

Of One
March 2021

My oldest son, in completing an extensive genealogical study of his mother's paternal ancestry, discovered that our ancestors include Quakers. I was rather pleased to learn this information, as I have always held to the belief that in the grand scheme of Life, we are all equal. Thus, we are all important. Thus, all of us deserve respect. Because I am of White Privilege, all this is easy for me to say. It's effortless to proclaim that I believe in justice and equality for all. The hard part is remembering, registering, acknowledging the "all." I admit that.

I am writing on Valentine's Day, a day set aside for us to send a note or flowers to someone we love, someone who has shown us love. Often that someone is on our lateral plane—financially, racially, ideologically. How comfortable, that sameness.

On this Valentine's Day, and the day before, our small-town newspaper printed articles that said that throughout our state, public school and public health services would fall victim to a drastic budget cut. If I understood correctly, our legislature is adamant. The "rainy day fund" has been depleted. Our state is in dire shape. However: no new taxes. The budget cuts won't hurt some people. They will hurt others.

I can understand the fear of taxes. Who wants to be hit every year with a call for payment to keep the state going?

Allow me a metaphor. The state is a ship tossed on angry waters. The angry waters might cease if we just had the money. If we just had the means to gather that money.

Actually, continuing the metaphor, there are two ships in the fleet in the midst of that storm. One ship carries passengers and crew who have financial backup or savings, a house, two cars, three square meals a day, and money at the end of the month. They also have life boats. The other ship carries those who live out of their cars.

There are good people in that first ship. Good people who, if called upon—and I truly believe this—to share their life boats, would do so in a nanosecond. There might need to be a quick discussion about the size of the boat they are willing to donate, but they will donate.

They will donate because they are members of the fleet. To end the metaphor, they, the donor-ready people, are members of a community. A community created of choice. No one told anyone that they were required to live in this state. They are inside these borders by choice. And because they are good citizens, they believe in civic responsibility. This responsibility requires little: cooperation, respect, care, and compassion. It also involves a belief in "us", not "I" or "Them".

And do you know what? I'm sure that even those people who live in cars would be willing to donate. They too might need some discussion of the size of the donation, but they will donate.

In other words, at that genuine and real level of humanity, most people in a community will be willing, in the storm, to reach out to each other. I believe in the selflessness of others because I believe, as do many, in the idea of community. The word “community” derives from the old English “maene” which translates to “common, public, general.” I didn’t hear any “I” in that definition. The word may also derive from the Old French “communité”, which comes from the Latin “communitas”, translating to “public spirit”, or from the Latin “communis”, translating to “common.” Bottom line: “Of One.” We, in a community, are all in it together. No one is better. No one is worse. No one gets privilege. No one gets left out.

In a true and good community, hands reach out from leadership to the public, from the public to leadership. Good leadership involves acknowledgement of those who are served. It demands cooperation, respect, compassion, fairness, accountability, and courage—not just to those it serves but to those it works with. In addition, good leadership requires research and study. And it requires the art of listening. Sound, fair, and educated decision making is the bottom line.

So.

So, why are the legislators of my state, all—let’s not argue—people of privilege, insisting that there will be no implementation of a monetary means for all of us to help all of us? Why do they insist that the only way to help our state is to cut anything that begins with the word “public”? Public health facilities and care? Do they not know that many people depend on public health as their only means of mental and physical care? Public school staff and teachers and resources? Do they have any idea of the negative effect of too-large classrooms and too-few/too overworked/too-underpaid teachers on teachers and children and loving parents? Let those living in cars or on pathetic salaries find expensive doctors and send their children to expensive private schools? I don’t think so.

Those who govern should not base their decisions on following the party line. Civility transcends politics. Their only concern should be to ensure that all serve all.

Those who govern must listen. Those who govern must see. We the People is not a myth, as long as “We” is respected, acknowledged, and trusted by those who govern. As long as mutuality is sincerely accepted as a strategy. As long as “Other” fades.