

The Express

9-11 and now: A divergent world

Nineteen years ago this week we came together as a nation. It wasn't because the event that precipitated it was anticipated.

In fact, I suspect that all of us would rather it had not happened at all.

But it did.

Do you remember that day and where you were?

Do you realize that college freshmen weren't even born yet, and the pandemic is their 9-11?

Both events tragic, but each at opposite ends of the human spectrum.

I remember seeing American flags everywhere after 9-11. I remember people singing the American Anthem, or God Bless America or any number of patriotic songs.

We cried and prayed the day. We cried and prayed as they continued to find body parts (in the case of the World Trade Center) or no body parts at all such as in a Pennsylvania field.

We cried and prayed when we saw the widows, widowers and children who lost a mom, dad, grandpa or friend.

We cried and prayed as we went to war against the interminable evil that had dared to set foot on American soil.

But amidst the terror and sadness, we came together, all of us. We smiled at one another more. We held more doors open for one another.

We already had kindness and caring, but much like the Grinch whose heart grew three sizes that day in Whoville, ours did as well.

Nineteen years later we have another 9-11, only this time in the form of a pandemic — coupled with one of the worst election years we have ever experienced. I'm not here to argue for or against masks, debate social distancing and vaccines, tell you who to vote for, or whether or not our elected politicians have gone too far or not far enough.

What I am here to tell you is to stop being such malicious, spiteful, vindictive, heartless, callous (should I keep going?) citizens of this land,

which we may not like right now, but it's all we've got.

The great mask debate has turned individuals on both sides into some of the most heartless people I have ever seen.

If you want to wear a mask ... go ahead ... it's your prerogative.

Don't want to wear a mask? That's your right as well.

While many politicians have declared mandates (for the uninformed a mandate is not a law), the brutal behavior by both sides is appalling.

Facebook sites to "*rat out*" businesses that aren't using social distancing. Other social media sites that post photos and videos of persons not following "*mandates*" ... really?

Who made you, the everyday, unelected citizen, the hall monitors or safety patrol leaders for everyone?

For those on ALL sides ... stop touching, shouting, screaming, pushing, shoving, rolling your eyes, chasing, taking pictures/videos, spreading malicious information on the internet, trying to get people fired, stalking or yes, even killing people you don't agree with.

THAT stranger who you just shoved because you don't like something they did (or said) might have just lost someone, or may not have a roof over their head, or enough to eat or just lost a job.

You have no idea who they are or what they're experiencing. I once read a post on Facebook that said while you may not like your station in life, there is always someone else who would love to be in your shoes.

For heaven's sake people of Pennsylvania (and beyond), maskless or masked, pro vaccine or anti vaccine, voting for Biden or Trump, rich or poor ... in John 8:7 we're reminded that "*let he among you who is without sin cast the first stone.*"

Take a good long look at yourself in the mirror before you are vicious toward someone.

Even if you don't believe in God, morality and ethics asks us to look inward and assess ourselves first before we castigate someone else.

People are suffering from COVID, death, hunger, joblessness, homelessness today — for just one day— stop yourself before you make a nasty comment or even visibly roll your eyes at someone.

According to numerous surveys conducted by the CDC and news organizations, depression and anxiety rates have tripled during the pandemic.

Pennsylvania is in the middle third of states with the highest suicide rates.

Don't contribute to it. One of my favorite movies, The Wizard of Oz, has an often-shared quote by the Wizard to the tin man who desperately wanted a heart: *"A heart is not judged by how much you love; but by how much you are loved by others."*

Not because a lot of people love you (or even like you), but because you are humble, wise and most of all, kind.

For just one day, smile at someone (or if you're masked ... wave or say hello). Don't be judgmental. Remember those who died in both of our tragedies — 9-11 and the pandemic — and that heart the tin man obsessed over wasn't what was important, it was the kindness and consideration that he showed throughout the journey.

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