

There's a couple I know who celebrated their wedding anniversary last month and she posted on Facebook about their crazy life together. That was a curious adjective to describe married life, I thought to myself. Crazy? There are, of course, several different meanings of the word "crazy." There's crazy as in senseless, irrational, foolish. Then there's crazy as in being fond of something or someone. And finally, there is crazy as in wild or extreme or fanatical.

So this woman was talking about their crazy life together, and I wondered what kind of crazy she meant, and thought about their lives, which were utterly chaotic and concluded that the only fitting definition was crazy as senseless, irrational, and foolish, with maybe a dash of crazy as wild, extreme, and fanatical. They are the kind of people who love drama, who thrive on tragedy. Every event, no matter how small a matter it was to begin with, gets escalated into this volcanic, boiling cauldron of emotion, which eventually spills over ensnaring, trapping, engulfing others.

Whenever Joan and I talk about them, which is often because they fascinate us, in much the same way you can't help but comment on a car wreck you come upon. When we talk about them, Joan will often say, "Those people need to get over themselves."

I think countries get like this too, sometimes. Sometimes whole nations get caught up in an issue, emotions escalate, and reason, judgement, and perspective go out the window. We act without thinking and are inclined to believe anything we hear or read, too inclined to accept ungrounded opinion as established fact. In those moments, we become especially vulnerable to those people who whisper in our ears that the economy is nearing collapse, that our leaders are corrupt, our children are failing, our morals worsening, our prospects diminishing.

These same doomsayers often point to a subgroup in our society and say, “And they are the reason for our decline. Those people right there.”

During World War I, socialists were the enemy, so that kind-hearted and eloquent Hoosier, Eugene Debs, a champion of the working men and women everywhere, was charged with violating the Sedition Act and sent to prison.

In the 1920 and 30’s, anti-Semitism and anti-Catholicism spread like a pox.

During World War II, 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry—men, women, little boys and little girls—were forced from their jobs and homes, and placed in prison camps.

In the 1950’s, Senator Joseph McCarthy, with the eager encouragement of millions of Americans, wrongly accused thousands of people of being communists and ruined their lives and livelihoods.

Today, others point to Hispanics and Muslims and blame them for our ills.

During these times, and still today, women and people of color have been kicked to the curb.

At the center of these moral failures were a handful of leaders whose lust for personal power and acclaim was so keen they forsook America's deepest values and urged us to do the same.

We are in the midst of a presidential campaign in which these destructive prejudices have not only been revived, but fueled, because we have permitted ourselves to become energized and engulfed by the irrational passions of some among us, who have lost their sense of balance and perspective, escalating very real but manageable concerns into looming crises, consuming our nation with an overwrought fear of our future. They have gone from whispering to shouting. "America's best days are at an end. The sky is falling. The nation will be ruined if we're not elected..." And on and on. To them I say, "Get over yourselves." We are not actors in a dystopian fantasy. Americans will not be wandering the world homeless and afraid. We need to get a grip and get over ourselves.

Because this drama has happened in the course of a political campaign, many have assumed these are political matters and therefore have no place in the life and conversation of the church. They are mistaken. The well-being of others, especially the well-being of the outcast and marginalized, is the core value of the church. Of course, the church should involve itself in such matters. Of course, the church should express the ideals of the gospel.

“Whatsoever you do unto the least of these, you do unto me,” said Jesus of Nazareth. What is that but a cry for social justice? Long before these issues became talking points in a political agenda, they were spiritual concerns, measures of our commitment to the way and life of Jesus.

This mean we will live with charity, courage, and clear-headedness. We will conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the high calling of Christ. We will not hate, we will not fear, we will not diminish others to elevate ourselves. And we will keep a proper perspective about our situation.

This past week, several of us went to the airport to welcome a Syrian family to America. Fairfield is their sponsor and partner as they begin new lives. A father, and mother, and their three little daughters, who fled their home in Aleppo, Syria three years ago. Their sky did fall. To act as if America is in similar straits is the height of craziness. We need to get over ourselves.

Friends, sometimes in a democracy, the crazy people get the microphone. We need to remember they don't speak for everyone, not even for most.

Sometimes in a democracy, people so magnify their anxieties they lose all sense of perspective. We need to affirm the basic values of wisdom, human decency, and godly faith.

Sometimes in a democracy, people neglect compassion, which is why we in the church must never forget that whatsoever we do unto the least of these, we do unto Jesus.