

SERMON "THINGS WE COULD LOSE 1. Democracy"

Before I risk slipping into HAIR ON FIRE mode, two news nuggets recently warmed and calmed in needed places. I hope they do for you what they do for me. Aaron Judge, home run 62, took me back to heroes of old for upstate NY grade school kids, Mantle, Maris, Mays and Duke Snyder. My best bud in that era loved the Dodger Duke Snyder. When they replayed that clip of Maris' teammates having to coax him from the dugout to accept the applause and praise of the roaring crowd in the stands when he muscled past the great Babe Ruth and hit number 61, it was a reminder of a time and day of modest achievement. Judge's home run 62 seemed in the Maris mode. There may be mitigating factors (how many games in the season) but so long as they're not performance enhancing drugs, the 62 is just darn impressive.

And Bill Nelson, head of NASA seemed to hit an even bigger and far more consequential home run with that experimental asteroid strike that changed the asteroid's course. Nelson just beamed, "we can save the planet," a pretty great accomplishment in a time when government has more things to fix than we have confidence in them fixing. Proud of our former senator! Maybe you also read this week that China has armies of drones ready to attack wildfires. Could we rent them out? Where are ours? We surely have the fires. So we savor Nelson's and NASA's great moment. Now, if like me, you lie awake at night wondering what you should be worried about, asteroids aren't as big on that list as they once were.

But America's DEMOCRACY is. Our founders knew that government by and for the people could only work by checks and balances, separation of powers, respected boundaries between state and federal governments ***and no established religion.*** They knew about the blood drenching wars of Europe between Catholic and Protestant. The founders were flawed but brilliant and disproportionately Unitarian. In all honesty and humility, that has to account majorly for their brilliance.

What they crafted has lasted for two centuries+, through foreign attacks, England in 1812, Al Qaeda in 2001, through a bloody civil war and through world wars. Who would have thought or imagined that power-hungry partisans would opt for political power over our rich constitutional heritage and our founders' vision? AND WHO COULD POSSIBLY HAVE FORESEEN THAT BLACKS, ASIAN-AMERICANS, LATINOS, NATIVE AMERICANS, LGBTQ'S AREN'T THE MINORITY - SORRY, BUT MY NEEDLE COULD GET STUCK HERE, ***THEY AREN'T THE MINORITY WE HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT.*** They fought for their due share of humanity, of power, they still are fighting for their share - they want their share, not to shut others out.

I hasten to say, it may sound like I am partisan here and have only one target in mind. But Any party or rabble rouser could play to grievance and woo us, or woo enough of us away from constitutional protections for all. And that's what has happened. We can't say we have a reliable two party system anymore, a system of two political parties with competing economic views and competing visions of America's place and obligation among the nations. It could be either or any party that could jeopardize our constitutional past and future. So many military chiefs have had the courage to say, you don't swear an oath to a leader. And any leader who wants such is not about to protect what he or she was elected to protect. The label could change so we have to be smarter than that. I hope to the heavens we are! The Democrats had Huey Long, Kingfish, governor then Senator from Louisiana who had a plan for America with him on top, but an assassin kept him from challenging FDR in 1936. Populist heroes come in all labels.

There are things I would rather talk about because I try to talk about things that I know something about, at least a little something, at least have read up on, or in an emergency GOOGLED. (Google now rewards my visits with, Shouldn't you be contributing something?) I don't know enough in the following matters but they keep me up or awake. So I hope enough solid legislators will craft a package to prevent these and more.

A group of partisans were allowed to take over an Arizona county's voting machines and do WE KNOW NOT WHAT to them for about six months. I never read of any watchdog organization watching these so-called patriots. How could the state or federal government not have protections in place to keep anyone's hands off such vital machines? When you go to vote, early voting here starts Wednesday, partisan placards and partisan people have to be so far from the machines. But after the vote, HAVE AT THEM? What harm could there be; what harm could mischievous power-hungry partisans pull off?

And how can we not have law enforcement protecting election workers and responding effectively to the families of election workers being threatened? Many of you saw that young black woman at one of the hearings sobbing through her pride at such an opportunity in Georgia, to help an election come off, and then her dismay at her mother and grandmother being threatened, for what? She said her grandmother knew about the lynching history of the south and a white mob at her door. Will we need military presence around polling places in the future, like next week or next month?

