

*"A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day. — 'Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood.' — Is it so bad, then, to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood."*

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

"I have kept my promise." The president recently used these words around a number of decisions. Leaving the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Pulling out of the JCPOA that sought to diplomatically set limits on Iran's nuclear capabilities. The moving of the American embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

In pointing to these examples, my intention is not to argue the benefit or folly of any of them, but to question whether keeping one's promise is always the best measure of wisdom. Since the beginning, the elected leadership of this country has been routinely chastised for promising one thing on the campaign trail and delivering another thing when in office. "Just do what you said you were going to do!" is the shout from the electorate. And where one expressly misleads voters about their intentions solely to get elected, getting voted out of office is an appropriate response on the part of the electorate.

However, I don't see foolishness or duplicity in admitting one didn't understand. Or didn't have all the facts. Or the facts have changed. Or one's mind has changed. Seems to me, changing course is often times a sign of maturity, not deception. When I perform a wedding I ask the couple to make sure and include in their vows the intention of permanence, often hearing "As long as we both shall live." I tell them you have to believe and promise it is forever or it will not endure the challenges and conflicts ahead. But if the marriage, despite good faith efforts, has grown toxic or abusive or one person has completely violated the covenant then it would be cruel and destructive to force the marriage to continue because a promise was made.

"I have kept my promise." Well, good for you. But wise leadership sometimes admits it doesn't have a corner on wisdom. Humility can be as inspiring a tool as certainty. And as the old hymn says, "New occasions teach new duties."