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"Getting Over It" & Getting On With It

On citizenship, discipleship, and refusing to be gaslit.

Jan. 18, 2017

"In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

– Martin Luther King Jr.

I know I promised some of my family & friends that I'd stay away from political essays for a while. But since the election I've been deeply discouraged by most, if not all of what I've seen from winners and losers alike, and once again I need to get a few things off my chest. For what it's worth, in the end most of what follows isn't really about politics anyway--more properly, it's about *humanity*...

First I'd like to apologize for the fact that some of what follows may sound like a rant... which in fairness, it may well be. Like most folks I struggle with righteous indignation that isn't 1% righteousness and 99% indignation. All too frequently I set out to condemn what I believe are wrongs, only to end up condemning the *human beings* committing them instead--people who more often than not are doing so unconsciously, as do I far too often. Unfortunately we live in a fallen world. Suffering and injustice are all too real and righteous indignation is often called for, even from the likes of us. I value and respect every one of my friends and loved ones who voted differently than I did, and I have no desire to offend anyone. But I would be remiss if I didn't take my best shot at righteous indignation, and call it the way I see it. If/when I fall short of the *righteous* part of that, or leave anyone feeling like they've been personally attacked, please know that wasn't my intent. On that note I'll get on with it.

Let me begin with some thoughts for my friends and loved ones who supported Donald Trump...

As you probably know, I and a lot of other folks who didn't support him were pretty discouraged by the outcome. We're more than disappointed—we're genuinely frightened for our nation and the world. While that may seem unwarranted to many of you, and perhaps even ridiculous, to us it's very real. We're losing sleep over it, and not because we have different hopes for our nation and our children than you. Other than the Klu Klux Klan and other white supremacists, I'm not aware of anyone who sees Trump as the embodiment of their vision for America and didn't feel forced into accepting some necessary evils with their vote. It may come as a surprise to some of you, but most of us who didn't support him did the same thing. We too felt forced into accepting some necessary evils--not the least of which was signing up for yet *more* of a status quo we didn't want any more than you did.

But make no mistake people... like it or not, that is in fact what each of us did. We went to the polls and knowingly signed up for a set of "lesser" evils, and with them whatever collateral damage would inevitably result if our candidate won the day. Whether that happened or not we are responsible for that choice, and in our hearts we know it. So it was my hope that in the aftermath Trump supporters would be working together with the rest of us, not only to assuage our fears of losing our commonly-held hopes but to mitigate those lesser evils. Indeed, given that yours was the set that prevailed, I expected you to be leading the charge. A few of you did exactly that, and you guys are my heroes... Thank you!

But the rest of you...? Since Election Day what I've received more than anything else from your camp has been either silence, or 120 decibel gloating. I've been pelted with enough Facebook memes calling folks like me "whiners" and "poor sports" to last a lifetime. Hardly a day goes by that someone doesn't share links to obviously made-up anti-Hillary rumors from documented fake news websites (e.g. "InfoWars," "EndingTheFed," "100PercentFedUp," and more) including many based in Russia and Eastern Europe, and a few that even go so far as to openly advertise themselves as *satire* sites (Emery, 2016; Silverman and Alexander, 2016; Townsend, 2016; Zimdars, 2016; Wikipedia, 2016; 2016b; 2016c). I can count on one hand the number of these "news" stories that took more than 60 seconds to debunk from multiple independent sources, yet none of this appears to have dampened enthusiasm for them even slightly. Most had been shared thousands of times, and some even *hundreds* of thousands. Incredible as it may seem, I've actually seen a few folks go so far as to defiantly deny any undue Russian influence on the election, and without missing a beat turn right around and share links to Russia Today—the primary disinformation and propaganda apparatus of the Putin Government (Wikipedia,

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2016c; ODNI, 2017)! [More on this in later essays.] It would seem that a great many in your camp value rage-gasms more than the knowledge that they aren't [bearing false witness against their neighbor](#).

When I've dared to voice my concern about any of this, the response I received more than any other was... "Get over it...!"

Just to be clear, this isn't directed at all of you, and to be fair there's more than a little truth in some of those accusations. As I pointed out in my last, there's been no shortage of condescending elitism from many on my side of the fence, and don't even get me started about all the rioters and window-smashers—many of whom it turns out, didn't even bother to vote because they didn't get the nominee they wanted, as though throwing a tantrum is more justifiable than being a responsible citizen and supporting whatever one believes to be the best outcome possible.

The rest of us however—in fact, the large majority of us—are another matter. I for one, am **not** going to get over it. At least, not anytime soon. Allow me to explain why, and afterwards I have a few questions of my own for you followed by some thoughts for us all.