And we have heard of fake electors signed on to challenge those who are supposed to vote for the winner of their district. Apparently there were plenty of alternative electors ready to challenge the certified or to be certified lists of electors. And the plan was, if

there were enough challenges, then the state legislatures got to decide, **not the vote tallies** in the states. And most state legislatures belong to one party. The original Jerry Falwell was smart back in the 80s to announce the key to political control is/are the school boards, which can ban books and shrink or enlarge young minds, and state legislatures which have plenty to do with elections like gerry-mandering districts. Definition of gerry-mandering: political manipulation of boundaries with the intent of creating undue advantage.

Look, I know this is not sermon stuff, but this is this minister's nightmare stuff. Because if our country doesn't set election protection high up there, you know, almost as important as inflation... I've heard there is a bi-partisan group in the two houses of Congress working on such an order of protection. I hope and pray! And if you can inform me where I have been wrong about any of these matters, I'll add another column to our update, titled, THIS MINISTER STANDS CORRECTED GLADLY!

How can democracy not matter greatly in the coming election?!

Every important aspect of our lives depends on it. AND OUR CHILDREN'S AND GRANDCHILDREN'S FUTURE!!! I felt the same panic when I realized that an elected leader was trying to weaken NATO. Making the sales pitch that the important thing was whether the countries in NATO were paying their fair share. A point for sure, but THE point?! The important thing for three quarters of a century has been the peace that NATO has overseen and the freedoms that peace has afforded us and increasingly in member countries. So much so that contiguous countries are wanting in; I haven't heard of any wanting out. How could all that be overshadowed and possibly canceled out by disagreement over contribution levels?

Two matters of social psychology have brought perspective and insight into the terrifying situation, to me anyway and I know to some of you, of **the polarization that is contemporary America**. If someone can make the case that some group, some other is getting more of the pie, the pie that should be coming to us, then groups hating each other and willing to act on that are readily formed. And that becomes more empowering and motivating than anything we may have in common. Protecting my group, protecting MY MINORITY, is a bigger deal than protecting our democracy.

And speaking of my group, is it possible that these nightmare scenarios, scenarios of what we are willing to delete to the dustbins of history, are brought on by fear of people of color, by fear of people who love differently? I think we still hear or need to, FDR, the only thing we have to fear is fear. So for a long time now, almost half a century we have

been hearing that the demographics of our country are changing and people of color are having more babies. So that's our driving fear?

Last week I read a story that I haven't been able to find since. You probably know it. A sociologist in 1952 took two groups of young teen or preteen boys to a park in Oklahoma, I think called Robbers Creek or Cave. The groups named themselves Rattlers and Eagles. The groups were kept apart and told of the other's existence or presence there. And negative impressions of the other group were formed before they met. Then the groups were brought together and fists began to fly. Not quite Westside story but close.

Then the leaders paired the groups in twos with a boy from each of the original two groups; the twos were given a task to work on together, tasks that affected the whole group. The end result was, the groups of young boys felt differently about each other after they had worked on and accomplished something together. And the suggestion in what I read was that this polarized country of people who are choosing to live in bubbles, media bubbles, suburb bubbles, social groups of like-minded only - the suggestion was, **this country needs mandatory national service** for all, like aged 18 to 20. So we can't get into adulthood, or the D or R party, without having rubbed shoulders with people, looked in the eyes and talked and listened to people we didn't bubble-wrap ourselves away from. When you work with people who seem different, you learn the differences are superficial and you are more alike. Like FDR's CCC, the civilian conservation corps. Schools have become bubbles so something large scale is called for. We've got to do something big and bold to break through the polarization. **It is leading to the death of our democracy.**

We're coming up on a month that to me wreaks of GRATITUDE. And reminds me that I should. It starts with All Saints Day, Nov. 1, a day Christian churches lift up for reasons I never understood, but I know who have been my saints and still are. And then Election Day. I have always been grateful for that and hope we all can be again. And Veterans Day, reminding us what many, many people gave up so we wouldn't have to. And THANKSGIVING. So many reminders that we had a lot of help to have what we have, and ***we don't want MEMORY LOSS*** to jeopardize what belongs to all of us, and our heirs.