



This week's revisited reflection was written in September two years ago. We had experienced a community tragedy and there was concern about the November election. People were both sad and anxious. As we fast forward to today we still find ourselves sad about local and global tragedies and anxious about the politics of the land. Brother Toby helped us then with wise words about creating a sense of peace. We believe those words will prove helpful again.



THE PATRIOT AS HEALER

There are times when a few minutes forever changes the life of an individual, a family, a nation. Recently I was driven by a friend along the Russian River where it enters the ocean. I was watching a flock of ducks swimming upstream. Then our car was stopped. A few minutes before, a pickup had spun out of control on the slick pavement and gone over an embankment. Two wonderful young girls died. Their family will probably never recover. Likely the same can be said of the many somber responders on the scene of the small coastal community itself, where one resident told me these were the only two little children in the settlement. We can all understand that. It is a "there but for the grace of God"

moment that could happen to any of us.

My friend and I were stopped there for about an hour. Just before we were allowed to pass, I noticed that the ducks had landed in the river once again. To me it seemed to symbolize that the next very difficult step here was to try to heal.

But when a nation is suddenly surprised by enemies, the first thought is not “healing” but “revenge” and that usually translates into “war.” We call this coming Sunday “Patriots’ Day”. It’s the 15th anniversary of the day when terrorists struck the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon outside of Washington. D.C. 2800 people died. Wars and massive killings have followed since that day. On the same day in 1973, the democratically-elected government of Salvador Allende was overthrown in Chile by a coup backed by our C.I.A. Many people died and were imprisoned.



And on it goes. Saturday is the 101st anniversary of the beginning of the Armenian genocide in Turkey, an event in which 1.5 million people died and has continually cursed that part of the world up to and including the present day. And on September 15, 1963, a white supremacist placed a bomb in the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham killing four young girls in the Sunday School, an event that had a profound impact on my life and, I am sure, the lives of many others my age.



There seems to be a sort of rabid nationalism in this country as the final stages of this election progress. I wonder if the root causes of this have nothing to do with politics but are simply an excuse to express the frustration and anger that seems so widespread. When I was a young boy growing up in Mississippi, my parents warned me that there were people who thought they could

take out their frustration on anyone with a dark skin. Unfortunately, for some people this situation has not changed.

I never was too sure what the phrase “What goes around comes around” meant, but I somehow feel it's happening again. I was told that, in one mosque, members were advised to stay off the streets on Sunday.

I'm not sure what “patriots” are supposed to do on Sunday, though I doubt there are many events organized around the theme of “healing”.

We have had some pretty radical healers as patriots. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968) said, “It is love that will save our world and civilization, love even for our enemies.”

Most of us are not international movers and shakers. I think perhaps some of the young people that come into my life may be. But I'm just three months away from 86, and I'm certainly more of a veteran than an active participant in that arena. However, I, and probably most of you, am among those who feel that peace begins inside ourselves and the more peace there is in us, the more there will be in this troubled world. So I often in my own way try and follow the advice of Wendell Berry (1934 –), that when I feel the pain of our fractured world and the suffering of my fellow inhabitants on this planet, “I go and lie down where the wood drake rests ... And come into the peace of wild things.”



At least we can all do something like that — which takes me back to some ducks on the Russian River.

Brother Toby