First, there seems to be some misunderstanding about what it is that I/we are not getting over. If I strike anyone as a "poor sport" perhaps that's because this wasn't a sporting event. It was an *election...* for an office that to me at least, is rather important. Had I thought it was a WWF Smackdown match I assure you I would've given my bookie very different instructions. Nor does my resistance have anything to do with what I deem offensive or politically incorrect. What's at stake here is the *Presidency of the United States of America*—a title which has a history, traditions, and sacred commitments, and with them responsibilities that are required of anyone appointed to that august office. Prior to Trump 44 men have held the presidency, none of whom were without their failings. To be sure, some were better than others and we didn't approve of them all, or have no concerns about those we did. But what those men all had in common was a recognition of the fact that this office, and everything it represents, is a *sacred calling*—one that was larger than their own egos and interests and could only be fulfilled by those willing to transcend themselves and rise to its duties.

In other words, it required them to be *presidential*.

Okay... now hold that thought, and consider the following New Year's Day tweet from "realDonaldTrump,"

"Happy New Year to all, including to my many enemies and those who have fought me and lost so badly they just don't know what to do. Love!"

Like most of what Trump has said & done, this tweet doesn't concern me because I find it offensive. I honestly don't... he's right. I did fight him, & I lost badly. I'm concerned because it's precisely the sort of behavior we expect from a 12-year-old playground *bully*, not someone who is presidential. There's virtually no evidence whatsoever, here or anywhere else, to suggest that "realDonaldTrump" even recognizes, much less embraces the importance of rising above his own ego & narcissistic rage before assuming leadership of the Free World. Sorry, but that damn well **does** concern me! Call me a "whiner" if you like--I don't want a badly behaved, chest-beating little boy in the oval office, any more than I want one playing with loaded guns or piloting a motor vehicle on the freeway during rush hour. That isn't "whining." As citizens of these United States it's our **duty** to be concerned about such things! Does "real" Donald Trump have the restraint, the judgment, & most importantly, the *selflessness* that the Presidency of the United States of America requires? To anyone paying attention it's blindingly obvious that he does not.

I didn't like George W. Bush's presidency either. I took serious issue with most of his economic, environmental and foreign relations policies. But I did "get over" his election both times for one very important reason: Like his successor and predecessors, he was (and still is) a **man**—one who recognizes that there's far more to being presidential than being a playground bad-ass, and "You're FIRED...!" is not the answer to every question facing our nation, up to and perhaps including "Whaddaya think I should do with all these really cool missiles...?"

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I can get over losing the election to someone who doesn't share my views on the economy or the environment. I can get over being branded an "elitist" for being scientifically literate enough to know that global warming isn't some nefarious conspiracy fomented by the Chinese. I can get over being accused of "liberal bias" for not being gullible enough to believe every silly, made-up rumor I get a hard-on from at Russian and Eastern European fake news websites. I can even get over the embarrassment of having a former nude model for a First Lady...

Here's what I will **not** get over...

- 1) Friends and colleagues living in fear of the very real possibility that they might be registered, and perhaps rounded up, pistol-whipped, and imprisoned in WWII-era internment camps because they profess the wrong religion...
- 2) The equally real fear that they and their children might be summarily deported to war zones, no questions asked, and with little or no due process because they were unfortunate enough to be born with the wrong skin color...
- 3) The thought of my little girl dying in a thermonuclear war because we saw fit to give control of the big red button to a guy who for all intents and purposes is an angry little boy, too busy defending his fragile ego on Twitter to attend these boring get-togethers the grown-ups call "security briefings..."

I couldn't care less what anyone's political views are, or how they voted... this is **not** acceptable. Dignity, restraint, and most importantly, **adulthood** are non-negotiable prerequisites for leadership of the Free World... period!

What we so-called "elitists" are refusing to get over is this clear and present danger to the same self-evident truths our founding fathers believed in and fought for--the unalienable right of *all* to Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. Note carefully that little word **all**... as in, not just upper middle-class, blue-eyed, white Aryan Christian males like me, and not only if we consent to never questioning anything the badly-behaved kid in charge says, thinks, or does (much less disciplining him). Anyone who disputes this is welcome to [read the Declaration of Independence for themselves](#) and look up the word "**all**" in a dictionary (it's under "A").

Believe me, I would love to be wrong about all this, and I'm not suggesting that any of the above is likely to happen. Indeed, if the developments of recent weeks are any indication, like most bullies our president-elect is all bluster and no follow-through. Nor do I believe he's incapable of rising to the office... I truly hope he does. But as any student of history will tell you, there's no shortage of precedents for what happens when angry little boys in adult bodies are given the reins of world power, and those who choose to be ignorant of history are doomed to repeat it. As long as these, and similar threats remain real possibilities I am not going to look the other way simply to avoid offending those who have their own reasons for wanting me to.

