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7 Thoughts on Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness

Michael Burcham - Guest Columnist

Below are my own reflections - seven thoughts about life, about liberty, and about the pursuit of happiness.

1. Democracy is not a Christian concept. It's a form of government. America's Founding Fathers worked very hard to separate church and state. Churches have their own form of government. Our democracy was established to ensure "...life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness..." The church was established to increase our faith, a source of fellowship, a place to find compassion, encouragement and love. In both cases the realization of the original purpose can get distorted.
2. Deep passion and devotion to God prompts people to gather in their churches with others who hold similar views under the banner of a nonprofit corporation. Church can either be a source of greater enlightenment and acceptance – or a place where narrow views and dogma are reinforced. Some begin to believe their "version" of truth is the only real truth.
3. Our nation is deeply divided as we transition from a manufacturing/industrial economy to a knowledge economy. Workforce retraining to knowledge skills works, but it is human nature to resist change. Some still think these old manufacturing jobs will come back. Unfortunately, they've been replaced by machines. Economic uncertainty creates fear. Fear drives us to give up our freedoms for the illusion of safety especially when filtered by bias and religious dogma.
4. The lines between fact and fiction get blurred. Some people seem to either shape the facts or filter them to fit their own version of reality and they see the world through their own biases. In such small minds, ignoring science seems perfectly OK. Many folks already attend churches where extreme creationists and literal translators have ignored science for decades. The 24/7 news on cable TV encourages people to ignore facts. Rumor is better news than truth.
5. Bad things happen even to good people. In my hometown, there are people there who believe every good or bad thing that happens is directed by God. I find that type of thinking as lacking basic logic and enlightenment. I lost my son last year in a tragic automobile accident. I don't buy the idea that a loving god would "take" your beloved son because he needed another angel or had a higher purpose. I prefer to

believe Ecclesiastes 9:11: "...time and unforeseen occurrence befall us all." Our maturity and spirituality largely define how we will deal with adversity when it arrives. That's what life is: A journey of the good and the bad.

6. We are creatures of free will and we are capable of recreating ourselves. If we choose to accomplish this goal, we can shake the limits of science, surpass the problems of this earth, surpass the limits of class, and attain genuine enlightenment. As people become enlightened, they leave behind narrow views of God and embrace all of his creation as equal. God is bigger than most people can imagine. He has been worshiped in many ways, through many images, and called many different names for centuries by many civilizations. To even imagine you have the corner on defining God is a very naive thought.
7. Attempting to limit another person's rights or freedoms (to work, to become educated, to question dogma, to marry the person they love, to vote, etc.) reflects fear, ignorance and lacking enlightenment. It's always easier to restrain the freedoms of others than to challenge our own biases. We should always look for the good in others; to make allowances for their shortcoming; and combat spiritual tyranny with reason, truth and respect for others.

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