



Jan-April 2022



Bathed in Purple

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On Saturday, we were bathed in Purple. With thanks to Resetting the Table and everyone who rolled out of bed for a Saturday morning Presbytery Gathering, we caught a glimpse of what it might be like to talk to each other. I mean, really talk. Talk about hard things. Talk about political things. Talk about competing values.

And then, walk away as friends.

[The film Purple](#) shows highlights from a workshop of Wisconsinites across the political spectrum, discussing challenging topics like the role of government and the social safety net. Through facilitation, each participant not only shared their own perspectives, but also explained how personal experiences shaped their beliefs.

At the Presbytery Gathering, we were then challenged to practice communication skills that might permit these healthy conversations in our own lives. We tried our best to articulate AJ's perspective in a way she would agree:

- *That all of us are human beings and should be given opportunity to live*
- *So AJ, you want things to be better for everyone. You believe that everyone's needs should be met and the priority is that people should be cared for in every stage of life.*
- *Human rights should be accessible to all humans*
- *We should all live as community and support one another.*
- *Every person deserves to have their basic needs met, and it is the responsibility of the group to make sure they are met.*

We did the same for Ted, who shared a much different perspective than AJ:

- *Ted, you have worked hard all your life and it's still unfair. It would be even more unfair if people who worked less had more than you.*
- *Ted is self-reliant, picked himself up by the bootstraps, and everyone should take care of themselves*
- *How people act is important. That affects the community.*
- *He thinks everyone has the same opportunities*
- *Ted worked hard and does not want handouts*
- *If you work hard, no one needs to take care of you.*

The goal was not to pick apart their positions but to explain their positions in a way that each person felt heard and could respond, "Yes! Absolutely. That's how I feel." From there, we could also ask pointed questions to challenge those viewpoints.

In our Presbytery Gathering, we were urged to challenge all perspectives, not just those with which we disagreed. For me, this was a key part of the exercise: it wedged open the tiny possibility that my own viewpoints might not



be infallible. In our echo chambers, we can come to believe that our group's perspectives are the best. Rock-solid. A might fortress of unassailable values. These perspectives can be reinforced to the point we shut out any other ideas.

When we are forced to critique our own viewpoints, however, we often find there are valid concerns. We can identify places for compromise possibly, but even more important, we can see the humanity in others. We see again the image of God in each person.

The Presbytery will send a survey soon to ask whether you'd like to participate in the longer workshop that Resetting the Table offers. Even if you didn't attend the Presbytery Gathering, I encourage you to [watch the film](#) and consider whether you'd want to replicate this activity in your own ministry setting.

The final question to those gathered on Saturday was why we would want to build relationships with those who disagree with us. Your answers reveal a hunger for caring relationships and affirm how much we need each other:

- *We see each other as loving, caring human beings even though we have different experiences and perspectives*
- *We remain divided if we don't communicate*
- *We become a society where one side wins and other loses instead of finding a way for all to win.*
- *We lose options if we only see one way.*
- *We are our best when we work together*
- *Relationships, spirituality are lost when US vs THEM is the underpinning to our communications.*
- *We lose the chance to be in loving relationship with many people in spite of our differences.*
- *Without it we lose community and relationships built on care and listening rather than being right.*
- *The only way to learn and strengthen our understanding of the world is to fully appreciate and understand all perspectives*