

June 17, 2020

This post is late today because it was my privilege to do a committal service for a veteran at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery near Joliet.

If you have never been there it is a hallowed place to visit, the likes of which there are few equals as places of dignified and deep patriotism, tributes to ideals and dreams and hopes realized and unrealized by our nation and fellow citizens.

There are about 10,000 internments annually and the rows and rows of graves and grave markers and rows upon rows of columbaria are all identical with no one any more loved or special or grieved than anyone else.

It is a place to behold.

They are constantly creating new burial and inurnment spaces and a time will come, I imagine, when there will be no more space above or below ground and that place will stand in solemn witness to the past so that there could be a future, I hope.

Patriotism is a noble virtue honored and lived in the human imagination since our ancient ancestors started telling stories and then writing them down so that they could be handed on from the past to the future.

Patriotism is also an illusive virtue subject to manipulation for ignoble purposes.

Patriotism is not the same as nationalism and it is not the same as fascism but that has never stopped charlatans and demigods and usurpers from stealing patriotism and dressing up nationalism and fascism and self-serving ideologies and calling them patriotism.

I don't like seeing folding deck chairs or clothing or head scarves or face masks or supermarket advertising done up in the designs of the American flag and I do not like pretend American flags that blue or orange or pink or rainbows.

The ideas and values and causes behind blue and orange and pink and rainbows are important and should be respected in their own right just as the flag should be respected in its own right.

Patriotism is a love of country, a whole country, an incomplete idea, work yet to be done, a value to be lived not merely saluted, a reason to cultivate citizenship, a symbol of a shared expectations, just and equitable laws, and civil and respectful compatriots in the pursuit of a way of being in the world that inspires, lifts up, cares, and hopes for the common good, the honest and real good of all.

Jingoism is theatrically wrapping yourself in the flag as a costume and using it to serve your own purposes that have little to do with the common good, the values that a nation holds dear, or the obligations that citizenship confers on its citizens, all of its citizens, because of the grief that rests at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery, indeed, the grief that rests in all places where our dead, our beloved dead, lie.