

Small Talk – October 8 2021
By Michael Small

Unlike my mother who was a good cook – her mother was a great cook – everything from scratch. Often using food, she had canned in the fall or fresh fruit from the trees at their home. One of the most amazing things she did was making apple pie. The crust was delicate, flaky, and melted in your mouth. The apples were just right. And the top of the pie was huge – rising to the heavens perfectly browned with a little sugar sprinkled on the top. You didn't need to spoil the pie with ice cream – it stood on its own. The ingredients were exquisite, perfect, and after eating all were well satisfied. It was made with a song in the heart and most importantly love all around. That pie making missed a generation (my mom) but was passed down to my twin sister and then down to her daughter.

The story is told of my niece making that same pie. It too looked exquisite, perfect, a thing to be admired. But, before cutting into it, a sudden gasp came from Amy. She realized her fatal error. Rather than using sugar to make the pie, she had used salt. Of course, it was a huge disappointment! The pie was inedible.

The ingredients we use and put into things matter! We know that what we put in our bodies can lead to health and well-being or illness, discomfort, and even death. It is the consensus, I think, that what we put in our air and water – they too make a difference. Too many pollutants and the air warms with devastating results. We need to be more diligent and disciplined about what we do with, to, and for this planet earth carefully choosing the ingredients we use.

Now, in the American discourse, we are reaping the consequences of being careless with the ingredients we put into the streams of consciousness, conversation, and of information. We clearly know the internet can be a tool that unites, yet, more than anything, it has become an instrument of division, misinformation, and hate filled causes. School Board meetings are now places of threatening hostility and yelling, with little time for conversation and careful decision making. A masked mother and masked child cannot walk together on the sidewalk without being harassed by anti-vaccine persons. Reason and simply the facts have been replaced by opinion, be it right or wrong. Respect has been replaced by irrational judgment. Kindness has gone by the wayside and is replaced with a meanness of spirit standing righteously on the altar “my rights, my liberties – and the rest of you be . . .”

We know in the times of Jesus things were contentious. There was a debate about what you could eat, what was Kosher and not Kosher. Jesus concludes, it is not what you put in your mouth that matters, it is what you put in your heart, and it is what comes out of your mouth that defiles. It is what you say that matters. It is what you do that matters. And it is your actions and interactions that matter. Are they kind? Are they just? Are they done with respect for self and the other? Are they done with that mysterious ingredient that is love? Are your actions done with integrity? Are you grounded upon the golden rule – “Do unto others as you would have them do to you!”?

These are tumultuous and perilous times. And I think this fragile democracy is hanging by too few threads. In my studies of history, I as many others, have often wondered how good and faithful Lutherans could become Nazis who wreaked havoc and death upon the world and who managed the death camps that killed millions of Jews – in a sense, their neighbors, brothers and sisters, friends. I have often wondered how good Christian folk could become overwhelming filled with hate for the other and instruments of a war machine. And I have always thought – that could never happen here in America.

I am now beginning to see how good people can be turned by bad ingredients, by mistruths, alternative facts, inuendo, and hatred. I also think it is not too late to turn the tide. But good people, need to be good people. Don't return hate with hate. Don't speak mistruths but speak truth.

Let's use good and healthy ingredients in this pie we call life. And may this pie we create be exquisite to the eye and sweet and nourishing to those we encounter.

In the spirit and agape love of Jesus, Michael

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