

Column

Lady Bird Johnson often faced hecklers during her 1964 whistle-stop tour of the South. The hostility came a result of her husband's support of civil rights legislation.

On one occasion, as she prepared to give her speech from the rear of a train dubbed the *Lady Bird Special*, a group of young men shouted protests and held up a banner reading "Go home, blackbird."

Mrs. Johnson listened to what they had to say, then lifted her white-gloved hand and said in her melodic Southern voice: "This is a country of many viewpoints. I respect your right to express your own. Now it is my turn to express mine. Thank you."

It worked! The young men with the banner went silent and moved farther and farther back in the crowd, and Mrs. Johnson was able to give her speech.

What made them do the right thing? One answer might be that in those days civility and good manners were still being taught in the home, especially in the South. Regardless of how passionately they felt about their viewpoint, they knew what their mothers had taught them and, in the end, did it.

Aren't these two qualities – civility and good manners – what is missing in American society today? To these, we might even add a third, respect . . . respect for other people's property and respect for life itself.

Recent scenes of mayhem on the streets of our cities have been painful to watch. Police cars have been overturned and destroyed; innocent business owners have seen people without consciences knocking out windows and carrying away merchandise; and historical monuments have been overturned and damaged.

In addition to the wanton destruction of property, many innocent lives have been lost, a notable example being that of 77-year-old retired St. Louis police captain David Dorn. Dorn, a black man, was shot and left lying in a pool of blood out front the shop he was patrolling. The incident followed a 'peaceful' protest in that city.

How do we address the current crisis? Do we need more police officers on our streets? The National Guard brought in?

Well, these measures may certainly be required in the short term. We do indeed need to support, honour, pray for and give thanks for those who put their lives on the line to ensure the public safety, as well as those elected leaders who boldly stand behind them.

With that being said, the long-term solution lies somewhere else. More lawmen is not enough. The long-term solution lies with the recovery of the home.

There, those basic precepts of human conduct found in the Bible – the Ten Commandments – must again be learned and taught. Jesus’ summary of them -- love God and neighbour – must again be obeyed and modelled. Only then will civility, good manners and respect return, and the healing of our land begin. At that point we shall know what the Psalmist knew many centuries earlier, “Happy is that people, whose God is the LORD” (Psalm 144:15).

ALMIGHTY God, our heavenly Father, who settest the solitary in families; We commend to thy continual care the homes in which thy people dwell. Put far from them, we beseech thee, every root of bitterness, the desire of vain-glory, and the pride of life. Fill them with faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness. Knit together in constant affection those who, in holy wedlock, have been made one flesh; turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers; and so enkindle fervent charity among us all, that we be evermore kindly affectioned with brotherly love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.