

Reflection by Rowley Hazard 1/31/21

Good morning!

You may know that the North Chapel's January theme is all about committing yourself to the common good.

So I thought long and hard about the common good when I set about making my new year's resolutions.

First, I made a firm commitment to driving on the right side of the road except when making a left hand turn.

This resolution was easy peasy. Driving on the right side of the road is likely to be good for me and for anyone driving toward me as well. Everybody wins. Of course, once Covid is under control should I decide to visit anywhere in the former British empire outside of Canada, I'll have to change my commitment to the left side of the road.

Secondly, I resolved to wear a mask for the foreseeable future. This would really just be a continuation of a habit I initially took up to protect myself from covid-infected other people and maintained when I later learned a mask was even more effective in keeping an infected but asymptomatic me from killing other people. Both rationales seem to meet the standard of serving myself and the common good at the same time.

My third resolution involves getting vaccinated against the virus as soon as my number comes up. Two shots in the arm makes sense again for me and for my fellow man.

But wait! Why doesn't everybody think and behave like me on the question of masks and vaccines? Don't they care about themselves and their neighbors? Are they actually pooh poohing the common good? Should I be trying to convince these nay-sayers to mend their ways?

So I got to thinking about the common good and why it's not always as clear cut as driving on the correct side of the road.

I started thinking about baseball. Early on, baseball was a total joy for me when my boyhood friends and I played a game called scrub. In scrub, 3 players are batters and everybody else is in the field. If one of the batters gets out, he goes out into the outfield. The catcher replaces him as a batter, the pitcher becomes the catcher, the first baseman becomes the pitcher and so on until each player has rotated into one position closer to batting. This game of scrub could be played forever or at least until it got dark or it was time for supper. Sometimes it got too hot and we all jumped on our bikes and went swimming. Although there was an implied goal of staying at bat as long as possible, there was no way of keeping score, so nobody ever won or lost a game of scrub. Nobody cheated. Any dispute was quickly settled by consensus so

we could get back to playing the game. We were just purely playing baseball. One hundred per cent for the fun of it.

Later on I participated in a more consequential form of baseball. For 3 summers I played second base and pitched for the Norwich VT little league. We wore light gray uniforms with maroon socks, and before each game I cleaned my spikes and ironed my tunic with Norwich across the front and my number on the back. We played against other teams from towns like Windsor and Woodstock and Lebanon and Hartford. The team we most wanted to beat was Hanover. It was us against another town team two or three nights a week, and the sidelines were packed with fans, mostly parents. Our home field was right on the town green. Our fans lined up on the third base side and the opponents along the first base side. There was a lot of chatter intended to rattle or support either the pitcher or the batter, depending on whose side you were on. Chants echoed across the field like: Hey, Batter Batter, Hey Hey Batter Batter or Fire hard in there Fire hard! There was an umpire and a scorekeeper. If the score was tied after 7 innings, we played extra innings until one team won. Somebody always won and the other team always lost. In my first year, more than a few times I cried when we lost. Baseball became an intense, sometimes desperate effort to win. Although some players were stars, everybody loved the team and we all shared this powerful commitment and allegiance to each other. If my teammate was at bat, I almost prayed he would get a hit. If I was pitching, I totally focused on striking out the batter, and I could hear and feel the support of my teammates behind me in the field. Through the emotional ups and downs of winning and losing, for me the best thing about little league was belonging to the team, knowing that all of us were rooting for each other. I had learned for the first time the happiness of belonging to a tribe.

So what does all this baseball and tribalism have to do with the common good?

In its finest form, the common good would serve everyone by reducing or eliminating suffering and by promoting happiness. Hard to find fault with those goals. So, what's the problem? The trouble with the so-called "common good " comes when people, whether as individuals or as members of tribes disagree about what is best for them. There is no apparent commonality. We are surrounded by these conflicts of interests and intents, based on our personal and tribal perspectives: our data and our beliefs.

What tribe or tribes do you belong to? As a Unitarian how do you differ from Catholics or Mormons or Pentacostals or Jehova's Witnesses? What difference does it make? How about your political party? As a Democrat, how do you feel and behave when you drive past a barn still displaying a Trump and Pence banner? As a Republican how do you feel about four years of Joe Biden? And what about your national affiliation? When they play "Oh, Say can you see" do you place your hand over your heart or hold a fist in the air? Have you ever saluted the flag of the United Nations? As a Vermonter, how do you feel when the grocery store parking lot is full of New York and Massachusetts license plates?

Once I took a class on the war in Vietnam with my mother. She was ninety so I must have been in my 60's. Toward the end of the final class, the buzz in the room grew chaotic with

efforts to identify how and why wars between nations keep happening year after year, decade after decade, century after century. As these efforts to identify a root cause of all this war-making fell silent, my mother said "Fear is the cause of war" The stunned silence was broken when one of the students asked, "What are we afraid of?" My mother replied, "The other."

In his recent New York Times opinion piece on the radicalism of Jesus, Peter Wehner spoke of the tendency to place loyalty to tribe over compassion and human connection. He allowed that when differences are perceived as threatening and we react without compassion, we become isolated, rigid in our thinking, harsh and unforgiving.

More and more often in the last months of 2020, I found myself yelling at my television. Outrage over the behaviors and attitudes displayed by all the networks, whether liberal or conservative, left me sickened in spirit and in need of healing.

So here is my final New Year's resolution: Kindness. I resolve to approach every apparent conflict in my life with kindness in my heart. When I told this to my brother, he said he had recently read about the derivations of kindness and kindred. He said that the foundation of kindness is the recognition of oneself in the heart of the other. I'm going to give it my best shot.

Happy Sunday , everyone!