The Apostle Paul said,

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. - (I Cor. 13:11)

It's my hope and prayer that someday our president-elect will do likewise. For my part, I will do my best to support him to that end in any way I can, whether I agree with his politics or not (which right now are the least of my concerns). But make no mistake. Until he demonstrates that he has what it takes to man up and be *presidential*... in his treatment of women, minorities, citizens who dare to disagree with him, and other nation states... don't ask me to "get over it..."

I will not.

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There... Now that we've cleared that up, I have a few questions of my own for you...

For Show and Tell part 2, here's a small sample of our president-elect's track record so far. Among so many other things, to date he has;

- 1) Bragged about "[grabbing women] by the p***y. When you're a star they let you do that...!"
- 2) Bragged about trying to bed a married woman...
- 3) Openly, and viciously attacked women with racial slurs and denigrated their appearance and bodies...
- 4) Publicly made fun of a disabled person (BBC, 2015; Snopes, 2016)...
- 5) In word and deed, inspired the Klu Klux Klan, David Duke, and white supremacists to endorse him...
- 6) Appointed a known white supremacist as his chief of staff, and other known racists and architects of anti-civil rights laws to key cabinet posts...
- 7) Called for an "open arms race" with other nuclear nations...
- 8) Tweeted that we should let the People's Republic of China just keep a U.S. Navy UUV drone they illegally seized... "We should tell China that we don't want the drone they stole back. - let them keep it!" ["Yeah, that's right! Let 'em *keep* that state-of-the-art U.S. UUV technology! Let 'em *reverse-engineer* it! THAT'll show 'em...!"]
- 9) Spent more time beating his chest on Twitter than he has in security briefings...
- 10) Directed most of his public commentary not to the issues facing his administration, but to belittling those who criticized, or even dared to question virtually anything he's ever said, thought, or done, and even threatened to "go after" those who did, including many in his own party...
- 11) After rising to power on promises to "drain the swamp" of undue corporate lobbyists and special interests, formed the richest and most corporate executive-heavy cabinet in the history of the United States of America...

And whether he endorsed any of it or not, let's not forget the post-election fallout his victory precipitated either...

- 12) As soon as the polls closed a nationwide epidemic of hate crimes broke out against blacks, Muslims, and women. Within 72 hours more than 200 had occurred, the large majority of which were committed by people chanting "Trump...! Trump...!" At college campuses women were being accosted by men claiming that "it [was] now legal to grab them by the p***y..." (ADL, 2016; SPLC, 2016). By Dec. 12 that figure had risen to 1094 (SPLC, 2016b)--a rate nearly double that of the previous year (FBI, 2016), and unprecedented in recent U.S. history. Many of my Latino and Muslim friends hid in their homes terrified and in tears, afraid to go out in public or speak to anyone when they had to for groceries or work. All of which our president-elect responded to with nothing more than a few perfunctory damage-control comments disavowing support for it...

Etc. etc. etc...

Presumably all of this and more, falls within the realm of things the rest of us should "just get over." If so, it seems fair to ask what *you* think would not... Unrestrained religious persecution...? Internment camps...? Rape...? A nuclear hair-trigger with the rest of the world...? Even, God forbid... *improprieties with public email servers...?*

At what point would you be willing to acknowledge that a line had crossed beyond which it was no longer reasonable, nor moral to expect his victims, and the rest of the world to "just get over it?"

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If I honestly thought any of you were bigots or misogynists I wouldn't find this so baffling. But for months now I've watched antics like these accumulate on a daily basis only to be met with nothing but this increasingly strident "get over it" mantra. I can literally count on one hand the Trump supporters I've encountered who responded to any of the above with even a raised eyebrow, much less evidence of concern for anything other than whether they were being accused of something. I'm starting to wonder where the end of this road is... or much I don't want to believe it, whether there even is one. How can so many non-racists and non-misogynists be so nonplussed by these things? Last year during his campaign Trump said,

"I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn't lose any voters... It's like, incredible...!" (Trojan, 2016; Fox News, 2016)

Surely he isn't right... is he? So whence this deafening, interstellar silence from the winning team...?

When times change for better or worse language often evolves to reflect it. I recently came across a term I'd not heard before: Gaslighting. According to Wikipedia, gaslighting is,

A form of manipulation through persistent denial, misdirection, contradiction, and lying in an attempt to destabilize and delegitimize a target. Its intent is to sow seeds of doubt in the targets, hoping to make them question their own memory, perception, and sanity (Wikipedia, 2016d).

