



Although sharing much common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry, often Mary and Bob find themselves approaching ministerial concerns from different angles... *He said - She said* is a venue to share differing perspectives and provide food for thought.

Blessed are the Mean of Spirit?

Bob's Perspective:

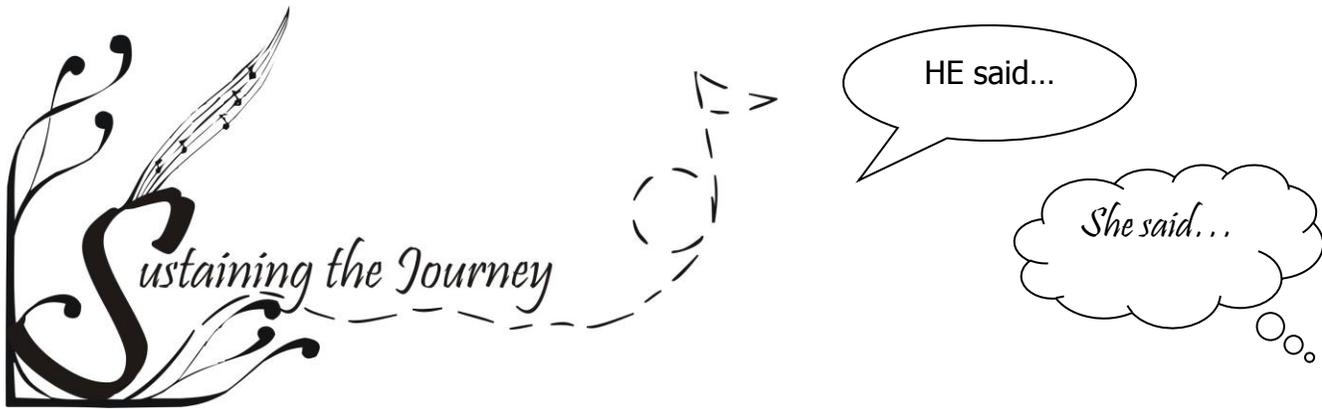
"As we approach what could well be a turning point....." has been the lead line in a number of news broadcasts over the last several weeks, and will no doubt intensify as we approach Election Day 2020. I have intentionally looked away from all of the hubbub. I haven't watched any of the debates or talking heads. I have done my very best to avoid conversations that are political in nature. It's not that I don't have opinions. I have plenty of them. It's not that I don't vote. I voted at the County Seat on the very first day that public elections were held. I'm no more disappointed in politicians than I've ever been. While some of them may be well intentioned, at the end of the day, most will do or say anything to get elected. That has been standard fare for at least as long as I've been paying attention. When I was in my early 20's I actually held an elected position in local government, so I know of what I speak.

The sad thing isn't the politicians (that's the nature of the beast) – it's the people. Since the turn of this century (the 2000's) I have noticed a trend that I find very disturbing. The trend is how mean spirited people are becoming. It's been a slow and insidious process – but a process nonetheless. I'm not here to judge (or support for that matter) any particular group or organization as far as their political or social stand. However, I do know that the political and social leanings of each individual are a clear and direct indication of their spiritual base.

Our Lord calls us to love one another. He didn't say "like one another." To be clear, we're not called to like one another, or anybody for that matter. However, we are called to love one another. So what does "love one another" actually mean? Just because one goes to church on a regular basis, or gives money (or anything else) to the poor, or donates to a charity, or puts a sign or statue in their yard – doesn't demonstrate any real capacity for loving one another. Those are all easy to do. I'm not saying any of those are bad things in themselves, but merely that none of those take much effort. I think that our Lord may have said something like, "Even the unbelievers do that much."

Love and respect take effort. A true spirit of love involves doing the tough things because they're the right thing to do – and sometimes the tough thing is to do nothing. I recently saw a sign with which I'm not sure I totally agree, but I think it's on the right path. It read, "Sometimes it's better to be KIND than to be right." I remember occasions when I was a kid and would get into mischievous situations – only to have to stand before the high court – my Dad. One time in particular comes to mind where I actually said, "I'm sorry." He looked at me, smiled, and replied, "Words are cheap; show me." Those words have rattled through my mind for over 60 years. "Words are cheap; show me." In other words, "don't tell me you're sorry, rather, show me you're sorry by your actions." I could be wrong, but I don't remember very many times (if any) in the Gospels where someone actually apologized to Jesus, but I remember him saying, "go and sin no more."

Political and social stands are one thing, and no one should abandon their core beliefs – unless, of course, they see error or fault within them. My rule of thumb comes from another lesson my parents taught me. The premise is that if you begin a thought process with, "Do you think it would be wrong if I..." (or something similar) then you already know the



answer (at least partly). By merely asking that question, deep inside you know that something is at least out of balance and needs to be examined and possibly rectified – otherwise, you wouldn't ask. And if I have to shout my opinion over everyone else, my question becomes, "who am I really trying to convince – them or myself?"

