

10 January 2021

Dear Friends of Elmwood,

The outrageous rampage – or was it a rampaging outrage? – that desecrated the Capitol in Washington this week just happened to happen on the Feast of the Epiphany. Did the breathless broadcasters not notice this? If so, they deemed it irrelevant.

But I noticed it. I'm odd that way.

Herod and his Henchmen

Epiphany, remember, marks the manifestation of God in Christ to the 'nations'. Those Magi from the East are stand-ins for us. They could read the stars well enough, but they were clumsy at the local signage. They stumbled into Jerusalem instead of Bethlehem. They knocked on the door of its Capitol.

Herod the Horrible opened that door. He shouted over his shoulder to his Cabinet Secretaries, "There's some illegal immigrants from a shithole country. (Note to self: *Get that Wall built*). They're asking about some kind of *new* King. Anybody know anything about that?"

"Herod was frightened," says St Matthew, "and all Jerusalem with him" That's because the panicky moods of a mendacious narcissist are as contagious as the Covid virus. So are his lies.

"My team says you want Bethlehem, due south, about 10 kms as the crow flies," he tells them. "Fire off a tweet when you get there. Hope you find this so-called 'new king' so I can, you know, begin the peaceful transition of power. (Note to self: *Kill all infants two years old and under.*)"

It's the trademark of tyrants to turn their inner fear into outer terror, and then mask it with putrid but obvious lies.

On Epiphany Day, as his successor's election was about to be confirmed in the Capitol, the U.S. President lied his orange face off. "This election was stolen from *me!* I'm supposed to be King."

Like Herod, he sent henchmen to put things 'right'. "You'll never take back our country with weakness! You have to show strength!" he shouted to the sycophants and Maga-Zombies at his fascist rally. They roared their manic approval and swore their fealty to this Father of Lies. Zombies? Yes, sadly. You'd

have to be seriously 'brain dead' to be so thoroughly in thrall to such obvious lies.

"Stop the steal! This election was a hoax!" he lied. "It's a disgrace! Everybody knows it!" he lied again. "Let's march to the Capitol. I'm coming with you!" But that was a lie too, and just as egregious as Herod's fake promise "to go and pay homage" to the very Christ Child he meant to murder.

"Cowards lead from behind," said one commentator on TV. His face was a portrait of barely constrained anger. "Fascist leaders throw *others* under the bus."

The President did *not* lead his rioters to the Capitol. Having whipped them into a mad mob, he released them to do his bidding. He never showed. He retreated instead to his *Führerbunker* to watch the made-in-America insurrection he'd just unleashed on TV.

The Mouse and the Elephant

There comes a point in the course of a disease when the initial feelings of vague malaise, heavy fatigue, and general unwellness finally erupt into definitive symptoms. The tests for what began as a 'faint twinge' in the stomach return with a report of 'stage three' cancer.

"Now we know what we're up against," the physician might say. "This may be terminal, but there are treatments. I also want to suggest some changes in the way you're living your life. They could improve your chances. But make no mistake. Your condition is very, very serious."

I had a friend who, when he finally succumbed to what we used to call 'a nervous breakdown', told me, "I just couldn't laugh and pretend it was all OK anymore." And yet, this breakdown was the beginning of his eventual healing.

I happen to think a *good* joke is almost always in order – *if* the timing is right. But, as for my friend's illness, our Southern Neighbour's political illness is no longer a laughing matter.

So, I hope that the bumptious Elephant who inhabits the apartment below us has awoken to the seriousness of what happened in its living room on Epiphany Day. Can they see what it reveals about the 'State of the Union'? Do they fathom what it portends? Their Supreme Leader refuses to lose. He's a narcissistic Fascist. ("Just say, 'Fascist'," my brother would add at this point. "The narcissist part is implied.")

A frighteningly huge minority in that country drank his Kool-Aid four years ago. They're drunk on it still. They can't be reasoned with. Objective

evidence means nothing to them. His lies to *them* and their love for *him* are in a dangerous feedback loop that may yet bring the whole House down.

My hope that it will not bring the whole House down isn't purely altruistic. It's tinged with healthy self-interest. Pierre Trudeau once compared Canada's proximity to the U.S., seen in the light of our demographic disparity, to a nervous Mouse sleeping beside a heedless Elephant. "One is affected by every twitch and grunt," he said.

This is still true. But our world is smaller than it was then. *Every* nation sleeps next to the Elephant now. Also a Chinese Dragon.

Democracy needs Good Losers

There's an old saying that compares the making of good legislation in a democratic system to the making of sausages in a butcher's shop: "the less you see of it, the better it is for your appetite." And yet, the best thing about democracy, to paraphrase Churchill, is that every other system is that much more awful.

Democracy was never pretty. A serviceable democracy is as noisy and messy as children let loose on the playground with big bags of sweets and an abundance of sharp toys. It can't not be this way. Democracy's playground will always require moments of shouting and arguing, crying and saying 'sorry', and refereed quarrels; many bandages, detentions and 'time outs'; winners, losers, and citizen bystanders.

Democracy can't be killed by the presence of bullies on the playing field. Bullies can be sent to the Principal's Office. It's killed when the bully is himself the Principal.

Democracy needs good losers. That's the point. Someone must be willing to lose if others are to win. And the winners must never humiliate them. They've lost, yes, but they're not '*losers*', if you know what I mean. For winners will be losers too one day. Good democracies know this, as if by instinct.

Some of the most truthful and inspiring political speeches I've ever heard have been 'Concession Speeches' given by 'Losers'. There's nobility in this kind of humility, this willingness to play hard and to lose graciously.

Acceptance of loss hushes the loser's noisy ego. They tried their best, they spoke their truth, but there's no shame in this loss and there's nothing about it to fear. Acceptance gives them access, somehow, to the generous voice of a deeper

truth that has always been within them, because it already lies at democracy's foundation. And more. It lies at the foundation of Reality.

The first Epiphany revealed our true Lord to the 'nations' (forgive me if I get all Religious for a moment; it's an Occupational Hazard.) Our true Lord demonstrated an astonishing strength in his seeming weakness – a '*seeming*' weakness because that's how it seemed to Herod, Pilate, Caiaphas, and every fear-driven politician ever since: 'weakness'.

But our Lord was not weak at all. He was simply willing to 'lose', to lose his life in fact. But he was never a '*loser*', if you know what I mean.

Fear blinds fascists; fear of their own weakness, and fear of loss and limits. Fear blinds them, finally, to the unbreakable strength of the One whose only amour is a love for truth and whose only weapon is the courage to speak and live by it.

Divine Truth and Love, not Fear and Lies – these are the foundation stones of Reality. That happens to be a Religious Insight, an Epiphany. Societies are stronger and better when they build upon *them*.

Meanwhile...

I'm sorry to tell you that Brenda Martin, the sister of Darlene Tenhaaf and Brian Cross, and the dear daughter of Mary Cross, has tested positive for the Covid virus. She is doing well and isolating at home. Let's remember her and her family in our prayers this week.

Yours in the faith,
Andrew