

Old Mixed With New — A Modern Day Parable

inspired by John 3:14-21

The crowd of angry citizens were piled into the Rec Center. Every seat was filled, and people lined the walls. More were crammed into the doorway, trying to hear what was happening inside. The old gymnasium floors creaked and groaned as folks impatiently shuffled their feet in anticipation of this monumental decision up for popular vote.

It was utter chaos that led to this moment in the city's history. One man up front proclaimed loudly, "So, are we all in agreement that the City Slogan must be changed?" The crowd roared, stamped their feet, and rattled their chairs in response. It was difficult to determine who was for and who was against the idea. Everyone just seemed angry.

Jacob said to Nicholas, "Just as the University lifted the cloud of misunderstanding over their seemingly controversial name, so must our slogan be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in tradition may keep it for eternity. He stood up and announced, "For we so love this city that we will give our all, so that every generation will believe, and our slogan and traditions might not perish but might remain.

"For our predecessors did not choose this slogan to condemn or offend the community, but that the honor of the people might be saved through it." The crowd let out a long, exhausting rant of personal opinions. One protestor stood up, pointed to Jacob, and shouted, "Whoever believes him will be fooled. The slogan is offensive. It was created decades ago and is no longer useful."

Jacob countered, " But, whoever does not believe me has already closed off any other possibility because you have not even heard a full explanation."

Just then, an elderly gentleman slowly rose to his feet and began making his way to the front. He was severely bent over and his clothes were as wrinkled as his skin. His gaze stayed fixed to the floor and he took small, slow, shuffled steps — two steps, then a rest to reposition his footing. Two steps, rest. Two steps, rest. A hush fell over the crowd as a tall, angry-looking, young man with tattoos covering his shaved head and arms approached quickly from the opposite corner. What was he going to do? Fight the old man?

He grabbed the old man's arm and whispered something in his ear. The old man stopped and looked up. The young man bent down so they could speak face-to-face. They engaged in a brief, private conversation, then turned to face the crowd. The old man spoke first. "I have lived in this city my entire life — 86 years so far. I live in the same house where my father was raised. It was my great grandfather who penned the City Slogan. It is rich in meaning, and not the least bit offensive I assure you.

Yet, none of you bothered to research or even ask its meaning....until tonight. This young man came here wanting to do away with the old and make room for the new. He, too, has been on the bandwagon of hate....until now. " He handed the microphone to the young man who cleared his throat and seemed nervous. "He's right," he said. "The old man pegged me perfectly. I jumped into this cause assuming it was for a good reason. But, I didn't form my own opinion. I just joined the

others. I have always liked to shake things up, and I had no respect for the history of this city. I thought it was a backwoods dump, and needed to be taken over by a new generation.

“I didn’t care about the past, and I was comfortable living in the dark about it. I dare say none of you knows the slogan’s true meaning either, and you would hate for that fact to be exposed. When this old man was stumbling to the front, we all just watched. I was even thinking he would probably fall and I would have laughed the loudest. I’ll bet most of you thought I was coming to push him down. Honestly, I thought about it.

“But, then a light was turned on in me, and a voice in my head said, ‘Listen to his story.’ And in just a few sentences I changed my mind. I had been comfortable in my own space. I thought only my life mattered to me. I didn’t care why that was our slogan. I just wanted a new one. Do any of you have a really good reason for changing it? I preferred to stay in the darkness, but my new friend here lives in the truth and comes to the light. He wants everyone to see what his ancestors have done for this city. So, let’s take a minute to listen to his story that we may all be one and live in the light together.”

After the old man unfolded the historical meaning of the City Slogan, there was a vote. And the verdict was to wait to share stories before the vote. To have more listening and less arguing.

The young man closed the meeting with this: Regardless of which side we are on in this issue, we would do well to all stop and ask ourselves,

- Are we here for the fight?
- Are we here for the excitement?
- Are we here for the attention?
- Are we here for true change?
- Are we FOR the slogan just because that’s what it’s always been?
- Are we AGAINST the slogan just because that’s what it’s always been?
- We need a good reason, either way we vote.
- We need a healthy decision that unites us.
- We need to do what is best for the future of our city.

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