

## REFLECTION FOR WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 13

*Lord God Almighty, you have made all the peoples of the earth for your glory, to serve you in freedom and in peace: Give to the people of our country a zeal for justice and the strength of forbearance, that we may use our liberty in accordance with your gracious will; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Stop. Wait. Listen.

The events and fallouts, actions and reactions of the last week have whipped many up into a fervor. More than at the height of the election last fall, social media accounts of all shapes and sizes seem to have been weaponized. I have seen people resort to language that is not only unkind but frankly un-Christian as people of faith on both sides of the political aisle fall prey to “following the course of this world”. That should not be so for us.

Stop. Wait. Listen.

Stop before you post, share, or comment on the latest thing to cross your screen of choice. Is your blood pressure up or your heart racing? Then it’s probably not the time to fire off the first thing that comes to your mind. The season of knee-jerk reaction in which we find ourselves only leads to escalation as heightened emotions beget uncharitable thoughts, words, and deeds. Passion for pursuing what is right is not the same as unbridled rage or contempt directed towards someone with whom you disagree, potentially someone you’ve never even met. There is nothing which we find online which requires our immediate response, so stop before jumping into the newest electronic fray.

Wait before you respond. Dialogue is to be constructive and not destructive, so wait until you can respond with the same grace which is shown to you in Jesus Christ. Only then, if you choose to respond and I honestly hope that many will not, slow down as you craft what you will say. Is it a derogatory comment about a person or group of people? Then don’t. Is it a repetition of what you or others have already said? Then why repeat it. Consider holding your friends accountable first before you take a swing at someone across the line. Articulate your point rather than attacking your opponent. Strive to win the person and not the argument. Speak from a place of loving the one with whom you converse.

Most importantly, listen. We are not in a place right now as a nation where it is easy to listen. Recognizing that, I choose to be one who listens in this season, and I invite you to do the same. My contribution to conversations of the last week, much less recent months and years, is not going to change the direction of national dialogue, at least not on their own, but what it might do is change the dynamic of relationships with those, near and far, who I am called to love in the name of Jesus Christ. And so, I listen. I listen to Scripture and the direction which it affords me. I listen in prayer, that I may seek the will of God. And I listen to others, that I may hear them and learn how it is that God is calling me to love them.

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We are called to recognize in ourselves first and foremost that we were once dead in our trespasses and sins and that we daily face the temptation to give in to the passions and desires of flesh and senses and social media. In knowing that truth about ourselves, we are also invited to remember that God is indeed rich in mercy toward us, that out of his great love he has made us alive by grace and raised us with Jesus Christ our Lord. He has saved us, perhaps most importantly from ourselves, and so we are called to be Christians first and to have that identity shape all other expressions of who we are, what we say, and how we live. So, my sisters and brothers in Christ, please:

Stop. Wait. Listen.

*Almighty God, kindle, we pray, in every heart the true love of peace, and guide with your wisdom those who take counsel for the nations of the earth, that in tranquility your dominion may increase until the earth is filled with the knowledge of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.*