A Luddite Looks at Progress and Change

What a challenge it is to look at changes and progress in this age of Trump in America. Just last week I was watching “Morning Joe,” following the news of the immigration battle and remarking what a sorry state we’re in. Less than two years into this administration, America is fighting with its allies; snuggling up to its enemies; lying to the public; and damaging, seemingly irrevocably, our standing in the world. America first has become America first and ONLY. And on the eve of our birthday, the only one who may go out of his way to flatter our Bloviator-in-Chief may be Vladimir Putin.

And yet, we Americans are an optimistic bunch as we turned to our teal hymnbook for inspiration in hymn #1017, “Building a New Way.” Specifically, we sang about “working to be free, with our hallmark of love, peace, and freedom.” I must wonder what the over 2,000 immigrant children from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala who were separated from their families last week by immigration officials acting on Jeff Sessions’ newly-announced policy of zero tolerance, think now of America’s promise for a new life built upon those very hopes for love, peace, and freedom.

Imagine what we Americans, with our TV’s, cars, smart phones, cable or Dish TV, high speed internet, fast food, Twitter, Instagram, not to mention running potable water, flush toilets, health care, microwaves, mosquito control, and on and on, would dare think of those just wishing for a better life free from gang rape, murder, and theft by wishing to give themselves and their children a less than fighting chance for survival in a land which they know only by reputation - a land of opportunity and modernism, built on the aforementioned values of freedom, love, and peace. Seems too good to be true, doesn’t it?

And yet, we are prepared to sing out and celebrate America on its birthday, and to extoll in song how it embodies the ideals which we profess to the world in the name of universal human rights: a love of families, a respect for hard work, and an admiration for anyone who strives to make himself better by the toil of his hands, the sweat of his brow, or the exercise of his intellect. Further, some of our own politicians are doing back bends and body gyrations in order to accuse these “people” of getting what they deserve because they broke the law - period. Of course these same politicians don’t mention that the immigrants broke the law because border officials made it damn near impossible to understand, let alone follow, the law. They explain: “If you are applying for asylum (a perfectly acceptable course of action for immigrants who face separation, initiation into a life of crime, or death), you must go to one of a few ports of entry which accept asylum applicants; and by the way, none of these ports is open today; but if they were, we would arrest you, separate you from your children, and send them off to strange places of incarceration, and you off to face the courts and most certain deportation - without your kids! Can anyone of you justify this course of action in the name of law and order? Can any one of you justify this course of action in the name of progress, or, to remind you of our theme, “Building a New Way?”

Well, I confess to being a Luddite! (By the way, a Luddite, as Dave Slocum explained to me once, is not a Neanderthal, a term I once used to refer to myself: but is a person who is aware of new technology and advances, but is very selective in choosing to use them.) I’m not ready to push aside the values I espouse for ones of sending Tweets or texts or even hashtags around the world. I’ll admit here and now that I’ve never sent a Tweet, read or sent a text, or marked anything as being a hashtag. The symbol for hashtag, in fact, I read as the symbol for “number” and more recently “pound.” I do use the computer, but only after I discovered its usefulness in navigating around eBay and buying things I greedily needed and wanted. More recently I use the computer for writing a weekly letter to friends, updating Diane’s and my activities. If that sounds like a capitulation, it probably is; but I’m quick to point out that I write in full sentences with correct spelling, punctuation, and capitalization (except when spell check intervenes to make my text unacceptable). And I absolutely never substitute the letter “u” for the word “you” or the letter “r” for the word “are,” and the gods of grammar would boil me in dangling participles if I ever typed “IMHO,” “LOL,” or used a disgusting little picture of a smiley or frowny face.

But my status as a Luddite does not in any way impede my ability to tell right from wrong, and on any scale of human rights, every thinking human being knows in his heart that separation of young children from their parents is wrong, wrong, wrong.

So as we celebrate the right as Americans to be free - to be a techie or a Luddite or anyone in between - let us not lose sight of the more important meaning of hymn 1017, “Building a New Way.” Maybe it’s time for Americans - at least the most fortunate among us- . No, scratch that. It's time for **all** of us to act like we are controlled by our **better** natures - to allow someone else’s dreams to come to fruition. We don’t have to deny our own hopes, but maybe it’s time to assist those who want to come to America for its promise, for its freedoms, for its love and compassion. Maybe it’s time to show the warmth of our open arms instead of the cold rejection of the backs of our hands. Maybe it’s time to reject hatred, bigotry, and fear. Maybe it’s time to “Build a New Way.”

With this I close: On this weekend of celebration of America’s birth, let us all realize what America has come to symbolize to the world. If we keep our eyes on the values of freedom, love, and peace, even a megalomaniacal demagogue cannot undo a cumulative 242 years of goodwill and of living up to the promise of America….not if we don’t let him.

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