

We are limited, but we can change!

On Nov. 14, 2013, the Harrisburg, PA, *Patriot News*, did something absolutely remarkable. Appearing on its opinion page was a retraction of an editorial that had been written under its former banner, *The Patriot & Union*, 150 years ago. That editorial now standing before the court of historical hindsight, was penned on Nov. 24, 1863, just five days after a ceremony took place to consecrate a burial ground at Gettysburg.

Back then, all puffed-up and harrumphing self-righteously, the leading paper of the state capital actually took offense that there should be a ceremony at all. It chose to judge the entire day as a blatant political charade seeking to manipulate the occasion for cold heartedly cheap gain. The three speakers were Edward Everett, William Seward, and Abraham Lincoln. Of President Lincoln, the editorial simply said the following:

“We pass over the silly remarks of the President. For the credit of the nation we are willing that the veil of oblivion shall be dropped over them and that they shall be no more repeated or thought of.” Lincoln’s “silly remarks” were what we now know as, of course, The Gettysburg Address. After 150 years, the paper retracted its error in judgement. And this is but one illustration of the tragedy of our limited human ability to “see” and in thus seeing, to be able to “perceive.” We are limited.

Here is how I say it, and maybe you do, too: “If I had just known then, what I know now, I would have...” My, my. If ever words could give expression to our deep sighs and groans, I guess these words just about fit the bill. You and I know that when we look back, we see opportunities both missed and ignored as we passed by on the other side of the road. “If I had just known then...” That is so sad for us. But even sadder still is the lament of the paths that we did choose, not seeing the end from the beginning. Choices we did make, not realizing the consequences. “If I had just known then...” Not choosing, as well as choosing badly, are two sides of the coin of life. It just seems to be maddeningly unavoidable! We cannot see what cards are being held in the hands of life when we make our play to trump or to pass. How can we possibly know what to do and when and how?

I think maybe we can follow the example of every single pilot who has achieved “Instrumental Rating.” The very best pilots always obey their training and not their own perception of the conditions. They trust and fly by the airplane’s time tested instruments and they do not follow the fickleness of their own limited senses.

Here is the point: Our world is broken and terribly wounded. There is great suffering and great danger. No child, no single person, should have to navigate life in such a world. Now there are many voices, many doctrines, and many beacons all competing for the role to be the guiding light through the storm. How do we choose which one is right? How do we lessen our chances of being on the wrong side of history, both our own and that of our world? “If I had just known then...” How do we limit the number of our limited visions? And therefore, expand and enlarge our lives to choose the right path to heal the world for all who breathe on planet earth.

St. Francis of Assisi prayed: “Lord make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O, Divine Master grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life.”

We are limited. But we can limit our limitations. We can change. We must choose to obey the time-tested Instrument of God’s Love in our lives. And amazingly we will be transformed into an instrument of love ourselves. Then we can be used to change the world! That is Renewal in the best sense. Come and Join us! We need you...just as you are...for what you can become...an instrument of love.