

Happy Thanksgiving everyone!

What a joy and honor for me and my family to be here with you all.

Later today, many of us will sit at Thanksgiving tables.

But this morning I want to start with a story about another table.

My job lands me at all sorts: meeting tables, conference tables, negotiating tables.

This was one of the better ones.

It was a dinner party table in London.

The host kindly seated me next to the comedian Jimmy Carr.

Now, for Americans who don't know him, that's like being sat next to John Stewart, or Jerry Seinfeld, or Amy Schumer.

He is hilarious. It was a riot.

I got to ask him a question about comedy I've always wanted to know.

"Jimmy: If you're trying out 10 new jokes for a new routine, how many will get a laugh?" I asked.

"After 20 years of practice, I'm getting pretty good.

...I'd say I'm up to 3 out of 10 by now."

Mmm. That's comforting.

It certainly makes me feel better as I practice my diplomatic trade.

What he said next struck me even more.

"You know, jokes are funny things, Matthew. I mean jokes are strange things," he said.

"If you play a song and no one likes it, it's still a song..."

“If you write a play and everyone walks out, it’s still a play...

“But if you tell a joke and no one laughs, it’s just a sentence.”

To me, that was profound.

A joke is not the delivery of words.

It’s a connection between people. A completed circuit.

The comedian does his or her part, the audience does theirs. And together they create something new.

It’s no longer just you and me. It is us -- engaged.

Otherwise: It’s just a sentence.

The same is true in other worlds.

My fellow diplomats know the way this works.

We live and work right there in that space between.

We know the difference between mere contact and true connection.

Between Washington and Whitehall we write cables, build spreadsheets, tweet and retweet.

We have to make sure they are not just words.

Not just numbers.

Not just sentences.

Not even sentences. Fragments, even, in 140 characters or less.

It’s a pleasure on this holiday to pause.

To appreciate the best measure we have for this special relationship that we tend.

We are all experiencing it right here, right now.

This wonderful group of mostly Americans. Gathered in this most British of buildings. Shared with us by the British for this iconic American holiday.

That connection is here. It's invisible but all around us.

Those of us who live here can feel it every day.

We are blessed by these connections of ours.

And yet we know that not so far from here, there are millions of people whose connections have been shattered.

Some seek to come to Britain and some seek to America.

They need somewhere safe to begin the long process of rebuilding them once more.

This poses questions of us.

Our countries, with our own concerns, must weigh our values and the practicalities.

And we are doing just that.

But as we look inward at our capacity to take in new families...

And as we look outward at these potential new residents...

We will do well to remember the opportunity gained- or lost- in the space inbetween.

Because the work isn't over when the paperwork is done.

When asylum is granted.

When a roof over their heads has been found.

Mere contact with our countries is not yet a connection.

Our engagement is needed, each and every one of us, to help newcomers become new neighbors.

That way they can become British.

Become American.

Call our countries home.

Otherwise, it's just a place.

So, on this Thanksgiving day that is about coming together and sharing the space between...

When we all sit at our tables later:

With our family: near and dear, even if far-flung.

With our friends: long-lost or new-found.

As the President puts it in this year's Thanksgiving proclamation: "Let us express our gratitude by welcoming others to our celebrations."

Let us celebrate the invisible and immeasurable connections between us all.

...and the power to light them up with meaning...

...and the wonder of a good joke.

Otherwise, it's just a day.

Thank you.