



### Deeper Than Melodrama

"If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?" -- Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Think back to 2008. John McCain is holding a rally near election day. He has already spoken and it's question and answer time. A woman stands up and gives a rant against President Obama ending with, "Obama is an Arab." John McCain answers, "No ma'am. He's a decent, family man; a citizen that I just happen to disagree with and that's what this campaign is about."

The 2020 presidential campaign is about our country but it's also a mirror for us to evaluate our hearts and the way we see the world. As Solzhenitsyn writes, "If only it were so simple!" If only we did live in melodrama, and wouldn't it be convenient that we just happen to be the enlightened people? Of course, we need to make political distinctions; of course, we need to stand up for what we believe is right and just and good for our country. After all, a vote is all about saying yes about one candidate and no about another. In the midst of arguments in our family sometimes my mother would say, "I guess we're all saying the same thing" and, being Southern, I'd sort of nod, but I'd think to myself, "No, we are saying opposite things."

I fear we as a country may lose our sense of being the United States of America and we could move into melodrama -- strict definitions of good and evil -- which is dangerous for our country and very dangerous for our souls. Richard Rohr said, "I like many of you am only a disciple of the poor man from Nazareth. He like the cosmos itself is about two things: diversity and communion." When we think of God's Realm, we know it's about those two things. After all, the New Jerusalem is filled with people from all races and, yes, political parties. All they do is sing God's praises in harmony. When we pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," perhaps that harmony is what we should pray for.

Therefore, we are called to another way. I think of Ruby Bridges praying for the mob outside her New Orleans school that cursed her and spit on her. I think of the Amish forgiving Charlie Roberts after he shot and killed five Amish children. I think of St. Francis walking to Jerusalem to talk to the Sultan to see if he would call off his armies and stop the crusades. I think of Paul writing to the Christians in Rome to say, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Romans 12:17. Or as the contemporary translation in The Message says: "Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone."

Labelling those who disagree with you in terms that demean them or degrade them or to make us feel morally superior may feel good in the moment and make sense to us at the time, but they cannot be good for our souls. When Ruby Bridges was asked by Robert Coles why she prayed for the mob outside her school, she replied, "Don't you think they need my prayers?" Is our motive to justify our moral superiority or to be agents of God's realm of peace, justice, and mercy? Do we want to be right or be faithful? Maybe this election pushes us to confront those questions.

