

## A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered-Down

Tuesday, August 18, 2020

# ***Staying Sharp! — In an Increasingly Dull World***

*As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.* —Proverbs 27:17

*To live above with saints we love, 'twill be an untold glory!*

*To live below with saints we know.... now that's another story.* —Anonymous

How is one to stay sharp? That is, how shall we remain mentally and spiritually thoughtful and responsive in the midst of this demanding world? The usual answers to this search range from lots of reading to crossword puzzles and exercise, and though all of these activities are commendable, they miss out on a key element of keeping sharp. That all important missing dynamic is explained in a terse and artful way in Proverbs 27:17 —*As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.*

How are we to stay sharp? We are to sharpen one another! Teachers should keep their students attentive and engaged, but that challenge should not be one-way. Students should also be challenging their instructors. Bosses, employees and fellow workers are to be doing an ongoing work of teaching and challenging one another. The image of iron sharpening iron is a harsh, or even violent sounding one, and this is for good reason. Argument, disagreement and debate can be difficult and occasionally unpleasant, but when done well they are very much for our good. Sadly, this kind of ongoing human engagement is lacking in our world, and how we need it!

Politics was intended, among other things, to be a world of deliberation and exchange of ideas and concerns. Our Senate is hailed as the greatest of deliberative bodies, but there is one problem with that praise – they no longer deliberate! Science, at its best, is meant to be an ongoing debate and refining of theories. Experiments are to be performed, data collected and analyzed, and conclusions drawn, and all this is to be evaluated, discussed and further researched by a wider world of scientists. These days, when one does not want their theory challenged the claim is made that it is “established science” and therefore above any further discussion. We hear too many attacking others with their “established science,” and too few exchanging perspectives and ideas. We would rather not deal directly with those who disagree, and being sharpened will occasionally present its share of discomfort, but all for a very good purpose.

People of the Church should be familiar with this dynamic. When the Church works well, we don't necessarily agree, but we do all stick together as family and hash it out as best as we can. Often times we simply agree to disagree and understand that we are all the more brothers and sisters in Christ as we deal honestly with each other and with God. When we look to the New Testament, we find a Church full of debate, faction and disagreement, and even before the Church, in the Gospel accounts of the Twelve in their training, we find all kinds of conflict and disagreement. Too often in our day a disagreement in a congregation can send someone shopping for another fellowship where folks are more likely to see eye-

to-eye, and be the poorer for it! Granted, it is much more comfortable to be among those with whom we overwhelmingly agree and are most unlikely to be confronted with a difference of opinion, but are we really being the Church?

This has become a time for criticizing our political leaders for their inability to work together and to resolve differences, and the criticism is deserved. As we do find fault, let us also pray, and let us resolve to do all we can to stay sharp, to engage one another, to learn as we are able, and when need be, to agree to disagree. Let us be a positive witness to the world of how iron sharpens iron.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

*O God, who hast brought us near to an innumerable company of angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect; grant us during our earthly pilgrimage to abide in their fellowship, and in our heavenly country to become partakers of their joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. —William Bright, 1824-1901*