



May You Live in Interesting Times

By Wendy Marks
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"May you live in interesting times" is an expression purported to be a translation of a traditional Chinese curse. While seemingly a blessing, the expression is normally used ironically, with the clear implication that "uninteresting times" of peace and tranquility are more life-enhancing than interesting ones, which, from a historical perspective, usually include disorder and conflict.

According to Wikipedia, "despite being widely attributed as a Chinese curse, there is no known equivalent expression in Chinese. The nearest related Chinese expression is usually translated as "Better to be a dog in a peaceful time, than to be a human in a chaotic (warring) period."

Well, I don't think anyone would doubt that we live in interesting times. This is true both nationally and internationally. A polarity of thought divides us at a time when it is most important for us to be united, in order to deal with challenges that face us, both locally and globally.

When I was young there was a science fiction movie (if anyone remembers the name of it, please let me know) where aliens came and met with a large delegation of humans from around the world; all the delegates appeared in their regional dress, hairstyles, and so on— and the aliens couldn't tell us apart. Their reference for differences between individuals didn't include any of the things we let divide us, like skin color, accent, size, or place of origin. They thought we all looked identical. (I loved that movie, second only to the Twilight Zone episode called "To Serve Man," where the closing line is "It's a cookbook!". . . But I digress.)

We are all basically the same, with only very small genetic blips that differentiate us. The groups of deer that walk by my office at dusk each evening to eat my hostas could be the same deer each time, or totally different deer— to me they just look like deer.

Here's my favorite religious fable: Hillel, the renowned Jewish sage and scholar, when asked by a prospective convert to Judaism to teach him the whole Torah while he stood on one leg, replied: "That which is hateful unto you do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole of the Torah, the rest is commentary. Go forth and study." Isn't that what all religions are about? (except for the one foot part). . . The summary of all belief systems is that you must love others as much as you love yourself. As the Christian teaching says, "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." We all "got stuff." We are imperfect, prejudiced, ignorant and often stubborn.

Nevertheless, we are all the same. When we do things that are harmful to others, it is as if we are harming ourselves. Our pain is the same as the pain of anyone anywhere else.

So let's take the leap. . . I don't give a fig what your politics are, or what music you listen to, or who you take home at night. We are all responsible for each other. And we are not doing a great job of showing it.

It should never be okay that anyone anywhere should be afraid to go to school. It should never be okay that anyone should be afraid to go to the supermarket because the way they dress might mark them as "other." It should never be okay that groups of people are exiled from a country they have lived in for hundreds of years because they worship in a different way. It should never be okay that your skin color or your accent prevent you from attending an event, or visit a country that you wish to visit.

We are all strangers somewhere. But we all belong everywhere.

What are we missing? People of different ideas and beliefs and feelings must come together and come up with solutions that everyone can agree upon to prevent the continuation of human suffering— and, for that matter, animal and plant suffering— on this planet. No one of us has the right to determine the future of all of us. We need to meet in groups small and large, and not avoid people who think differently than we do. Most people can agree with the basic concerns that we all have. And that is where we start.

Despite the doom and gloom messages that we hear every day, and the horrible tragedies that we face every day listening to the news, I believe that most people are good, and most people want the same thing: We want our children to grow up in a safe and verdant world, and to be acknowledged and welcomed for who they are.

Let's make that happen.

Namaste, Wendy