

Seeing the boogeyman

September 28, 2012

Like the other day, when the phone rang in my pocket while I was up in Oklahoma, checking on my parents.

(By the way, many of you remember my mother and father were involved in a horrific automobile accident July 4 and have asked about them. Joanna and I drove up to their home in southwestern Oklahoma to see them with our own eyes. They've made solid progress since mid-summer. They've still got a ways to go, especially Mother, who suffered a compound fracture of her right femur. But they're getting better and stronger. Thanks for your prayers.)

Mother and I were visiting in her living room when my phone started ringing. The message on the screen told me the caller was "Baptist Standard," which meant either one of my colleagues was trying to reach me or someone had called the phone at my desk, which by a miracle of modern technology passed the call to me.

Full head of steam

By the time I could say: "This is Marv Knox. May I help you?" the fellow on the other end of the line built up a full head of steam.

He mentioned the name of the little town where he lives, something about "my mother" and "mainstreaming Mormonism" and "trying to get Obama re-elected, which would absolutely ruin our country." He also used a word that, if his mother were much like my mother, would have gotten his mouth washed out with soap.

At first, I didn't know what he was talking about, because I didn't have a copy of the Sept. 3 *Baptist Standard* in front of me. As it so happened, the

cover package of that paper focused on the increasing influence of Mormons in America. Of course, the presidential candidacy of Mitt Romney influenced the selection of that topic. But while Romney is a Republican, the leader of the Senate Democrats, Harry Reid, also is a Mormon, as are numerous other business and government leaders.

To put it mildly, the caller didn't like the Mormonism package. Well, that may or may not be the case. I never determined if he ever actually read the articles, or if his mother got upset, and he reached out and touched the cell phone in my pocket.

No endorsement intended or implied

I tried to explain the Mormonism package was nonpartisan, featuring prominent Republican and Democratic Mormons, as well as Mormons who have nothing to do with politics. Our practice—as well as common sense—forbids us from endorsing political candidates.

The caller didn't really care for my explanation. He told me he was involved in "something big" and about to come into a boatload of money, part of which he had considered donating to the *Baptist Standard* unless we kept on doing things he didn't like. Or his mother told him he didn't like.

When he paused to take a breath, I told him about another phone call I received. It came from a Texas pastor, who saw the same package of articles and was concerned because he felt we were endorsing Romney and trying to defeat Obama.

See what you expect ... or fear

So, I told the anti-Obama/pro-Romney caller that folks sometimes read into articles what they want or expect to see. Sometimes—and this seemed to be one of those cases—they also see what they fear the most.

The next sentence out of the caller's mouth use another phrase that, I'm pretty sure, consigned my soul to eternal perdition. And then he told me—again—he has a lot of money.

Although I think of myself as being fairly patient, this fellow finally got on my nerves. I thanked him for cursing me out twice and told him to keep his money.

Since then, I've thought quite a bit about how two people saw the same set of articles and drew completely opposite conclusions. That's probably a byproduct of this fractious, heated political season. But it happens far too often in homes, churches, schools and workplaces in our communities.

We need to slow down our mouths and open our ears. We need to listen to each other and cut each other some slack. And, for heaven's sake, let's quit cussin' each other.