

“How do you begin?”

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“Nursing Hope”

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Thermometers measure temperature, whether Fahrenheit or Celsius. Yardsticks measure inches, feet, yards, and miles. Barometers measure air pressure. A clock measures time. A level measures balance. A plumb line measures true vertical. A speedometer measures, obviously, speed. So how do you measure a people or a society? You measure us by how we treat babies.

Several years ago, reflecting on St. Patrick’s Day, I wrote how wearing green is popular, excepting those from Northern Ireland who, annoyingly and stubbornly, prefer orange, such as myself. Time to repent -- rather than feed the hungry beast of hatred, I wear today a Hawaiian shirt. Again I quote Canadian folk singer Stan Rogers whose song, “The House of Orange,” pushes us toward kinder aspirations. He had been approached by a representative of the Irish Republican Army to donate to the fight. He refused, singing:

*Now they cry out for money and wail at the door
But Home Rule or Republic, 'tis all of it shame;
And a curse for us here who want nothing of war.
We're kindred in nothing but name.
All rights and all wrongs have long since blown away,
For causes are ashes where children lie slain.*

For causes are ashes where children lie slain. How do you measure a people, a society, a government? When will we ever get it right?

Recently I’ve been researching a project where I intend to write about what our Susquehanna region looked like from the death of Oneida chief Shikellamy in 1748 to the death of Danville’s William Montgomery in 1816. Research can be disturbing when you read of all the treaties, mostly broken. When you read about the mutual massacres and marauding: French on English, English on French, American on English, English on American, Native American on Native American, Native American on white settler, white settler on Native American. How long, O Lord, how long? Check out the Paxton boys of 1763 and their Conestoga massacre of Susquehannocks converted by Moravians. Read about the frontier forts (often stockade mills) built in our neighborhood: Fort Augusta, Fort Freeland (which was forced to surrender June 29, 1779), Boone’s Fort, Fort Menninger, Fort Muncy, Fort Bosley. In May, 1778, the Big Runaway began, with the Susquehanna West Branch and Wyoming Valley aflame and bloody. The settlers rushed for refuge from the British Forces and their Iroquois and Loyalist allies into these forts. After the American Revolution, Joseph Priestly had had enough and wanted to get away from the ‘Susquehanna Settlement’ and go to France. He rather misjudged what the French Revolution would lead to: heads in baskets.

Can you imagine how English transcendental poets wanted to sail here with new brides to set up their utopia and commune with romanticized nature? What they ignored was the danger, risk, and arduous labor required.

Someone explained the perverse popularity of Marvel movies and superheroes. We want immediate and quick rescue from threats. The reality is that the only heroes are the ones who would be looking back at us in the mirror. Perversely, I also ask the Proud Boys, 3%, and other militia that if they really want to fight for liberty, go to Ukraine. By the way, only freedom equals prosperity.

A secret to church work is that pastoring isn't factory piece work. It's ironic, but the worst thing a church that wants to increase its membership is to want to increase its membership. Our faith instead commends us to be worthy by doing ministry. Give folks a reason to want to participate and use their own gifts in ministry, mission, fellowship. How do you begin? By taking care of babies. Can you imagine how different our community, our county, our commonwealth, our country, our world could be if we all agreed to make children our priority?

Fire and flood, Ash and mud, Lives in despair, Some beyond repair, Does anyone hear? Indifference severe, Please walk with us, Forgive the callous, We are more than news, The abandoned accuse, And now the next, Human ruin and wreck, Bloodying Ukraine, Babies forced on a train, Putin's ungodly sin, That with war he wins, Bombing with an evil will, Tiny bodies crushed still.

We pray fervently for Putin's conversion. Short of that, praying for a heart attack would not be amiss.