

A Colyte

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A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things
at Austin College



Here's the Thing...

AColyte

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

Sherman, TX USA

7.3.24

Ain't that America?

--John Mellencamp

I have an old friend who posted this question on Facebook yesterday:

What exactly are we celebrating on the 4th this year?

It was a fair question that's worth asking every year.

Here's my response:

When I put our American flag on the holder on our front porch tomorrow morning, I will be doing it to celebrate and honor:

- My grandfather **John T. Morrison**, who was drafted at age 37 and served as a medic on the USS Comfort in the Pacific Theater in World War Two (a term during which the Comfort was struck by a kamikaze plane);
- My father-in-law **Wilford Shurtleff**, who went to his grave convinced that the German soldier who shot at him six months and fifteen days after his 19th birthday missed him intentionally because it was Christmas Eve;

- **Barbara Jordan;**
- U.S. Army veteran **Clyde Hall;**
- A bunch of rich, property-owning, predominantly racist white men who signed a document 248 years ago that included the imperfect, noble, elusive, but somehow still relevant phrase “all men are created equal” (to quote my late friend the historian **Robert Alley**: “Those men did better than they knew”);
- All the **teachers, professors, students, and colleagues** who showed, told, and taught me that Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are directly related to those five words;
- The hundreds of **immigrants** who became U.S. citizens at a special Naturalization Ceremony in Wynne Chapel in 1995 with Federal Judge **Paul Brown** presiding and AC History Professor **Hunt Tooley** offering remarks;
- The life and legacy of **Justice Thurgood Marshall** and his legal associate **William J. Durham** whose home was less than a mile from the house where I currently live;
- The late **Alan White** who probably canceled every ballot I cast in any election in which he also voted but who was a good friend, a good father, and a good man;
- **Public school teachers** who get up and go to work every day and strive to welcome, attend to, and nurture every child who shows up at their door;
- The **three Austin College Alumni** who are currently members of the Texas State Legislature;

- Baptist preacher, lawyer, and wannabe songwriter **Oliver “Buzz” Thomas**, who told me and dozens of other seminary and law school students at a conference in Washington D.C.:

*If the Supreme Court doesn't make you do the right thing,
do the right thing anyway.*

- Whoever had the idea to change the name of the third largest military base in the world from Fort Hood (named for Confederate General John Bell Hood) to Fort Cavazos (named for **Richard Edward Cavazos**--a Texas native who was the first Hispanic four-star General in the U.S. Army);
- **Opal Lee**, the “Grandmother of Juneteenth;”
- **Bruce Springsteen**;
- **Brandi Carlile**;
- **Maya Angelou**;
- National Parks;
- **Amanda Gorman**;
- **Hundreds of our neighbors** who – when a trans student was removed by our school district superintendent from the cast of a high school production of *Oklahoma* – protested to the School Board with the results that the student was reinstated and the superintendent is no longer employed by the district; and
- Each and every **election worker** in the country.

There's a lot for a lot of us to be disappointed, jaded, outraged, and cynical about.

There will be plenty of time for that.

Tomorrow, I'm putting out the flag.

Until the Fall, I remain,
Just Another Cowboy Preacher,
Glad to Be Here and Grateful for Friends Who Make Me Think,

JOHN WILLIAMS
Chaplain