

# Jeff's Jottings

## *Perspective, for at least today ...*

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*I came away from these conversations ... struck by pervasive but subtle hunger for a change in the emotional tenor of life. "We're more connected but we're more apart," one student lamented. Again and again, students expressed a hunger for social and emotional bonding, for a shift from guilt and accusation toward empathy. "How do you create relationship?" one student asked. That may be the longing that undergirds all others.*

That's what David Brooks wrote in his New York Times column Tuesday after a series of conversations across the country with college-aged young people. Maybe you saw it, too.

How do you react to a statement like that? Are you defensive? Dismissive? Curious? Regretful? Supportive? Is it a voice of future hope and engagement, or a refuge of privilege for those who can stand above the fray? Is it a call to the hard work of reconciliation, or just another version of Minnesota nice?

We live in a time when our most visible influencers — whether elected, appointed, or even self-appointed — are increasingly using the primitive emotions of fear, scarcity, and self-interest to drive our debates, rather than engaging our better capacities for cooperation, caring, and generosity. We tell stories about each other and our challenges with just enough truth to make them believable, but never enough to be fair: that diversity is a problem; that a healthy economy produces a healthy society; that poor people have different motivations than other people; that the person who disagrees with me is out to take away my humanity and beliefs.

But we never meet each other, to listen to each other's real-life hopes and dreams and aspirations. We instead settle for abstracts: Conservative. Liberal. Immigrant. Illegal. Hates me and all I stand for. We speak of all being created in God's own image in one moment, and in the next are willing to trade our birthright for the thin gruel of political posturing and preservation. I hear in these young people a longing to break out of our either/or, us vs. them mentality. I don't know how we do that, systemically, only that I will keep working for it, not against it.

In the meantime, both for my own well-being and to challenge myself, I have taken on the Lenten discipline of gratitude: to name, every day, one thing for which I am grateful and thankful. Not so I can ignore the challenges of society, or pretend them away, but so that I can put them into perspective.

Here's today's: that it is a singular honor to be called to the work I do with you. I have come to know you as a people who, with all your mind and heart, both proclaim and act on things we know to be true: That Jesus is alive. That Jesus is the hope of the world. That Jesus calls us to love one another and care for the world and all God's people in it. And that in this calling, there is hope, both in this life and beyond it, and thus we need not be afraid, but faithful.

Thank you, my friends. Now, back to work. For all God's people.