

## First and Center

Pastor's Blog

February 11, 2020

Much more attention was paid to the National Prayer Breakfast this year than is usually the case. Unfortunately, the attention mostly centered on how the President contradicted the main speaker to say that "love your enemies" was NOT what we should do. Contrary to what Jesus said, of course. It continually boggles my mind that Evangelical Christians support this man who has the audacity to publicly contradict their Savior. But that's another blog.



The attention **should** be paid, in my opinion, to the words of that speaker, Arthur Brooks. You can read the whole speech here: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/02/07/arthur-brooks-national-prayer-breakfast-speech/?arc404=true>

He focused on the hateful polarization in our country right now. A conservative professor from a liberal family, he brings an important perspective. Near the end of the speech, he said that the central issue is not really "hate," but rather "contempt." He defines contempt as seeing the other as "worthless." He tells a story of giving a speech in which he said that political liberals "are not stupid and they're not evil." He reminded people that contempt never changed anyone's mind, but love might. After the speech, a woman came up to him and told him that he was wrong -- liberals are "stupid and evil."

I have heard the same thing from liberal friends about those who support Trump.

Contempt.

His solution to this issue was to challenge his listeners to do three things: 1. Ask God to give you the strength to love your enemies and banish contempt from your heart. 2. Commit to disagree with others without contempt "and ask someone to hold you accountable to love your enemies." 3. Seek out contempt "so that you will have the opportunity to answer it with love."

He acknowledged that this would be difficult, but he believes that this is the only way to begin to heal the serious wound that afflicts our nation.

He may well be onto something, but I am not optimistic that his solution will do the trick. We need to do those things, but so much more, much more inner work for all of us of every political persuasion; work that, as he says, can only be done with the help of God.

Despite the rejection of his message by the President, I believe that people of faith, especially Christians who claim to follow the one who challenged us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, have a unique mission in these times to reset the culture of our nation that has been evolving in various ways for a very long time. This is hard work, and it requires courage, especially in the social media age. I admit I can easily fall into despair that any kind of healing is possible. And yet, I believe in the God of Resurrection, so I am holding onto faith as best I can and trying to challenge myself to follow Jesus' challenge. Church, we have work to do.

~ Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,  
Transitional Minister