

OPINION: The quest for truth, freedom and change

John Esposito 12:12 a.m. EDT June 14, 2015



(Photo: ~File photo)

Many years ago, a street-smart guy that I was good friends with from work offered me a memorable pearl of wisdom. During an extended lunch break at a local greasy spoon near our office, we became engrossed in a deep discussion. The conversation we were having centered on a myriad of topics, including the rights of individuals, and how the human condition can correlate with truth, freedom and lead to important changes in our society.

I believe the essence of what he communicated to me that afternoon deserves repeating today. In a gravelly, hoarse voice made worse by cigarettes, he simply leaned across the table and said without hesitation, "This world is a big place, man. There's plenty of room here for everybody."

Although not unduly profound, those two concise sentences have remained with me over the years, especially in the context of mounting civil disorder and political unrest that persists in a number of cities across the United States. While we are all seeking answers to the significant problems facing our country, many people fail to recognize what it truly means to be free and how real freedom works to resolve conflict and bring solutions to so many issues in our lives.

I would like to advance my old friend's words with some subjective commentary. Freedom and change are attainable, but only through an orderly process of adhering to society's rules using sound reasoning and judgment, and not by presenting unrealistic makeshift points lacking in substance. Conversely, this is not meant to suggest that we adopt a laissez-faire attitude, or stick our head in the sand, ignore wrongs, not address injustices, and forfeit demands for change when they are warranted. People can certainly agree to disagree on a host of issues, but a crucial first step in addressing the problem is to live and abide by the established rules and respect the system of authority that is in place, while always striving to improve upon it.

We must also maintain a willingness to accept the differences among people and recognize there are those who do not look, think, and act like we do. It is imperative that we work together to achieve a common ground for the common good. Our survival as a free nation depends upon it.

The ultimate method for influencing others, affecting positive change, finding the truth and establishing real freedom is by listening and digesting what others bring to the table, especially those whose voices are much different than our own. This is how solutions are found and problems are eventually solved.

At the same time, individuals articulating a personal viewpoint, whatever it may be, must recognize their assertion will be weighed under the auspices of a higher authority, where order prevails and rules are enforceable. Without order in society there can be no real freedom, only chaos and anarchy.

A wise man once said, "Who is actually more free, a fish in the water or a fish out of the water? And which is more free, a train traveling on the tracks or a train traveling off the tracks?"

Peace.

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