

**IMMIGRATION & HEALTH:**  
**TREATING PEOPLE LIKE PEOPLE!**

Too often throughout history, and now once again, here in the United States, ordinary people have become pawns in the games and machinations of the wealthy and powerful. So many ways over so many ages, those with power have found to suppress and oppress the commoners, feudal societies, and now even the middle classes of our society. Kings and despots have rarely recognized the personages or any but some minor monetary values of the under classes, but here in the United States we had built up a dream, a vision, that all people have value. It is imprinted in our founding documents with only a couple glitches requiring later amendment to acknowledge the full humanity of Blacks and Women. It is clearly stated in the 1<sup>st</sup> Principle of Unitarian Universalism, that all persons have *an inherent worth and dignity!*

Every first world nation but ours offers healthcare for all. Insurance companies have insured best their own profits by vilifying socialized medicine. Politicians have depended on support from Insurance companies to insure election and re-election. Consumers and especially the poor have suffered the most. The Affordable Care Act did not fix all the problems or cover everyone, but it was a step forward. Trump and the Republicans keep saying they will get rid of Obamacare, but they also keep failing to offer any viable alternative.

Every nation has some immigration policy, and throughout most of our history America was the land of opportunity, welcoming in people from every land into this great melting pot. At times in the last century, there have been limits placed on immigration, but now the new President is threatening to selectively close the door to Muslims and Mexicans while prioritizing high value persons before those in need but cutting the number of visas available in half.

Jews who so often had doors to immigration closed to them around the world historically have taken some pretty strong stands against Trump's policies to keep Muslims out. Many of us are also opposed to Trump's Wall and his anti-Mexican immigration policies. The Wall may be pandering to his base, but

most farm and factory corporations need immigrants because Americans won't take such hard low-wage jobs. Even if a living wage were somehow miraculously enacted, those would still be the least desirable jobs for most Americans. What we really need are better policies for visiting workers, better immigration policies generally, and a clear and affordable path to citizenship for all immigrants.

For years, Republicans have been getting people to vote against their own self-interest by fear-mongering and lying. I guess they wouldn't get so many votes with rallying cries like, "Vote for me and you will lose your health insurance!" or "Vote for us and we will make sure Fruits and Vegetables are more expensive because there won't be enough workers to harvest them!" or "Vote for us and you won't be able to get safe drinking water because we're going to take all the restrictions off Fracking and Drilling and Dumping wastewater!" And just think, Obama never did get around to taking their guns! Now Trump is going after the First Amendment and his supporters are cheering. We have a lot of work to do!

And remember all those Evangelical Christians who supported Trump? They still don't seem to care that Trump clearly doesn't follow the teachings of Jesus, or that his policies will hurt children, the poor, women, and the Sojourners that the Bible says ought to be welcomed. Too bad they couldn't imagine a woman in charge. Interesting that they don't seem to care about Trump's Tweets or e-mails or e-mail servers. Ok, to be fair, lots of them have been praying for Armageddon for years anyway, so they must be thrilled with all Trump has accomplished so far!

Those of us in more rationally based religious communities have a somewhat different take on things. Lots of us expect no afterlife other than the heritage that we leave for our children and grandchildren. Those of us who value equality, justice, and the worth of every person have trouble with corporations getting even richer and freer to take resources and leave pollution. Quite a number of us believe the 97% or better consensus of Climate Scientists who are concerned about Climate Change, Global Warming, intensifying storms, growing drought belts, melting polar ice and rising seas.

A number of us gathered to watch, National Geographic and Leonardo DiCaprio's "Before the Flood" on Thursday evening. "Before the Flood" visually portrays the problems with extracting oil from Tar Sands, air and water pollution, and melting polar ice and glaciers, along with a number of other concerns now facing all of Earth's inhabitants. As always, the problems fall hardest on those with the least resources, the poor. And there are a Billion people living in low-lying coastal areas around the globe that are susceptible to flooding from storms and rising seas. Where will all those people go?

All throughout history groups of people have moved to find better living conditions. Migrations of people historically have been just as common as migrations of animals. Indigenous peoples moved to warmer more protected areas in the cold months and into higher often more productive areas in the warm months. The indigenous peoples of Mexico and the American Southwest historically moved freely across the areas now blocked by a border and soon to be blocked by a longer wall. In many places around the world, borders have created an artificial separation between areas previously crossed freely by many peoples. These borders have become more of a blockade when Nationalisms have arisen in which some are seeking to maintain ethnic, racial, or national purity by vilifying whatever groups might be seeking to enter.

I know you are aware that many of the people Trump wants to block from Muslim countries are refugees precisely because they helped our soldiers in some fashion or are otherwise considered collaborators by their own people because they supported things the Americans wanted or were doing. Keeping many of these people out may be a death sentence for them.

