

Jeff's Jottings

Lessons from Facebook

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I spent more time than usual on Facebook this week, and it was wonderful. That's because it was my birthday, and the social network did what it does best: connecting people who otherwise would remain apart, distant; friends in name but rarely in person.

I heard from high school classmates and former colleagues and current colleagues and people just around the corner, some of whom I saw yesterday or last weekend or last month but a number of whom I haven't seen in years. To all of them, I quoted former Minnesota governor and senator, the late Hubert Humphrey: "The greatest gift of life is friendship, and I have received it."

I spent more time than usual on Facebook this week, and it was awful. That's because this week was much like last week and the weeks before, where the social network did what it does worst: facilitated a shouting match. From Trump to Kavanaugh, white supremacy to border walls to the kicker for the Vikings, I was lectured by both sides, shamed, dismissed. Only an "idiot" could even consider certain points-of-view the writer could not abide by — which meant that some of the friends who wished me Happy Birthday were, indeed, idiots. As was I.

We encounter this fragmentation in our world every day, of course: people who are gracious and kind and generous, and people who are angry, deceitful, intent only on satisfying their own needs; people who are caring and intelligent and well-intentioned, and people whose greed, pettiness, and self-interest make their ends justify any means. To see it so starkly this week,

however, forced me again to confront this question: what do I believe about others? And about myself?

I spent more time than usual on Facebook this week, and more than anything else, I was reminded of this: that my vocation from God is nothing less than to be fully human, where love and grace and “bearing witness” is an act of courage, not of fear; where who we are and what we do brings us closer to this calling, not further away.

Since I’m staying on Facebook, would some remind me about this as Election Day draws near?