting at another person, calling them by some epithet, using profanity.

2) We can commit to only discussing the issues rather than the personal qualities of "the other side."

3) We can write to the campaigns of our candidates and demand that they renounce all violent language, that they discourage their followers from employing violence, and that they speak respectfully of their opponents. No leader can deny responsibility for the actions of their followers - the leader sets the tone.

In short, we can do what Jesus told us. We can remember that we are all God's children. We can remember that we are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves (and remember that when Jesus said this, he gave as an example two groups of people who hated each other). We can remember Jesus' command to look at our own words and actions before saying anything about someone else's.

I know, that's not how politicians work. Politics is all about blaming the other guy (so, in that sense, I suppose politeness is not "politically correct"). But a large number of people in this country claim that we are a Christian (or Judeo-Christian) nation - and at least they ought to be able to stand up and demand nonviolence.

I don't know how this election is going to end up. I don't plan to move to Canada if one or another candidate wins. And I will not shout at those who embrace a different policy. But I will refuse to jump in on the physical and verbal violence. I will demand better from my politicians. I will begin by looking at my own actions.

It's Lent. This is the perfect time for self-examination and repentance. And really, the time is now, because if we don't, it may soon be too late.