

# Common Identity vs. Factional Ideals

*Rise & Shine, October 27<sup>th</sup>*

## **African Proverb**

*If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.*

## **Questions:**

1. When, if ever, have you intentionally invited someone with a starkly different point of view, life experience, ethnicity or political position into your circle of acquaintances?
  2. When is it appropriate to work fast instead of working together? What are the up and downsides of each?
  3. When have you been inspired to join those you disagree with to work toward a common good?
  4. At a time of significant polarization in America, what needs to happen to restore a greater sense of national unity?
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*In the News*

## **Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize**

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali has become the 100th recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of his work to establish "peace and international cooperation," and especially for the steps he took to bring the decades-long border conflict with neighboring Eritrea to an end.

Abiy's office said the award was testimony "to the ideals of unity, cooperation and mutual coexistence." After becoming Prime Minister in April 2018, Abiy initiated important reforms built on three pillars: democracy, economic vitality and cooperative relations with Ethiopia's neighbors and the world.

During his first 100 days, his administration lifted the nation's state of emergency and press restrictions, freed thousands of political prisoners, legalized opposition groups, dismissed officials suspected of human rights abuses and corruption, and appointed women as president, head of the supreme court, and to half the cabinet posts. He surprised many by inviting a dissident exile to return to oversee the National Election Board as the nation prepares for free and fair multi-party elections next year.

Within months of his rise to power, Abiy and Isaias Afwerki, the president of Eritrea, met together to hammer out a peace agreement between the two countries, based on a 2002 arbitration ruling of an international boundary commission. Abiy has also worked to improve relations among other nations and people groups, including Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia and Sudan.

The youngest head of government in Africa, 43-year-old Abiy traveled throughout Ethiopia to hear grievances of the people, build inclusiveness, and find common ground based on better understanding of people's needs, aspirations and concerns. He's fond of the African proverb, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

Salih Booker, president and CEO of the Center for International Policy, said Abiy, the son of a mixed ethnic and Muslim-Christian marriage, "at a very young age ... learned the value of tolerance and understanding across religious and ethnic divides, and later, socioeconomic divides." He speaks four languages fluently.

A devout Pentecostal Christian, Abiy holds advanced degrees in conflict resolution, peace and security issues, and transformational leadership. He fought against the Marxist regime in 1990 when he was a teenager, served in the military, been a UN peacekeeper in Rwanda, became a member of parliament, and was minister of science and technology prior to rising to his present position.

Ethiopia is Africa's second most populous nation, with over 100 million people from more than 80 different ethnic groups. Up to three million Ethiopians have been internally displaced due to ethnic conflict. In the past, Ethiopia's ruling autocracy often relied on repression to control conflict among its diverse ethnicities. It remains to be seen how Ethiopia will handle such challenges, as well as a high rate of unemployment, and the opportunities of its burgeoning economy and youthful population (six in 10 are under the age of 24).

Surveys conducted seven months ago showed that Ethiopians primary identity was with their tribe, their secondary identity was as Africans, and their third identity was as Ethiopians. Now Ethiopians surveyed tell international observers that their first identity is as Ethiopians, their second identity is as Africans, and their third identity is with their tribe.

Governments around the world could learn a lot from Abiy's method of seeking consensus and focusing on common identity to work through the issues that divide his people. In stark contrast to this is the leadership of Boris Johnson in Great Britain, who has sought to cut Parliament out of any chance to negotiate during his push for a quick Brexit. In the United States, President Donald Trump has ignored advice from the Pentagon, refused to work across the aisle with Democrats, and played up conspiracy theories of a "deep state" working against his administration.

According to a new poll from Morning Consult, an increasing number of people across the U.S. are digging in as the political divide continues to widen since Donald Trump's election. Nowhere is this more evident than in the partisan echo chambers of the media. The results of the survey, which polled more than 13,000 people in July, show that news outlets make up 12 of the 15 most politically polarizing brands, led by Fox News and CNN.

As division and partisanship grow in Great Britain and the United States, Abiy Ahmed seems to be bringing Ethiopia, a historically divided nation, closer together.

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**Exodus 18:14, 17-18**

*When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?" ... Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone."*

**Romans 14:13, 18-19**

*Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another. ... The one who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and has human approval. Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.*

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## **Prayer for the Unity of the Church (BCP p.818)**

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions; take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify *you*; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Amen.*