The term isn't new (it goes back to the late 1930's), but I've never heard it used to describe an election... until now.

In my last I pointed out that when we use words as a means to an end rather than a vehicle for truth, we cheapen them and ourselves. Do this long enough, and not only will they cease to be vehicles for truth, they'll render it irrelevant. We will arrive at a place where the difference between fact and fiction no longer matter to us—only whether a claim resonates. "Bias" will no longer mean selective data and/or unreliable methods—only whether someone pisses us off. Established and respected media outlets, universities, Governmental agencies and NGO's, and eventually, even *science*... anything that doesn't mirror our own faces and angry narratives will be dismissed as conspiratorial heresy. The Biblical term for this is *hardening our hearts*, and the further down this road we go, the more vulnerable we are to anyone with an agenda who knows what match to light. Self-proclaimed "whistle-blowers..." anonymous criminals hiding behind Guy Fawkes masks... Eastern European fake news websites... even Patriot Movement extremists will become persecuted heroes whose words we accept without question, without evidence... and without a second thought. It's little wonder that commentators are now referring this as the *Post-Fact Age*.

One often hears it said that we should "love the sinner but hate the sin." For years that struck me as little more than hair-splitting rationalization, until it occurred to me that this is precisely what Jesus did... and in all likelihood why He was crucified as well. Those who hate us can be pushed away because they've neither seen, nor cared to know us or hear our stories. If we're to be convicted in any genuinely redemptive sense, those calling us out must meet us face-to-face, and for that to happen they first must acknowledge that we **have** faces. If they cannot, or will not, we feel justified in turning our faces away from theirs.

Those who *do* see our faces are another matter however. They *have* met us face to face and embraced our humanity—often in ways we've been unwilling to ourselves. They aren't calling us out to assuage their own narcissistic rage or further any personal agenda... They do so because they know we were made for more than the familiar, self-serving brokenness we've grown comfortable with. Whether they realize it or not, they're God's prophets sent by Him to gird us and lead us where we do not wish to go (John 21:18), but desperately need to... and in our hearts we know it. Contrary to popular belief, love and hate are not opposites—they're far more alike than we may realize. Nothing on this earth evokes the latter like those who genuinely come to us in the former, and in so doing hold a mirror before us that we don't want to see. It's no coincidence that the angry mob wanted Pilate to pardon Barabbus the murderer rather than Jesus (Luke 23:18-25). Nor is it a coincidence that we prefer fake-news *rumors* about others to properly researched *facts* that reveal to us who we truly are.

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Proverbs tells us, "A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing personal opinion" (Prov. 18:2).

By contrast, David prayed, "Search me God and know my heart. Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23-24).

When we cease to think critically and demand evidence—when we stop questioning whether our indignation is the fruit of love's fierceness or our own narcissistic rage—we become *sheep*... people who are only interested in expressing our own opinions, and would gladly bear false witness against our neighbor before allowing our hearts to be searched and our anxious thoughts known. There is no clearer sign that we've lost our way.

In the end, the only book anyone will ever read is that of our daily lives. Jesus tells us that a tree is known by its fruit (Luke 6:44), and if every apple lover in the county is lined up at one tree in the orchard, you can bet there's a reason why. The KKK didn't endorse Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, nor either of the Bush's, even though the latter can hardly be called screamin' liberals. There weren't hate crime epidemics after any of their elections either. I'm here to tell you folks, there's a reason why... and like it or not, no matter how indignantly we deny being apple lovers, if the apple tree is where we seek shade from the noonday sun it's only a matter of time before the world starts putting two and two together and coming up with the obvious answer.

I can't speak for anyone else of course, but if I'd voted for Trump (or more properly, voted against the only person with any chance of defeating him) I'd have seen everything in the aforementioned 12-point list as unintended collateral damage of *my* vote. Even if I'd felt compelled to endure an apple tree for the long-term good of the orchard, it would seem to me that I carried a big share of the blame for that, and as a sworn apple-hater my first concern would've been doing anything I could to mitigate apple damage. If I didn't want to be seen as an apple-lover, I wouldn't be standing in the shade of the apple tree angrily denying that I was in line...

I'd be doing my best, however feeble, to get out of bed every morning and walk a daylight path to a different tree, picking up as many bad apples as I could carry along the way.

Mother Teresa never once had to defend herself against charges of racism, nor the Dalai Lama against charges of misogyny... on social media or anywhere else. The reason why is obvious... Those who let the Light shine in their lives don't need to tell all and sundry that they don't hate candles.

