

A Call to Global Fellowship

As American Citizens, we live in a very challenging time. Our economic and military prowess alone gives us unique and unprecedented levels of global moral responsibility.

But, how does one begin to examine and embrace those responsibilities? We can find a starting place by asking ourselves a clear and compelling question. “What does it mean to be an active moral citizen in the most powerful nation on earth?”

People answer this question in a wide variety of ways. The second question is then "Do some responses reveal greater moral maturity than others?" My answer to that question is yes.

In defense of that assertion, I offer the following overview of five developmental steps that can lead an individual towards a greater sensitivity, openness and connection as citizen of the planet. The five steps are: self-oriented, curiosity about others, company with other, compassion for others and courageous solidarity with others.

Self-Oriented

Where can one start in the journey of development other than with self. The problem comes not from self as a starting point but from neglecting to move beyond this point.

The word “*self*” suggests separation. From this self-centered view, others, especially those whom we see as different can be seen as the “stranger.” In a global context, a person at this stage may have thoughts like:

“They dress different.”

“Their food is weird.”

“They worship a different God.”

Strangers warrant suspicion and at this stage, we are likely to keep a safe distance from the “other”. Most of this analysis is done in the head, maybe based on limited information or stereotypes all of which serves to objectify the other and turn them into “its” as opposed to persons.

A person moves towards the next step when they are no longer satisfied with their assumptions and they begin to wonder if there is more to the story.

Curiosity about Others

Curiosity from the Latin “cura” – “attention” causes us to turn our attention to include others and in the process, we may begin to observe the others with greater awareness. We begin to see the other as interesting and desire to get closer than our earlier value judgments make the liberating shift into questions.

Small shifts in curiosity can lead to more complex questions so that “They worship a different God” becomes “She seems like a good person, I wonder her faith teaches?”

Throughout this entire process, the individual is becoming less distant and more curious and the “other” becomes more interesting.

Although we are making progress, the “other” here remains objectified. But there is hope here because curiosity opens the door to the possibility of deepening the relationship.

The shift to the next step occurs when the individual risks an encounter with the “other”.

Company with Others

The root of the word “company” from Latin roots *com* and *panis* literally means with bread.

Sociologists report that we eat with those who we share a close connection already or those whom we want to get to know better. When we share bread with others we normally share stories too. We tell each other about our families, childhood, beliefs, etc. in the sharing of bread and stories we build new relationships. As we do the “other” becomes “neighbor”.

Some readers may have volunteered at a local soup kitchen. If they were fortunate, one of the staff might have encouraged them to put down the serving ladle and go sit with the guests. It is one thing to dish up food to strangers it is another break bread with them. It takes courage to strike up a conversation with those who might make us uncomfortable but when we do, we create more neighbors and fewer strangers for ourselves.

A person at this step becomes ready for the next when they become interested in not just meeting a new person but understanding their story.

Compassion for Others

“Compassion”, to “suffer” “with” marks another major shift in the journey towards global citizenship. When we are privileged to know the struggle, witness the pain and acknowledge the suffering of the “other” turned “neighbor,” we move onto sacred ground and have the opportunity to become sisters and brothers of the heart.

When we have compassion, we begin to see, like Dr. King and others that “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality” and that which diminishes the humanity of one, diminishes the humanity of all. Compassion connects us to the struggles of others and invites us to first feel their pain and then act to resolve it as if it were our own.

The last step is a some level a call – in the divine sense – to place ourselves with the other in the most profound fashion possible – willingly sharing the pain until the day of justice and shalom.

Courageous Solidarity with Others

“*Solidarity*”, fellowship in gain or loss, brings us into union with the struggles and victories, the challenges and gifts of the least fortunate and most vulnerable in our midst.

In the first book of the classic adventure trilogy, by J.R.R. Tolkien, Lord of the Rings, we witness the formation of the Fellowship of the Ring. In this case, the fellowship is a diverse collection of characters (Elves, Dwarves, Hobbits and Humans) who band together in a common

vision and quest to restore peace and justice to Middle Earth. They ate, planned and struggled together; while they learned to deeply care for one another along the way.

In the midst of their fellowship a miraculous shift occurred -- the imagined line that we use to distinguish self from others disappeared. Ben couldn't swim but in the end, he ventures into the deep waters -- placing his life at risk -- to follow and support Frodo. Ben could do nothing else -- he and Frodo had become soul mates.

In the 1950's and 60's, we saw a profound fellowship arise in the Civil Rights Movement in this country. Blacks, Jews, Whites, Christians and Muslims struggled together in creative fellowship to deliver the sweet justice inherent in the promise of America to those who had more often tasted bitter fruits of injustice.

While there is still redemptive and liberating work to do at home in America for Blacks, Hispanics, Native American's Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual and Transgender community, etc.; today we are called to embrace the work associated with global justice.

Unjust working condition including, sweatshops, slavery, indentured servitude and impossibly low wages, plus infant mortality, AIDS, starvation, undemocratic regimes, lack of human rights, and the related unimaginable despair are the modern day seven horses of the apocalypse. Pain is pain and the magnitude of suffering that our global sisters and brothers endure calls us to turn our hearts more fully towards the global family.

Like Ben, in fellowship we are called into waters that appear to be over our heads. Our hope lies in believing that in the choosing of a moral future for ourselves, our nation, our Church and our world, we will learn to swim!