

Doris "Granny D" Haddock

Thank you.

I would like to share two thoughts with you today. The first regards the special character of the American community that makes us strong and, indeed, very special in the world. The second idea regards the special moment in time where we find ourselves right now.

The special character of the American people isn't the fact that we have a Constitution and its Bill of Rights, although we are blessed by that document and blessed by the way it has been improved by wisdom and humanity over the centuries.

The words of our Constitution and its Bill of Rights, while special indeed, only reflect something that was already deep in the emerging world dream that America is.

Here is a hint of that special aspect: Let me ask you a question—why is it that the first ten amendments to the Constitution are the Bill of Rights? Why didn't they just put the Ten Commandments in there from the Bible?

Why, indeed, did they go to so much trouble writing this new Constitution when they already had a guide book to living--their Bible? For they were, most of them, religious people.

Why did they create a strong and well-stated separation between their religious lives and their civic lives?

The word that gets to the answer is the word Respect.

They understood that different people have different belief systems, and that the civic square is where we come together to make our public lives and our economic lives work well together, in spite of, and sometimes with the help of, all our differences.

That respect for our differences is the key to understanding the genius of America. They certainly had not perfected a notion of the brotherhood of all people, as it took us, as a people, another century to eliminate human slavery on our shores, and generations more to accept the equality of all people. But the seed

was there, and it remains—though it is now under attack as if by a serious disease.

If we look around the world at the most frightening and dangerous places, we see, first of all, the failure of respect for differences. The Taliban perhaps represent that in the American mind. But we do not have to look that far to see the disease of moral intolerance infecting cultures and governments. It is all around us now. It has sprung from our own soil, as it has elsewhere.

In its most fatal form, the disease of moral intolerance somehow bestows the power of heaven on our humble human institutions of government. And so, where in a previous generation we might have been willing to let some great moral issues be decided between a person and his or her God or conscience, we now demand that institutions of government represent themselves as God's attorneys. The problem with that, of course, is that government institutions are what we share across the entire community, and religious beliefs are not. So the only way that government can speak for God is if large parts of our community have a religion not of their choosing forced upon them, not as beliefs, but as oppressions.

This is easy for the women of Afghanistan to understand precisely. But it is not far away from us now, as an immoral element of our society, cloaked in false morality, move hard on us to destroy that word that underpins our Constitution and its Bill of Rights and that is the bright little light that shines in the American soul and can be found in the torch of the Statue of Liberty. It is the flame of freedom, yes, but its truer name is the flame of respect for others and their beliefs, for that is where our freedom comes from, and that is where our nation comes from.

If there is one idea we must not tolerate, it is intolerance. If there is one position we must not respect, it is disrespectfulness itself. It is, in short, not acceptable for people to push their own religious beliefs onto our civic institutions, and they must please look in the mirror and see if they do not see some image more from an Afghan desert staring back at them. We do not tolerate intolerance here. We do not respect disrespect on these shores, where the world is still having a dream of a better life for itself.

Now, you fight fear and intolerance with courage and love, but it is not always a matter of sticking

flowers in the muzzles of their guns. Sometimes we must act with strength and force, as we do with laws against hate crimes, and so we should. Sometimes love means you lock somebody up, or take them outside for a little discussion. But it should never be a battle between two different belief systems, it is a struggle to preserve the civic square as a place where all people and beliefs cooperate in a better kind of world, and where bullies to the contrary are dealt with.

It is my personal opinion that bullies to the contrary are what this political season is all about. It is my view that intolerance that a wildly Unamerican intolerance has infected the far right wing of American politics and, as with any tumor in a body, it endangers the entire American system. The coming election is an opportunity to escort the bullies outside.

Just as a disease will attack the weakest part of the body, the moral bullies come in through the issues we are least comfortable defending. But if we do not defend even these areas, we will soon find the entire body infected.

So lend your support to those who do that defending. They are people like the ACLU, the Bill of Rights Defense Committee, and the organizations that protect the individual freedoms of women, gays, ethnic and racial minorities, and others on the first line of defense against moral bullies.

If you need a reminder of all this throughout your life, just think of the Ten Commandments every time you think about the first ten amendments to the Constitution, which comprise our Bill of Rights, and remember that these are different lists, and remember that the founders of our nation, many of whom were intensely religious, saw a need for fundamental separation, and that this need was based in respect for the freedom of other people to find their own religious way in the world.

Throughout your life, you will occasionally find yourself being that bully. Check yourself on that. Am I upset because someone believes and acts differently than I do, or because they are attempting to push their beliefs on all of us by making our civic institutions their tools of enforcement? Ask yourself those clarifying questions and the high ground will always be under your feet. Do not be afraid to be intolerant of intolerance; show no respect for disrespect; be

the bouncer at the door of the better world we are dreaming and working for, and do not be afraid to do what bouncers do. But whatever you do, do it in love and for love, not in hatred for hate, and do it in defense of our mutual respect, the beautiful light of the American soul.

What I have just said could have been said at any time in our national history. But it has greater meaning to say such things at this moment, for we are assembled here as people who are bracing for battle on the eve of great changes in our history. For many of us, the coming election means much. But the struggle for America's soul and for our shared dream is just beginning, as it always is, and you all are the warriors in this struggle, which is the greatest struggle on the planet. So many lives are at stake, so much happiness is in the balance. If you like to think of yourself as the hero of a book or movie, I tell you that no book or movie is as dramatic or as meaningful as the story you now find yourself living. This life is perhaps a moral stage for the acting out of great struggles between the forces of light and the forces of fear. There are no sidelines, only those who fight for love and those who fight for fear. Only those who stand up for tolerance and respect and love, and those whose sad fate is to stand on the other side.

If you look around this gathering, you cannot see where we all are going. To demonstrations? To Congress? To courtrooms where we will fight for respect and justice? To prison camps? The young to great universities where they will help keep ideas advancing to serve our people? We go from this place and this moment onward to great lives in a great time. But let us always know who we are—remember who we are. We are Americans, and we are for freedom, and for respect, and for love.

Thank you.