



November 14, 2016

President's Waypoint: A Union Deeply Divided

The Presidential election turned out nothing like my reckoning of the situation. Like many, I was operating rather blissfully in my own reality bubble. Unfortunately, it gives me no great solace that many of you were in that bubble with me. It doesn't help matters that the results of the Electoral College and the popular vote were not aligned, even though we know there are reasons that they're not necessarily supposed to align. In any case, our election process has resulted in a President-elect, whose term will begin Friday, January 20, 2017, at noon after Chief Justice Roberts administers the oath of office. There has been tremendous discord and unrest across the county, including protests, the likes of which I have not seen after a U.S. Presidential election. We are a Union deeply divided on many levels.

Over the weekend, in my personal exploration of the situation, I turned to the pages of a couple of books I haven't looked at in some time, including Profiles in Courage by Robert F. Kennedy, Habits of the Heart by Robert N. Bellah, et al., and The Courage to Teach by Parker J. Palmer. From these disconnected writings, I want to share some connected thoughts for your consideration related to community and advocacy.

In the early 1900's, Theodore Roosevelt said that, "A great democracy must be progressive or it will soon cease to be either great or a democracy." Time has not diminished the value of this statement, and in many ways, Roosevelt's words are more important today than they ever were. The progressive search for excellence presses on in this country through education. There is relentless pressure to improve the quality of life, with education as the centerpiece of that process. Education absolutely is the centerpiece – the pathway – for a better quality of life, and the community college, our SBCC, is the first step along that pathway. As members of this college community, we must never forget the importance of this overarching mission. We have people counting on us.

Because of the critical importance of our mission, as Bellah expresses, this is not the time to be focused on individualism or isolation. Our community (i.e., academe) is more important than ever. While we will disagree, my hope is that we will do so respectfully, giving each other an abundance of charity, like we would family members. Certainly we all have good and bad days. I do not agree with some of the views expressed on the all-campus email, but nothing has been so offensive to isolate or sanction anyone. Everyone in this college, and his or her views, are essential to our greatness.

We can ill afford to shame any member, or maybe worse, withdraw ourselves from our own community because of differing views. Bellah reminds us that, "being one's own person – does not entail escaping our ties to each other, and that real freedom lies ... as we acknowledge our common responsibility to contribute to the wider fellowship of life." I think this holds for us in a college community. Our work ahead is too important to alienate each other, when there is no more important time to understand differences and be together.

A second idea for your consideration relates to standing together as advocates for those values important to us at SBCC. Palmer calls this the “Grace of Great Things.” In explaining this, he points out that simply relying on the conventional pieces and functions of the “educational community” ignores the great, overarching things that called us together in the first place. Words do not adequately capture subjective meanings, but in general sense, here is a sample of the grace of great things I see at SBCC: Open educational access, student success, social welfare, racial harmony, nonviolence, peace, freedom, diversity, equity, civility, empowerment, and justice. Each of these is a powerful, value-laden concept that creates a culture of significance in this college. They pull us together.

We must defend the grace of these great things, fortifying our educational mission and building our related vision, standing stronger than ever in the values educating the neglected, the forgotten, the poor, the homeless, the disadvantaged, and the many others without a voice. We must get over being defensive of the politics and focus on our shared responsibility to help these students be part of the solution going forward. While the Union may be deeply divided over the election of President-elect Trump, our college community and its “grace of great things” must bind us closer than ever to our students and each other.

Together forward,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Anthony". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial letter 'A' that loops back. The name is written in a professional, yet personal style.