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Witness for Justice #464

February 22, 2010

Bound by the Blizzard

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I've been snowed in lately. A lot. As the snowpocalypse struck the Mid-Atlantic last week, I rejoiced. I'm from New England and nothing makes me feel more at home than three feet of snow on my front steps. I love what a blizzard can do to people. It forces us to be present in our community. To recognize that we are part of a whole – that the world is larger than just ourselves and our immediate needs and wants.

It reminds us to love our neighbors, which seems like a straightforward commandment, but somehow becomes easier in a crisis. We check to see if the elderly couple down the street has power. Help struggling motorists dig out their cars. Share food with the guys upstairs.

The gift of snow, especially in a city like Washington DC, is that it unites the community and gives us all something politically neutral to talk about it. The lines that divide us – partisan, religious or otherwise – get covered up like the sidewalk.

It makes me wonder. Why is it so difficult to love each other on your average, snow-free day? Why is it that we're so quick to distance ourselves from each other?

We're living in a world where we don't have to know our neighbors to be social. We can instantly connect to our friends all around the world instead. If we don't want to, there is no need to interact with people who think differently from us. It's socially acceptable (and for many people preferable) to ignore your fellow passengers in the elevator/train/bus and turn your attention to your Black Berry; to avoid eye contact with strangers; to go years without knowing the names of people you encounter every day.

With relationships come trust, understanding, and forgiveness. So what do we have to start with if we refuse to connect with those around us? Will we tolerate a friend who thinks differently than we do? Can we love people whose opinions may actually offend us?

Do we really have a choice? The command to love our neighbors did not come with loopholes. We weren't instructed to love our like-minded neighbors - only the ones who vote my way or pray the same way I do.

It's an issue that applies to people all across the political spectrum. Can conservatives find it in their heart to love, and still disagree with former Governor Howard Dean? Can progressives hold a man like Pat Robertson in love, even if they find his beliefs counter to their own? How can we be tolerant people, even in the face of disagreement or intolerance?

It's not easy, but personally, I'm hoping the good will stick around longer than the snow.

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