

No Room for Arrogance

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Arrogance is defined as overbearing pride. To be arrogant is to “display a sense of overbearing self-worth or self-importance, marked by an assumption of one’s superiority toward others.” It is the direct opposite of humility, the quality of being humble, defined as “marked by modesty in behavior, attitude or spirit”, of being unpretentious. (American Heritage Dictionary).

Proverbs 16:18 tells us “Pride goes before destruction; and a haughty spirit before a fall.” And Jesus, in his sermon on the mount instructed his followers “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5)

Old Testament and New Testament alike tell us to beware of pride and arrogance. Unfortunately, in the hustle and bustle of daily life it is easy to forget these basic admonitions. And as for our current political environment, arrogance has become the norm. But pride and arrogance come with a price, for with every arrogant act and expression of superiority, we lose a part of our basic humanity and the civility that defines our cultural heritage.

An example of our national failure in this regard is how we deal with immigrants and refugees. We readily perceive ourselves as superior to Mexicans, Guatemalans, Syrians and others desperate to come into the United States to escape prejudice, persecution and even death. Jesus gave us the gold standard by which we should guide our actions: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.” (Matthew 5:7)

If that were not clear enough, Jesus later expanded on his admonition for mercy (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus asked an inquisitive lawyer what he thought was necessary to enter into heaven. The lawyer answered in part that he must love his neighbor as himself. He then asked Jesus, “But who is my neighbor?” Jesus responded with a most remarkable parable. “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers.” Left to die beside the road, and ignored by a passing priest and an aloof Levite, he was finally taken in by a reviled Samaritan, bandaged, and put up, at the Samaritan’s expense, at a local inn to recover.

Jesus asks the lawyer, “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” The lawyer replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

At which Jesus, always an expert in understatement, told him “Go, and do likewise.”

So tell me, dear reader, how does the campaign rant “Build the wall! Build the wall!”, or the anti-Muslim travel entry bans issued by our new president, or your own personal feelings toward those human beings who are seeking safety from persecution and death and a better life in our land of opportunity, how do these jibe with the very clear and unambiguous exhortations of Jesus? As a secular humanist, I deeply respect and value the moral principles attributed to Jesus’ teachings. One should expect that, as followers of Christ, Christians should do no less.