The Apostle Paul calls us not to be overcome with evil, but to overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21). It's been emblazoned ad nauseam on posters and in melodramatic pop song lyrics to the point of almost being a cliché. But that doesn't make it any less true, or in need of being repeated. No problem was ever solved, nor any tear dried by the mere assignment of blame. Here's a news flash everyone: The world doesn't need more people who are "100 percent fed up." It doesn't need more people scrambling for moral high ground, angrily accusing others of racism, misogyny, elitism, or anything else. It doesn't need more people rationalizing these things, or disavowing support for them.

What it needs is more people *demonstrating* something better by showing up in the lives of their victims and walking beside them.

Not an "elitist...?" Not a supporter of the status quo either...?

Then get involved in the lives of the Middle American workers it displaced. Instead of posting Facebook memes about how "stupid" they are for voting against their interests, try *listening* to them. Dry their tears, and hear their stories... *before* making up your mind as to what their interests are. Resist the cold, profit-driven offshoring that left them jobless. Support job retraining programs, economic incentive packages, food banks, and healthcare for their families. Better yet, HIRE one! And for those to whom it applies... whether you get the nominee you want or not, next time try *voting* instead of rioting and smashing windows!

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Not a racist...?

A day or two after the polls closed, a 12-year-old girl was confronted by a boy who told her, "Now that Trump is president, I'm going to shoot you and all the blacks I can find!" A Louisiana woman was harassed by three men in a truck who shouted, "F**k your black life!" at her and drove away chanting, "Trump! Trump! Trump...!" (SPLC, 2016). Find this little girl. Find this woman. Dry their tears and show them that they aren't alone. Let **them** know, not your Facebook critics, that this is not what you signed up for and you won't abide it. Last month the Klu Klux Klan held their "Klavalkade Victory Parade" in North Carolina in celebration of Trump's victory and their hope for a new America under his leadership. Thousands of people turned out to protest (including friends of mine who live nearby). Next time the Klan holds a parade, show up and join the protest. Stand side-by-side with Hillary supporters and others in solidarity against their hatred.

Not a misogynist...?

Find one of the college women who was accosted by male Trump supporters trying to "[legally] grab them by the p***y." Dry her tears as well, and let her know that you didn't sign up for that either. Refuse to be part of a culture that believes perfunctory apologies for such behavior, or dismissive labels like "locker room banter" are acceptable get-out-of-jail-free cards for male leaders, and the "Christian" thing to do is to demand forgiveness from their victims instead of standing with them...

I really couldn't care less how you, or anyone else voted. I promise you... One single daylight act like any of these will say more than all the indignant Facebook memes and social media denials in the history of the Internet.

What are the answers to our nation's woes...? I don't pretend to know. But I know what isn't—Allowing ourselves to be gaslit... Expressing our opinions rather than seeking understanding... Preaching at others instead of listening to them... Building walls instead of bridges... In other words, *venomous narcissism*.

It's been said that the extent to which we believe our ideology and values are what make us human is the extent to which we will deny the humanity of those who do not share them. Whatever the answers are, this I know... they must begin with **me**, not someone else. It is **I** who must get up every morning and walk that path to a different tree, even if I have to do it under the hot, noonday sun... It is **I** who must see the humanity in others, especially when they don't see things my way... It is **I** who must remind myself that the face of Christ is most visible in those who are *least* like me, not those in my own camp. It's what I choose to do with *these* people that will determine our children's future. Not keeping a safe distance but walking beside them, doing whatever I can to help shoulder their burdens and bind their wounds... including the ones *I* will inevitably cause because I too am a fallen sinner. If there's a better definition of discipleship I have no idea what it is.

At the height of the Cold War during the 80's Jim Wallis of the Sojourners community once spoke with an anti-nuclear activist. How was it, he asked him, that he could continue protesting, being arrested, enduring insults, physical abuse, and more with no sign of progress? "Well," the man replied, "I guess I never really thought about whether I was being successful, only whether I was being *faithful*."

In the end, we haven't been called to change the world. That's way above our pay grade. What we've been called to do is be *faithful*. To get out of bed every day and present ourselves as living sacrifices, wholly acceptable to God, which is our reasonable worship (Rom. 12:1). To *show up... not* on social media, but *out there* in the Valley of the Shadow of Death... where wounds bleed and tears flow, where friends, loved ones, and strangers alike are despairing, where hungry demons roam but angels can be found as well... and do whatever we can in that angry and austere landscape to be one of the angels. If every one of us would only commit to that much, no matter what our "deplorable" or "elitist" neighbors do, our faithfulness will change the world...

And therein lies our hope.

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