

Peace of mind and critical thinking

What is critical thinking?

The National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking, said :
Critical thinking is the process of skillfully evaluating information generated by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action. In other words, taking reflections from all sources as a guide as to how to act. It is looking before you leap.

Diane and David are in Starbucks and strike up a conversation.

Diane: Do you drink many mochas?

David: Yes usually about three a day!

Diane: Really?!

David: How much do you pay per mocha?

David: \$5.00

Diane: And how long have you been drinking all this expensive coffee?

David: About 20 years, I suppose

Diane: So a mocha costs \$5 and you have 3 a day which puts your spending each month at \$450. In one year, it would be approximately \$5400 ...correct?

David: Correct

Diane: If in 1 year you spend \$5400, not accounting for inflation, the past 20 years puts your spending at \$108,000, correct?

David: Correct

Diane: Do you know that if you didn't drink all that coffee that money could have been put in a step-up interest savings account and after accounting for compound interest for the past 20 years, you could have now bought a Ferrari?....

David: Do you drink coffee?

Diane: No

David: So where's **your** Ferrari?

Text from the New Testament: “The herd of pigs, about 2,000 of them, rushed over the edge into the lake and were drowned.”

Text from Moses in the Old Testament: “You shall not be led into wrong doing by the crowd...”

I can remember as a young boy being upset with the story of Jesus casting the demons out of a man and into a herd of pigs. Didn't seem fair to the pigs to me! Didn't seem like something that Jesus would do! Scholars have worked at this story's background and find evidence that the story of the demons and the pigs may be a Jewish folk tale. The story of the healing of the demoniac is actually separate and has been wrongly linked together by the early church into one story. So, according to some scholars, Jesus did heal the demoniac and had nothing to do with sending dark spirits into a herd of pigs...so perhaps I was right as a little boy?

But let's not discount the power of this Jewish folk tale about pigs being spooked and charging over a cliff. It is in the Bible for a reason. It has been used as a powerful metaphor to describe mass hysteria- like the German Nazi rallies, the Trump rallies, the mass radicalization of terrorist websites, the mass suppression of all dissent and the moral collapse of societies like Russia under Putin. It actually still applies today to our world society that uncritically continues on destructive courses like wars, overpopulation, environmental destruction, the deepening of climate change linked to fossil fuels, and the continuous mindless exploration for more fossil fuels regardless of the consequences.

In the metaphor we humans become like the Garasene herd of pigs: Possessed with a crazed idea, comforting one another with phrases of solidarity, our eyes red with an unquenchable fire, we madly rush toward the cliff of our mutually assured destruction.

Dr. Wayne Dyer the psychologist, who came here to Knox, talked about the importance of leaving the tribe. He said it is vital that we “become independent of the good opinions of others.”

Jesus taught us something very similar; that we were created as individuals with every one of us important enough, to have God count every hair on our heads. No two of us are the same. We are unique.

In a world that likes us all to conform so that we can be controlled as suicide bombers are, this message of Jesus about our individuality was not a popular one, by those who wanted to control others. When I used to work for IBM, I was told that I needed to wear a particular kind of tie and drive a late model conservative car. If you search back in your experience, I am sure you can remember when someone told you off because you did not want to conform!

A lot of controller types use their disapproval in an attempt to control you. Some of us who didn't receive much praise as young children, often find that our need for approval has become neurotic. So today if you find yourself trying to keep everybody happy around you, you have become vulnerable to people's disapproval.

The great Abraham Lincoln once said: "If I were to read, much less answer all the attacks made against me, this shop might well be closed for any other business. I do the very best I know how- the very best I can; and I mean to keep on doing so until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference." Lincoln had learned to live with disapproval as coming with the territory of leadership and living honestly.

In the Old Testament lesson, we came across a very interesting verse. It has to do with the herd mentality and the individual and about how to make balanced judgments. It says: "You shall not be led into wrong doing by the majority, nor, when you give evidence in a law suit, shall you side with the majority to pervert justice; nor shall you favor the poor man in his suit just because he is poor."

What this is teaching us is about impartiality. It is too easy to side with the majority and follow the herd. It is also tempting to pervert justice in the case of a poor man, just because he is poor and we feel sorry for that. The fact that the man is poor according to the herd instinct makes that more important than whether his suit is just or not.

What Moses is saying is this: “Don’t pervert justice and give in to peer pressure.”

But you say to me “David I can see that it is wrong to agree with the majority and pervert justice, but how do we know when it is right to go against the majority view?”

Solomon was Israel’s wisest king. He said “In a multitude of counselors there is safety.” When we are in leadership, we need to surround ourselves with people who are knowledgeable and above all wise, and then listen to them!

