

"The rabbit listened."

The Danville News

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"Happy Seuss Day"

Word Count: 750

Which is your favorite Dr. Seuss story? Seuss Day – today! At elementary schools they'll predictably read the standards: "Green Eggs and Ham;" "The Cat in the Hat." Fun. Fun.

Hush please. Please don't tell Ron DeSantis (or other emotionally illiterate right-wingers) that Seuss' stories convey 'woke' messages. I dare not mention what he might think of, "There's a Wocket in my Pocket." He might ban them all for not complying with his elitist world-view. Seuss is more than silly, he's subversive. Those stories are my favorites.

"Yertle the Turtle," his best, mocks tyrants. "The Sneetches," ridicules arrogant prejudice. "Horton Hears a Who," my second favorite, portrays repressive McCarthyism bullying those who wouldn't conform to his Americanism. "Gertrude McFuzz" warns about ingesting drugs to meet commercial expectations of beauty. "The Butter Battle Book," parodies dumb politics and dumb religious disputes. "The Lorax," promotes protecting the environment.

If DeSantis' 'fainting couch' Republicans (who honestly cannot be considered Republicans), really want to ban a book that graphically flaunts adultery, genocide, abuse, killing children, violence defending tyranny, violence rebelling against tyranny, rape, murder, sexual confusion, drunkenness, theft and cheating, there's a book that never should be found on any bookshelf. It's called, "The Bible."

At a recent church-wide meeting, a colleague oddly invoked Mister Rogers to argue how he frowns upon cultural influences infiltrating the purity of church positions, especially by allowing modern gender language. Speaking of gender, with Biden visiting Ukraine and Carter embracing mortality, we see prime examples of manhood in action. I confess, unhip that I am, I'm ignorant about gender issues, but I'm willing to listen. Two things I do know, however, is that church positions can be whatever someone says they are, and, second, that decades ago I realized that since God can use the church to reform culture, God can use culture to reform the church.

If we cherry pick any of Mr. Roger's messages (March 20 is his day!), let's choose the one where he sings: *"I Like You as You Are, I like you as you are, Exactly and precisely, I think you turned out nicely, And I like you as you are. I like you as you are, Without a doubt or question, Or even a suggestion, Cause I like you as you are. I like your disposition, Your facial composition, And with your kind permission, I'll shout it to a star. I like you as you are, I wouldn't want to change you, Or even rearrange you, Not by far. I like you, I-L-I-K-E-Y-O-U, I like you, yes I do, I like you, Y-O-U, I like you, like you as you are."*

Then again, there's where Fred sings: *"You are my friend, You are special, You are my friend, You're special to me, You are the only one like you, Like you, my friend, I like you. In the daytime, In the nighttime, Any time that you feel's the right time For a friendship with me, you see, F-R-I-E-N-D special, You are my friend, You're special to me, There's only one in this wonderful world, You are special."*

Perhaps Fred sang this song after reading Seuss' story, "Horton Hears a Who." Kind Horton bravely stands against those who harass him, those threatening the clover refuge of those vulnerable Who's, protesting: "A persons a person. No matter how small."

Danville's school district has begun a task force to address mental and emotional health challenges faced by our students. I can suggest plenty of remedies alongside counseling and medication: boycott social media, animal husbandry at school and hallway dogs, creative writing clubs, expanding theatre and dance opportunities, arranging chances for doing something for others, engaging in sweaty and satisfying manual labor where you accomplish something, mandatory national service. Still, Dr. Seuss and Mister Rogers would be a compassionate way to frame the effort. We just don't live for ourselves.

At the same church meeting, while we were busy pontificating, our Director of Christian Education read, as part of her report, a children's book, titled, "The Rabbit Listened." It begins with something sad happening to a little boy. Things came crashing down. Chicken, bear, elephant, hyena, ostrich, kangaroo, snake, come by thinking they can help. They advise, they scold, they shout, they offer opinions, they tell him how he should fix things, how he should act about what happened. Then along comes rabbit. The gift of rabbits is that they have big ears. Rabbit is invited to come close and cuddle with the boy. The rabbit listened.