

## Amor o Miedo

[Love or Fear]

*Que las palabras de mi boca y la meditación de nuestro corazón sean aceptables ante tus ojos, oh Señor, mi roca y mi salvación. Amén.*  
[Salmos 19:14]

This past election season has been one of the most contentious and divisive in my memory. The rhetoric has been heated and many of the messages have been interpreted as suggesting that our nation should be less inclusive and diverse; that we should build walls, remove or exclude our neighbors from south of the border, people of the Muslim faith, or others who are different from us.

Whatever the actual intent, one effect of all of this rhetoric has been to inflame the passions and bring out the worst in those among us who would seek to divide rather than to unite. I have spent a lot of time in soul-searching, reflection, and discernment. I recall saying to my wife that I wonder how in the world we will ever put this genie back in the bottle. As a long-time counselor and conflict resolution specialist, I should not have been surprised that her response was that we cannot and should not try and put the genie back in the bottle. Instead, we have to deal with the genie.

Back in February this year, I preached to you about a time when I summoned medical assistance for a Korean immigrant who was lying on the pavement at a bus stop in medical distress while people nearby ignored him. I described it as a time when I encountered Jesus. And that by stopping to helping this man, I was *listening to Jesus*, and following is commandment to *love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind* and to *love your neighbor as yourself*. Because as Jesus said in Matthew's Gospel, "*Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of those who are members of my family, you did it to me.*"

The United States is a nation of immigrants; having been founded by people who came to these shores to obtain religious freedom, economic security, freedom from oppression, safety, and a better way of life. As Christians, we look to Jesus for guidance on how we should model our lives. Jesus embraced diversity, and in reaching out to those who were different or marginalized, he sought to unite and not to divide, and to build bridges instead of walls.

The scriptures tell us that Jesus ate with a tax collector. As one commentator suggested, while doing so may have broken some social taboos, his doing so demonstrated how Jesus looked beyond culture and into people's hearts. Further, as the commentator noted, while "the Pharisees wrote people off simply because of their profession or their past, Jesus looked past all that and saw their need."

Although it was unheard of at the time for a Jew to associate with a Samaritan, Jesus engaged the Samaritan woman at the well, asking her to give him a drink of water. Because of their interaction, the woman came to understand that Jesus was the Messiah and she became the bridge through which other Samaritans became believers. The scriptures provide us with many other examples of how Jesus broke with cultural norms to become a bridge to those who were different: Luke (7:36-50) tells us that Jesus forgave an immoral woman; in Mark (7:24-30) Jesus casts a demon from a Syrophenician woman's daughter; Luke (5:12-16) records that Jesus touches a leper and cleansed him; and later in Luke (19:1-10), we read where Jesus enters the house of Zacchaeus, the Chief Tax Collector, and brought him salvation.

In his letter to the Galatians (3:28), St. Paul wrote, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." To the people of Corinth (1 Corinthians 12:12-13) St. Paul wrote, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." And James (2:1-4), speaking to the twelve tribes of Jews scattered outside Palestine, warned against partiality, saying, "My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, 'Have a seat here, please,' while to the one who is poor you say, 'Stand there,' or, 'Sit at my feet,' have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?"

So, I think it is pretty clear what Jesus would do. The question is: What are we going to do to help heal this brokenness? For me, the answer falls into three broad categories:

First, I am going to comfort those who have been afflicted. I know people who are Muslims who recently have been the victims of verbal abuse and other forms of harassment and who have been made to feel unwelcomed in this country – a place where they, their parents, and in a couple of cases, their grandparents were born. These are close acquaintances of mine, people who are kind, gentle, loving with as much right to be here as me. When these people and others have shared their experiences with me about how they have been made to feel estranged, I took time to listen to them, offer words of encouragement, and let them know that they are my brothers and my sisters.

Second, I have and will continue to engage when I hear people speak in ways that divide instead of unite. But when I do so, I try my best to use reason instead of confrontation, as the latter will build walls and not bridges.

And, third, I plan to encourage and participate in ecumenical activities designed to demonstrate solidarity with those who are different or have been marginalized.

What might you do?

I am reminded of something one of my Sunday school teachers was fond of saying: "We are all children of God" and, while not grammatically correct, she reminded us that "God don't make no junk."

So, borrowing from today's Collect and the words of the prophet Isaiah (35:1-2), "Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us," make this wilderness and the dry lands glad, and this desert blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing.

... En el nombre del Padre, del Hijo, y del Espíritu Santo, Amén...