



## **It's Not What You Think**

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This past week, I helped my in-laws move to a senior living center and put their home up for sale. We hired movers to pack and gently transport decades of belonging from one home to another. My mother-in-law was careful to write notes and provide information to my husband and me that we would need for the sale of their home. She carefully set aside papers that she didn't want to get lost in a box. The day before the movers arrived, she showed me a plastic sandwich bag in which she'd placed a labeled carpet sample for matching purposes and a syringe/tube combination needed for the water dispenser. Like me, she worried these would get lost in the shuffle. In a moment of inspiration, she put them where she thought the movers would not be packing: the refrigerator.

As it turned out, the movers did pack and, at the new home, unpack the refrigerator. They carefully placed the baggie of carpet and syringe on the second shelf below the milk. The family had a good laugh as we wondered what the movers must have thought. There was a perfectly good explanation, but on the surface, the refrigerated bag seemed outlandish.

As we head into election season, we will have plenty of opportunity to view actions and statements from an outsider's perspective. We will hear truncated sound bytes and see abbreviated video clips. We will be challenged by policy decisions, when no rationale is attached. What we think from the limited evidence before us might give us good insight, or it might not tell the full, or real, story.

Sometimes not having the full story is innocent. Movers end a job believing their clients were kooky. Other times, not having the fully story leads us to accuse falsely or, on the flip side, to believe naively. Before assuming we know the full story, we should do some digging. Check our sources. Consider multiple perspectives. Situations are complex and often defy easy labels.

And yet... and yet, we cannot ignore patterns. When something happens time and again, we lose the import of the pattern by insisting that each situation be examined and explained on its own facts.

This reflection isn't particularly biblical. I don't have a Scripture quotation to tie everything up neatly. My words are simply coming from the heart because I'm dismayed by what I see. A negative remark or situation might not be what I think, or it might be. I need to do some digging, but I can't lose the forest for the trees.

In our love for one another, out of respect for one another, recognizing the inherent dignity of one another, take time to seek the full story. Ask questions and demand transparency. Most important, don't overlook the patterns that signal something is wrong at a deeper level. Those patterns will call us to action and, in some cases, admission of our own complicity. With the gospel as our plumb line, we can seek a truth that sees all people as children of God and demonstrates love without exception.