

Voices: Wisdom and guidance in the age of chaotic politics

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America is experiencing a chaotic moment, politically and socially. The implications are far-reaching.

Many are wondering if we are witnessing the end of democracy in America and our nation is going to go back to its worst forms. In this moment, we need wisdom and guidance.

For me, I seek wisdom from the Scriptures and recollections from my ancestors to assure me of our ability to survive this tumultuous time.

Among the many Scriptures I reflect upon, I hold to this command of Jesus: "In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12).

This verse of Scripture should be guiding wisdom for our politics for this moment. We have, on the whole, shunned this wisdom.

Slurs

When I moved into my present neighborhood, I was greeted perniciously. In my backyard, someone spelled the n-word in the sand. Suffice it to say, this was not the kind of greeting I wanted from my neighbors.

Seeing this racial slur was degrading and disheartening. This word was not just any racial slur. This word helped bar people from bathrooms, restaurants, neighborhoods, golf clubs and universities. This word has had grave historical consequences. It comes with a history that cannot be denied or dismissed out of hand.

In response, I had to turn to God in that situation, pray and seek God's grace to handle this world's evil. I did not pack up and move, nor did I sink into inescapable panic, because I realized what I had experienced was part of a larger story of Black people in this country.

Many in this country, though not Black, believe their lives and livelihoods are being threatened due to the chaos caused by the current political situation.

Ancestors

When I turn to God for guidance now, God reminds me I should listen to the voices of Black Christians who came before me. They experienced chaos in its worst forms in America. Their story gives me encouragement in times like these.

They taught me how to actualize Jesus' command. Others may call me the n-word, but I am not that. Consequently, I will not return evil for evil. I will promote the good.

Why did this happen to me? Why are we experiencing so much chaos in our government and society?

There is a reason Frederick Douglass said: "Between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference—so wide, that to receive the one as good, pure, and holy, is of necessity to reject the other."

Another Black man, David Walker, who wrote a littler earlier than Douglass stated: "The white Christians of America, who hold us in slavery, (or, more properly speaking, pretenders to Christianity,) treat us more cruel and barbarous than any Heathen nation did any people whom it had subjected, or reduced to the same condition, that the Americans (who are,

notwithstanding, looking for the Millennial day) have us.”

Another 19th-century Black abolitionist, Maria Stewart, said: “All the nations of the earth are crying out for liberty and equality. Away, away with tyranny and oppression!”

Each person pointed out the hypocrisy of living in a “Christian” country where they suffered. These 19th-century Black Christians bemoaned their mistreatment in America. But their cries were not heard, completely.

Yes, but

Yes, slavery was ended. But soon after the destructive power of Jim Crow was unleashed. And to this day, the system is still bent toward the exclusion of Black, brown and many other people.

I am not playing the race card. This is a reality I have experienced in my own life, and most of the Black people I know have experienced this as well.

Let me be clear. Oppression is not new for Black people. Having resources denied us is not new for Black people. Having our votes rejected is not new for Black people.

In the land of the free, we have experienced the contradiction of enslavement and disenfranchisement. How so? This country forsook the commandment of Jesus in its treatment of people of color. We are showing signs now of going back to our worst ways.

Remember

I make this appeal to my white brothers and sisters: Remember where God has brought us. Americans have voluntary amnesia about the worst things

in our history.

We do not want to remember during the wars of the 20th century, Black people fought for a country that hated them.

We do not want to remember Black people were told, with the legitimacy of the Supreme Court, they did not have the right to drink from the same water fountain or go to the same bathroom.

We do not want to remember Black people were physically—not just on paper—barred from moving into certain neighborhoods.

We certainly do not want to remember Black people being hung up on trees on Sunday afternoons right after church. In fact, many white people still have this very day jars with the remains of Black people who were lynched.

But we must remember. How else will we learn?

When we choose to forget or choose to change these stories to make ourselves feel better, we invite peril.

I invite all Christians of every color to remember the depths our country sank to in its formation. We have to remember the horrors and atrocities we have committed in the name of freedom. We have to listen to the voices of those who cried out against such horrors, if we will ever learn not to repeat them.

Wisdom's source

Our wisdom must not be found in the illusions of American exceptionalism. We must not make up a doctrine that centers America as the apple of God's eye, destined to rule the world. These beliefs only lead to imperialism and wanton brutality toward other peoples.

As a Christian, I argue we must lean on the words of our Christ. What we want for ourselves, do that to others. When we choose another way, we must realize as Thomas Jefferson said, God's "justice cannot sleep forever."

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