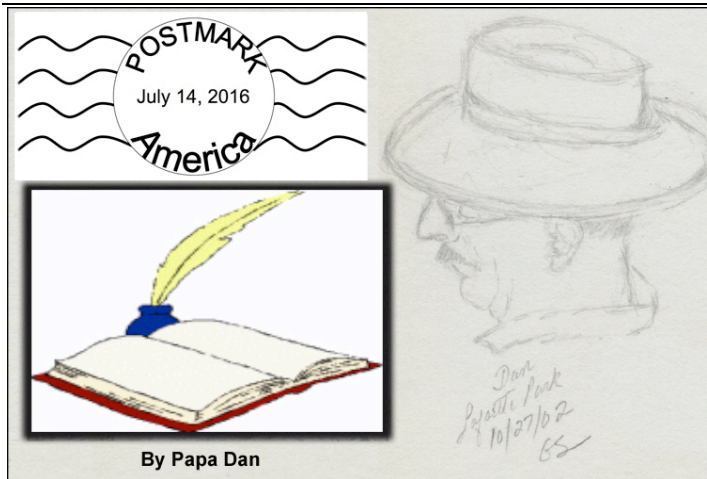


Where Do I Start? Where Do You?

By Dan Sapone



**Unless someone like you
cares a whole awful lot,
nothing is going to get better.
It's not."**

— Dr. Seuss

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This week in Dallas, in the depth of despair, once again, we heard the President of the United States tell us that we must reject the despair we see all about us. He said, *"Scripture tells us that in our sufferings, there is glory, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. Sometimes the truths of these words are hard to see. Right now, those words test us because the people of Dallas, people across the country are suffering."*

Words of hope — but the words are hard to hear. Despair and suffering speak with loud voices that can drown out words of hope, making it difficult to move past suffering and get all the way to "perseverance and character" before getting to hope.

And he said, *"I understand. I understand how Americans are feeling. But Dallas, I'm here to say we must reject such despair. I'm here to insist that we are not as divided as we seem. And I know that because I know America. I know how far we've come against impossible odds."*



A big challenge — bold words delivered to an audience in mourning. He told us things we know, but things that are hard to hear while we're in the middle of the suffering.

And he said, *"The pain we feel may not soon pass, but my faith tells me that they did not die in vain. I believe our sorrow can make us a better country. I believe our righteous anger can be transformed into more justice and more peace. Weeping may endure for a night but I'm convinced joy comes in the morning."*

He reminded us of the promises made to Ezekiel in the old testament: *" 'I will give you a new heart,' " the Lord says, 'and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh.' "* The President cited examples of those with such new hearts who had made progress possible, right here in Dallas. But still, we mourn.

Much earlier in my lifetime, a man I admired (who would not become president) stood on a street corner on the back of a flat-bed truck and talked about a terrible thing that had happened that day. Robert Kennedy told a small gathering of African Americans in Indianapolis that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had just been murdered. What was promised that day was wisdom, the same promise made to Ezekiel.

Quoting an ancient Greek playwright, Senator Robert Kennedy said,

***"Even in our sleep, pain, which cannot forget
falls drop by drop upon the heart until,
in our own despair, against our will,
comes wisdom
through the awful grace of God.
— Aeschylus***

You can listen → <https://youtu.be/GoKzCff8Zbs>



The pain that day did not go away, nor — as of this writing — has the promised wisdom arrived. In fact, two months later, June 6, 1968, two days before my high school graduation, Robert Kennedy was himself the victim of violent hatred. That was 48 years ago. And, across this nation, still we have not yet seen the wisdom nor the new heart.

What do we learn? If we're paying attention, we learn that *waiting* for the wisdom and the new heart has not worked. I suppose that means that we have to do it ourselves, somehow. And, this week, we heard some suggestions — President Obama said,

"we can learn to stand in each other's shoes and look at the world through each other's eyes."

And he said, *"we can abandon the overheated rhetoric and the oversimplification that reduces whole categories of our fellow Americans, not just to opponents, but to enemies."*

And he said, *"those protesting for change will guard against reckless language going forward."*

And he said, *"police departments will acknowledge that, just like the rest of us, they're not perfect. That insisting we do better to root out racial bias is not an attack on cops, but an effort to live up to our highest ideals."*

And he said, *"we can worry less about which side has been wronged, and worry more about joining sides to do right."*

And, to bring us back to where he started, he said, *"It turns out we do not persevere alone. Our character is not found in isolation. Hope does not arise by putting our fellow man down, it is found by lifting others up."*

These prescriptions for change sound simple. But, with the number of times we have tried to teach ourselves these lessons, and failed — that's where the despair comes from — one can only hope that these things do not turn out to be impossible.

BUT, if we can persevere, we have been offered hope. Also in my lifetime, we were given another list of prescriptions for change that seemed daunting in their time. On January 20, 1961, President John F. Kennedy confronted the nation with such a list and summarized the challenge this way:

"All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first thousand days, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin."



Maybe the success is in the starting, not in the finishing. I suppose the "us" these leaders spoke of must be assembled one person at a time. So, where do I start? Where do you?

What answers can we offer? Even if they seem too small and the challenges seem too great, let's say them right out loud. "... let us begin."