Back to the point at hand: while there may be disagreement, no one should abandon their family members or dear friends because of an opposing viewpoint. It's been my usual experience that "it's easier to attract ants with honey than with vinegar." There is no doubt that there are times when stern words are necessary. But even stern words can be expressed with kindness and compassion. "I think you're wrong, but I love you and care about you," might not solve the problem right away, but will certainly keep the door opened for thought, conversation, or even conversion (by either party) as opposed to, "you're an idiot and you're not welcome in my home," or, "if that's how you feel, I don't want to see you anymore," or "I don't know you."

I don't live the perfect life. I have my share of faults and shortcomings. But I remember our Lord saying something like "love one another as I have loved you." I certainly hope that when my day comes to stand before him, he might say something like, "you were wrong on some stuff and we'll need to deal with that, but I still love you and care about you," rather than, "I don't know you."

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

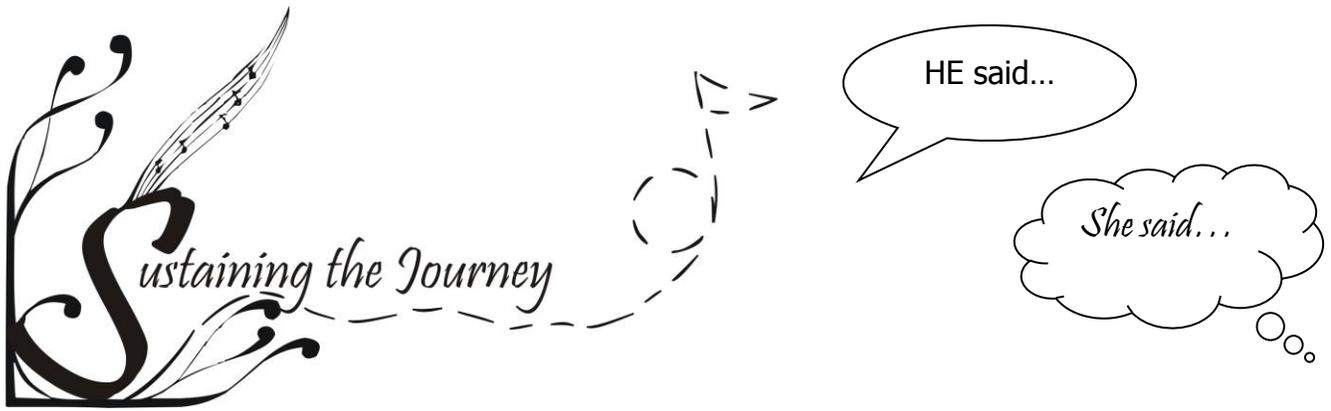
Mary's Perspective:

In general, I agree with Bob's perspective. I am a proponent of being respectful, even if you disagree. Therefore, respectfully, I take issue with one of Bob's points. "*The sad thing isn't the politicians (that's the nature of the beast)...*" I do not believe it's the nature of the beast to become a leader based on telling others what they want to hear, nor that it's the nature of politics to be rude and disrespectful to others. Quite the opposite, true leaders shine because of their honesty and respect.

Our political realm has degraded, even in my lifetime, to a point that I have lost all interest and respect for those involved in the process. It has become the norm to be mean, interrupt, and seek ultimately to serve oneself. I, like Bob, have intentionally avoided listening to media coverage, talking heads, debates, etc. Don't misunderstand – I have done my homework to know where the candidates stand on a number of issues, and my vote will be an informed vote – but I do not need to subject myself to listening to the rudeness, disrespect, and commentary.

Taking that a step farther, I believe it is important to exercise one's right to vote. The only way we can have a say is by our vote. Many people have lost their lives defending my right to vote, and it would be a slap in their faces to ignore that. However, I recently came across the term "political bullying." The general idea is that, if you promulgate your support for a candidate or issue, you open yourself up to verbal (or more) attacks from proponents of the opposing candidate or issue. So while I certainly will vote conscientiously, I refuse to engage in debate.

This election time, combined with the pandemic, has given me reason to really ponder and discern. Here are some of the conclusions I have drawn:



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1. While my only say in the process is via my vote, ultimately, I don't feel like I have a lot of control over things political.
 2. Given #1, it is all the more important that I look out for myself and my family – nobody is going to do that for me. Therefore, decisions that my husband and I make regarding finances and provisions are made with our family's best interest first in mind.
 3. True leaders don't need a lot of words. Their actions speak for themselves.
 4. Given #3, I really believe we need to hold our leaders to a higher standard. Stop taking for granted that politicians will be mean, rude, and ruthless. Stand behind true leaders and support their mission. And if you are in a position of leadership, act like it!
 5. Discipleship demands leadership by action.

Don't just say we should help the poor; actually donate to the food pantry or volunteer at the homeless shelter. Don't just say that prayer is important; take the time to pray. Saying we respect life and then exhibiting violent road rage are contradictory. Watching the talking heads and pumping one's fist and saying, "yeah!" isn't helpful. Submitting your vote is.

Bob and I try not to use *Sustaining the Journey* as our soapbox, and perhaps this blog is a bit preachy, but ultimately that's because we are passionate about this. For my own mental health, I will continue to avoid the media and political circus. For my family, I will continue to work hard. For my friends and acquaintances, I will be respectful – and ask the same respect in return. Let's get past the hubbub, and get back to the basics.

Actions speak way louder than words.