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Community Members,

As we prepare to once again celebrate the founding of our great nation, I hope in light of all that we have gone through in the past few months, it will carry a little added significance for us. Hopefully, as often happens when we are faced with times of struggle or crisis in our lives, we are given a new sense of appreciation for all we have. We also are given the opportunity to refocus, and to use the time of difficulty to grow. I know it is almost a cliché to speak of a time of difficulty as a time for growth. However, when I look at my own life, it is true that the times of greatest growth were times of greatest difficulty. When I had to confront things that were not always comfortable, and never easy, it was often a time when things in my life were torn down, so that new things could be constructed.

We are facing in this pandemic another time of reconstruction for our nation. A time to rebuild. Will we learn? Will we be willing to allow some things to be torn down, so new things can be built? In these days of difficulty, will we stubbornly hold onto our old and familiar ways, because they are so important to our identity? Or can we learn a new identity? It was so sad to hear about how a group of protesters shouted down Governor Inslee in Pasco the other day with chants, "You are taking away our freedoms!" The irony here, of course, is that those who refuse to wear masks are the ones who are ultimately taking away not only our freedoms, but the chance to open up our economy to more activity as well. By insisting on "what is good for me", we threaten what is "good for us all". I saw a video of a person standing before a crowd without a mask, ranting about those who would try to force him to wear one, and at the same time saying that he would gladly give his life for the flag. I can't help but wonder, "if you would give your life for the flag, (I assume it represents for you this great country and its people), then why is it so hard to wear a mask for it?" It is tough to change. It is tough to let go. But it is also the gift that life offers us. To be on a journey that takes us on different paths than the ones we knew. Is it a threat, or an opportunity...? or both?

It was interesting to read an article on the 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic that was written from the Spokane area. Many of the same strategies that we are now using were also used at that time, including the universal wearing of masks. However, it seems that the response to such a "taking of our freedoms" received a somewhat different response. Kenneth Kroll, who lived through that pandemic and wrote about it many years later states that, "People rallied with volunteer efforts to relieve the suffering... a sense of personal responsibility for helping in an emergency was evident." I believe that we were just as free in 1918 as we are now. But I have to wonder, have we lost some of the sense of responsibility that comes with such freedom? Has freedom been misconstrued as license to do what we want, rather than freedom to do what is in the common good?

I was pleased to see Douglas County Commissioner Dan Sutton encourage everyone to wear masks. He pleaded with people to put their personal feelings aside to help the local economy. This is the kind of practical message we need to get from everyone in any position of responsibility. If we want to keep moving forward, and not backwards, we are going to have to put "we" ahead of "me" and show the same kind of willingness to help in an emergency as was shown in 1918. This is not about who you support politically. It is about what will ultimately get us through this. We can do this, if we will remember that we are all in this together, and are willing to journey in new ways for the sake of all those freedoms we so treasure. Those freedoms that continue to ask us to make a sacrifice in order to keep them! Forward together! Stay safe!



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