Now some of you are aware that there are people who are assessing Trump's actions, especially in the case of the Muslim immigrant ban as a 'shock event' designed to distract from his real objective of consolidating power. It will only become clear over time how true that assessment may be, but it is certainly one of the scarier possibilities.

Let's get back to Health Care for a bit. What is the benefit to the country to exclude millions of people from the health care system? They will go to clinics and emergency rooms when desperate, but why not help them stay healthy?

The Medical, Pharmaceutical and Health Insurance industries are each large, rich, and powerful and want to be larger, richer, and even more powerful. Healthcare for the poor is at best a break-even proposition if subsidized by government. The growth for these industries is in a wealthier clientele and in the insurance that can be sold to corporations. Bottom line profits (the only kind that apparently matter to corporate persons) are not benefitted by caring for the poor unless someone else is paying. Extracting wealth from government, corporations, and those well enough off to pay all their own costs is what supports the bottom line. Fortunately morals and ethics do not get in the way for corporations any more, they just need to provide the greatest value to their stockholders. Stockholders can even sue corporations that do not strive to do their best to satisfy the bottom line! In this wonderfully capitalistic society of ours, money really is the only god that matters.

For those of us who think that individual lives matter, that all persons have value, it is inevitable that we will clash with the beliefs and practices of corporate executives. Choosing a businessman as President set up that clash of values, but may have been itself inevitable with the growing power of corporations, the freedom they have to influence politics since the Citizen's United ruling, and the willingness of the populace to be divided and for many people to believe an amazing array of lies!

So here we are in a corporate world, in a nation state defiantly capitalistic, beholden to oil corporations whom we subsidize, ready to bar the door to Muslims and Mexicans, and with the healthcare for some 20 million likely disappearing by the end of the year. For most of us, these are not the best of times! So how do we as a religious community, make a difference in insuring that people are treated like people?

We do our best to treat everyone who walks in our door as a person of sacred worth and dignity. We try to assume the best even of those who may have caused trouble previously. We do our best to welcome everyone into our community so that they may each decide for themselves whether this is the community to which they want to offer their support and allegiance.

For those who are at risk of deportation, we may consider becoming a Sanctuary Congregation—we don't have the space or facilities to offer to house anyone but we may be able to work with other congregations to provide meals, rides, and assistance as needed.

For Muslims who are now scared, whether they were born here or are immigrants, we can offer friendship and support. Our liberal clergy group, the Stockton Area Interfaith Network (SAIN) has begun making some outreach efforts to local Muslim communities which we hope will forge some ties with those communities.

Most of all, I think that we can accomplish a lot by telling the stories of the people who are being harmed by these new dehumanizing policies. For years lies have been told about massive numbers of welfare cheats and more recently about people committing voter fraud. The small numbers of problems in each case were only an excuse to cut benefits, suppress minority voting, and cut taxes for the wealthy. Now there are millions of people who will actually be hurt physically, emotionally, and financially by these new immigration and healthcare policies, and we need to tell their real stories.

We are also working on gathering a group of people who will respond to calls for demonstrations and marches, who can put on our new gold love shirts and join with others who are trying to make a difference by letting politicians know where we stand and what we believe.

It also may turn out, that the most important thing of all that we can do is to be a welcoming and accepting community to all those who need a safe place, a family, a home. This has always been a major role of churches, but in this era it may become even more important. Every institution seems hell-bent on depersonalizing interactions with people. Stores keep expanding self check-out lanes, businesses only allow you to speak to a real person on the phone if you can get to that option on the third or fourth menu, restaurants want you to order and pay through a digital display on your table, governmental offices might let you speak to a real person briefly if you have the required forms and paperwork. Distance learning, on-line classes, & other digital classes can replace classrooms. And of course, there are jobs where you work from home.

People still find ways to interact, often via text message, but face to face contact with other people is becoming the refuge of Luddites and the digitally impaired!

Treating people like people is becoming a lost art, but of course the valuing of all persons as individuals as it sprang from enlightenment values probably was an anomaly whose time may be passing. Slaves and the lower classes never did receive much attention from the rulers of other ages and at best they were considered expendable, more property than people. The humanistic idealism of the modern era in America and the West may be no more than a passing fad historically as the rich and powerful regain control. And yet, I want to rage against that kind of a world. I want to hold onto that hope that even in a world of 7 Billion people, we each have value and our lives do have meaning.

Immigrants whether Mexican or Muslim, and all of us whose healthcare is no longer assured are pawns in this crazy game played by those with wealth and power. In the outside world there may be little that we can do to change whatever Congress and Trump decide, but here within our church we can be real with each other. Here we can tell our stories. Here we can protect each other from racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and religious prejudice. Here, with each other, we can be together as friends and equals, accepting, loving, and respecting each other. And that may be the greatest thing that we can offer each other!

Go out and do all you can to shape a better world, but remember you will always have a place here! Go now in Peace!

Shalom, Salaam, Blessed Be, Namaste, and Amen!