

How will we be remembered?

Ken Olson

Our sun is one of more than a hundred billion stars that make up the Milky Way Galaxy, the size of which is incomprehensible. It takes 100,000 years for light, traveling at 186,000 miles per second, to go from one side to the other. The stars within the spiral arms are revolving around the galactic center at 250 miles per second, and yet the immense form requires some 200 million years to go around just once. On that immense scale of both space and time, the comings and goings of countries and leaders on tiny planet earth are next to nothing, but to us they matter greatly.

Presidential historians have no doubt that the current officeholder will be remembered as our worst --while his pathological ego boasts that he is “the greatest!” He says, for example, that his accomplishments in six months were greater than those of the entire terms of all other presidents, combined, and that he could beat a ticket of Washington and Lincoln. This is what derangement looks like.

One is reminded of the snake-oil salesman in the western movie, *The Outlaw Josey Wales*. The film’s hero shows what he thinks of the bottle of absolutely amazing cure-all by spitting his “chew” on the huckster’s white suit and asking, “How is it on stains?” Trump has stained the Office he occupies in ways that might take decades to cleanse.

In the big picture of the universe, this life is fleeting indeed, but consider words of the astronomer Harlow Shapely in his 1986 book, *The View from a Distant Star*: “We should remember that it is only the bodies of men and women that the gravediggers inter and the cremators oxidize. Our civilized heritage, our contributions to knowledge and to the art and beauty of human living —our spirits, if you will—escape the mortuary. Our works live after us.” William Faulkner said something similar about both good and bad: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”

So, what will outlast us? In this tiny, transient realm wherein we live and move and have our being, how will we be remembered? As good ancestors? Or will we be known, at least among friends, relatives, and some descendants, for having promoted and voted for the bizarre charlatan who won two presidential elections by fire-hosing lies, who attempted to overturn another and worked to take away liberties guaranteed by the Constitution? In 2016, Marco Rubio said: “For years to come, there are many people on the right, in the media and voters at large, that are going to have to explain and justify how they fell into this trap of supporting Trump.” Yes, Marco, including you.

Further, will we be seen as people who cared for others, beyond family? “In the 6th chapter of Luke’s Gospel, Jesus asks, “If you love only those who love you, what credit is that to you?” In other words, limiting our concern to immediate kin is not much of a virtue, is it? (Spider and crocodile mothers have that, too, for a while.) So, how about the least and the lost, of so many sorts, whom we are also called to love? Did we do our part to enable health and wholeness, not

just here but around the world? (USAID has been a huge, tangible way to do that.) Our record, for good or for ill, will live on through what we all did or failed to do.

A related question: will our legacy include our having done our best to battle racism, or will we have been part of perpetuating this evil? Will we be known for having had such small and fearful minds that we needed to depreciate others who, under the skin, in flesh and blood and bone and brain, are the same as us?

Here on earth, our individual names will not be remembered for very long; however, our cumulative impact will carry on in substantial ways. As it says in the Victorian novel *Middlemarch* by George Eliot (pen-name for Mary Anne Evans), “The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half-owing to the number who have faithfully lived and rest in unvisited tombs.”

Finally, many of us believe that such ideals and deeds are, in fact, witnessed by One who inhabits eternity, of whom it is written that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without being noticed.

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