

## LET'S DROP THE 'US VS. THEM'

Although we still have four months until the presidential politicking 'officially' gets started with the New Hampshire primary, we are already seeing a growing disparity of opinion and a predominance of the 'us vs. them' mentality. It often appears that those candidates and supporters who frequently proclaim themselves 'Christians', are also the loudest factions displaying argumentative and adversarial behavior. Civil discourse in the public arena is too often not 'civil'; it has become a shouting match, each faction calling the other derogatory names and demeaning one other.

While we acknowledge that for those whose faith is important and a core of who they are, their actions are driven by their beliefs. Yet, it seems that those who proclaim their religion repeatedly are also the ones who are most suspicious of anyone who disagrees with them. They are intolerant and negative about any ethnicity, skin color, social or financial position or political leanings that do not mirror their own. They see the public as easily-labeled groups or factions each of whom represents 'the others' or 'them'. If one studies the teachings of Jesus, this tendency to emphasize the differences in people is contrary to everything He taught us. One could say that turning others into 'thems' is the complete opposite of the core message of the Christian faith.

*'Love your neighbor as yourself.'* (Matthew 22:39)

Somehow, in this time of political and social polarization, both sides seem to have forgotten this second Great Commandment from Jesus. They display a lack of caring about the stranger, the brother, the sister, the mother, the father, the children, the unborn that do not join lockstep in their political philosophy. Rather than rejoice in any commonalities, both physical and emotional, that all human beings share, they emphasize differences, no matter how small.

Have we forgotten that we are all created in the image of God?

*So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them* (Genesis 1:27),

and we are all beloved by God?

*"We know, dear brothers and sisters, that God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people."* (1 Thessalonians 1:4)

We have to hope that all people want to do the right thing, and that most people strive to do the right thing. Yet, when people begin to believe that what is good for all of us (healthcare, public education, food security, job security, affordable housing) is in fact sinister, and only approve of things that are good for 'them' and their perceived group, we have come a long way from the teachings of Jesus. There becomes a gap between how we live our daily lives and how we *talk* about our common life.

After at least three decades of this 'us vs. them' mentality, there is extreme stress on our democracy. Legislatures at both the state and federal level are non-productive, seemingly going out of their way to make sure that either nothing is accomplished or that laws are passed that marginalize and limit the inclusion of everyone in our society. This has left the American people feeling that they are lost and 'no one is minding the store'. Daily we are

bombarded by alarming events in the global economy, endless wars that no one really wanted, famine and misery for millions, racial and legal injustices, and great income disparity. Levers of government and social action are paralyzed. There seems to be no one who is willing to stretch out their hand and try to work together for the common good of us all.

But it doesn't have to be that way. . . we, as individuals, and collectively, as followers of Jesus can and need to change this.

There is no actual 'us vs. them'. This is a fiction created by organizations with a narrow self-interest to put roadblocks in the functioning of our society. All political parties, liberals, conservatives, libertarians, progressives, and tea party-er share the blame. If we are to be the United States of America - people living and striving to maintain a nation where all people are created equal, where all have the same rights, and all can pursue life, liberty and happiness, 'us vs. them' mentality must be exchanged for 'all for one and one for all'!

It is time for those of us who follow Jesus to stop this madness of 'us vs. them'. We must work to overcome the prejudice and animosity rampant in our lives that is dividing our country. We must talk civilly with each other, listen to disparate opinions, use compromise and common sense to develop consensus in a loving and Christ-like way.

The next time we think about 'them', we must remember the many ways we are alike as human beings; we must realize we share the same hopes, dreams, fears and yearnings. Look for the similarities, not the differences. Have a conversation to build understanding and you'll probably find that you are not so different from us.

We must begin. . .

we must start the conversation.

If **WE** don't do it, **who** will?