

Loving the stranger in an election season

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The other morning during my run I listened to [Krista Tippett's 2010 interview](#) with Lord Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of Great Britain.

Can I say once again that I could totally see myself as Jewish... except I just can't quit Jesus.

Anyway.

We keep hearing about how polarized we are as a society. Are things really more rancorous than they used to be? (The Civil War was pretty polarizing, folks.)

Or have we just gotten meaner?

Have the stresses of modern life given us short fuses? (I'm thinking the Black Plague was a bit stressful, amirite?)

Does the relative anonymity of the Internet give us license to say things we wouldn't normally say face to face?

Sacks offers one perspective as we ponder these questions:

It seems to me that one of the things we most fear is the stranger. And at most times in human history, most people have lived among people who are mostly pretty much the same as themselves. Today, certainly in Europe and perhaps even in America, walk down the average Main Street and you will encounter in 10 minutes more anthropological diversity than an 18th-century traveler would have encountered in a lifetime.

Maybe things seem more rancorous simply because we're bumping against more people who don't look or think or talk or act or believe like we do.

I don't know what we do with this, other than give ourselves a little bit of a break for having some growing pains. Maybe we're not going to hell in a handbasket. Maybe we just are learning how to deal with more diversity in that handbasket, wherever it might be going.

Sacks goes on to say that, while "love God and love your neighbor" are the twin commands of love, "the one command reiterated more than any other in the mosaic box — 36 times, said the rabbis — is love the stranger."

I'm preaching on [James](#) this Sunday: "Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom." I think we could use some of that.

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