Now the herd always distinguishes itself by refusing to listen to wise counsel. The herd’s decisions are usually made quickly and without thought. For instance, when Stephen the New Testament martyr was stoned to death, the herd looked for a trigger line- a blasphemy against God. This was all that was needed in New Testament times. And Stephen gave it to them when he said: “Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? I can see the Son of Man (meaning the Jewish Messiah) standing at God’s right hand!”

“Blasphemy!” they shouted. What did the herd do? Scripture says. “At this they gave a great shout and stopped their ears. Then they made a rush at him, flinging him out of the city and set about stoning him.”

You remember that in Jesus’ trial it was the very same trigger that they were looking for- a blasphemy. Jesus gave it to them when he claimed Messiahship. He said: “And you will see the Son of Man, seated at the right hand of God and coming with the clouds of heaven.” When the High Priest heard this, he said, “Need we further witness? You have

heard the blasphemy.” The judgment of the herd was unanimous. He was guilty and should be crucified.

Wise counselors behave in a manner opposite to the herd instinct. They cherish objectivity, knowledge and impartiality. Theirs is the art of perspective and the long view.

But while wisdom is not found in bolting over the cliff with the herd, neither is it found out on the limb alone, sawing off the limb behind us!

Becoming independent of the good opinion of others does neither of these things. Truly independent, balanced, wise critical thinking makes a huge contribution to the welfare of the world.

Perhaps one of the greatest contributors to independent critical thinking was Socrates. In this regard Socrates was Christ like- some 470 years before the coming of Jesus. Socrates was completely independent of the good opinions of others. He was rigorously honest. No words satisfied him, no formulas, no philosophy and no religions. Socrates questioned, always seeking the good, the true, the honest and the beautiful. He said our task was to care for our souls- to make our souls honest. He said that we must never say anything that we did not feel to be perfectly true and we must never do anything we do not feel to be perfectly right. He said that to run after wealth, fame, and power is very illogical. Our business is to walk quietly and contentedly with truth, beauty and goodness.

The Athenian herd eventually had enough of Socrates and sentenced him to death for his perversion of the minds of youth, particularly for his continued skepticism in the name of truth. Christ-like, Socrates died the death of a martyr. As one writer put it: “He remained in prison when he might have escaped; he died when he might have lived; he died with a majesty of confidence and glory of tranquility which were like an elevation of the Divine.” Socrates had peace of mind!

Here are ten points to think critically about that affect our peace of mind:

- 1) It doesn't take courage to run with the herd. It does take courage to be ourselves.
- 2) No matter what we do in leadership, we can never escape disapproval.
- 3) It's okay to be different!
- 4) It's okay to trust your own opinion
- 5) Never apologize for something you are not sorry for!
- 6) Ask: "If I agreed with them, would I be better off?" If the answer is no, consider going it alone.
- 7) Keeping your own conscience is more important than keeping the good opinion of others.
- 8) Socrates said: 'Know thyself'. And Shakespeare adds "To thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night follows day, thou canst not then be false to any man."
- 9) When we separate from the tribe, it will make the tribe nervous because they cannot control us!"
- 10) Wayne Dyer says. "Immunity from despair in the face of disapproval, is the ticket to a lifetime of delectable, personal, present moment freedom.

Wayne Dyer taught me something when I read him for this sermon: he said: "Separate, *appreciating* approval (which is normal), from *needing* approval, which is neurotic."

If we can separate ourselves from the good opinions of others, we have a chance of really being able to love them unconditionally, Why? Because their well aimed arrows will miss us. We will become elusive to them, uncontrollable and secretly admired for our independence.

In other words, we will be free to really love. Dr. Bernie Siegel, the cancer doctor, asked the question, "How can we be happy for the rest of our lives?" He said the answer is surprisingly simple. "We need to do things for others out of love."

Notice he does not say, "Do something for someone else's approval." We do it for love alone! When we are truly independent of the good opinions of others; that becomes possible.

Dr. Siegel's prescription of doing something for someone else out of love is a healer for us. He says "**Love can make everyone a Doctor, and do more to cure the ills of life than all the medicine on earth.**"

Jesus cured the Garasene demoniac and when he did so we are left with a beautiful picture of what Christ's unconditional love did for this man. When people returned to where Jesus was, they saw this dear man, this terribly troubled person, clothed and in his right mind.

His name before he was healed was Legion, which meant vast in number- a herd in fact.

When he was in herd mode, he was not in his right mind. But when he met Jesus, he came to himself as an individual, unique and precious in the eyes of God, distinct even down to the number of hairs on his head. When he left Legion behind, he was in his right mind...

So, when you respond to the call of God in your life, to be who you really are, when you decide to be lovingly independent of the good will of others, **You can choose to leave Legion behind.** To leave Legion behind is to sit at Jesus' feet, clothed and in your right mind.

May it be so for you today!

Then God can use you here at Knox and beyond to build a better world!

Amen.