

NOW WHAT? ELECTION AFTERMATH!

As the week progresses, I remain in shock over the election outcome. The thoughts I shared on Wednesday were about all I could write out, so as I start this sermon after hearing many responses from friends and family, listening to some TV comments including those from Stephen Colbert, and reading various things on the internet, I still have no great wisdom from on high or from Boston to share. What I want to do this morning is open up a few questions and a few possible responses and then invite you to share some of your thoughts and struggles. I recognize that we may be in many different political and religious camps and thus have very different feelings about what may or may not have changed in our nation with this election. You might be considering international relocation or joining Calexit to support secession from the union.

One of the most difficult questions for families is what to tell children about the election of a man who has advocated racism, misogyny, and the exclusion of immigrants and especially Muslims, as well as practicing sexual abuse toward women and the failure to pay laborers for work he contracted. How do we tell children how bad these things are when the President-Elect of the United States advocates and practices such things? And what do we tell our children about the parts of Christianity that have embraced him as their champion? I suppose we can tell them that kings and dictators and Presidents are above the laws and expectations of normal moral and ethical behavior, but that remains more than a bit unsatisfying. Remember when leaders were expected to operate by the highest moral and ethical values?

But even setting those questions aside, there is still the question of our national unity. Can we in good conscience support the peaceful transition of power, advocated by President Obama and Secretary Clinton, which will continue the practice and law that has helped maintain our Union with the exception of that Civil War thing back in the 1860s? We wonder whether Trump and his supporters would have supported Hillary if she had won. There have been many demonstrations and there is an effort afoot to convince the official electors to choose Hillary when they make this thing final.

I have had people compare this outcome to the takeover of Germany by the Nazis in the 1930s, wondering how we can be sure that the future will not follow the pattern of a new genocide against Mexicans, Muslims, Blacks, and LGBTQ persons? Many people I care about are now living in fear.

We can take some comfort that Hillary won the popular vote even if the electoral vote was won by Trump. I do not take much comfort though in the number of people that did not vote, who stayed home perhaps as a protest, possibly believing that it would not matter or even that it would be good to shake up the system. Nor do I take comfort in the fact that Hillary Clinton had never been convicted of anything, much less the accusations made by Trump, while Trump has been convicted numerous times of failing to pay workers and contracts, avoiding creditors, as well as choosing bankruptcy and tax dodges over responsible civic behavior. Trump was elected on the basis of promises with no evidence that he had ever done anything for the betterment of anyone but himself while Hillary was defeated even with the evidence of her lifelong work of public service. We live in a very messed up time in a crazy nation.

Somehow though, we have to put all of that aside and figure out a way to move forward. Clearly our work of helping to instill UU values in our society is far from finished. How many times before have we taken a step forward toward justice only to be pushed two steps back? Even in light of the progress made in regard to racial justice, the rights of women and LGBTQ rights, it is even clearer now how much there is yet to do. This work is too important to give up even when the progress of decades seems to be cast aside in the election of Donald Trump and the re-election of a Republican Congress. There will be post-mortems of the election over the next couple of years, but one of the early messages is that the liberals have not been listening well enough to the voices of the people nor understanding the depth of fear and frustration that currently grips much of our nation. It is obvious now, especially in retrospect, how much more effective the Republicans were in fanning the flames of fear and capitalizing on the unfulfilled longings of the people in rural areas and poor less educated whites. It is sad but instructive to see how effective fear-mongering still can be in an election. And now it is us, the liberal progressives who are living in fear of what may happen next. We have so far to go and so much to do!

I have no idea what impact the demonstrations against Trump happening in many cities may have. I am not yet ready to heed much less issue the call to forgive and forget. I do know that we must find a way to move on from this point, somehow turning our fear, anger and disgust into fuel for the continuing struggle for equality and justice. Even though this may seem to many of us like the darkest period ever in history, we can look back into history for perspective. The Civil War had to be won before black slaves were free, and though full equality is still often denied, the Civil Rights movement forced much of the overt racism of Jim Crow laws to fade into more subtle forms of racism. The fight for women's rights also has progressed slowly in fits and starts and clearly continues. The rights of immigrants remain contentious. The rights of Muslims, even those who are citizens by birth are as much at risk as those of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War.

We can also look to the heavens for some perspective. Even if our planetarily suicidal abuse of fossil fuels does finally leave our planet fit solely for the cockroaches, there will be other species developing on other planets across the universe who may be far smarter than us! Even the earth will eventually recover to spawn new species, some of whom are likely to gain sentience. In some future sentient incarnation, I may be saddened to hear the story of humanity's self-destruction, but perhaps this is a necessary step in the evolution of some more stable intelligent and aware life form! In the cosmic story, we are just a blip, and this current setback to progress even less than an iota.

Recriminations and blaming will not help us get beyond this, though I do think that it is another lesson on the importance of choosing wisely and voting for the best possible electable candidate. I also would recommend that we find a way as a society to insure truth-telling by candidates in TV sound-byte ads and when they speak about others so that unfounded claims will not become truth. In this as in several elections in my lifetime, split votes for conscience have also had a significant consequence. We must learn from this election and we must move forward. Garrison Keillor has had some interesting things to say about this election, including the responsibility that Republicans bear for an outcome many of them never expected. He also lets Unitarians, librarians, people with shelves of books and bird-watchers off the hook of responsibility for whatever will happen.

In the aftermath of this election, there are many people hurting and we need to find ways to comfort and reassure them. There is a movement growing borrowed from Brexit in which people wear a safety pin as a symbol that they are safe and will listen, encourage, walk and stand with those who are fearful or struggling, whether because of their immigration status, religion, race, sex, or LGBTQ identity. At times like these those individual acts of courage can help make a world of difference for those at risk and struggling.

I am old enough now to have been disappointed many times by the outcome of elections, but never so badly. Even if his Presidency is marked by the moderation and restraint he has shown this week, his candidacy will remain tainted by the things he said during his campaign and the actions throughout his life. Do people change? Sometimes they do, but the campaign was more like the rest of his life than it resembles the promises he has made or his restraint this week. 8 years of progress under President Obama will be hard to forget, but we must take up the cause as if we had been transported back in time to a harsher world.

The Unitarian Universalist campaign slogan Standing on the Side of Love needs to be our watchword going forward. We must stand with those who are living in fear, walk with those who would dare to demonstrate for progress in all the areas of life now under risk of attack. We must strengthen ourselves for battles that may last far longer than the short 4 years until the next Presidential election. In 2 years we will have another chance to elect members of Congress. And each day we have the opportunity to make our voices heard. Each day we have the chance to stand with those who are at risk against whatever may come. This election may in the future be seen as the dying gasp of a way of life that allowed misogyny, racism, heterosexism, and hatred under the power of illiterate fear-mongering. This time may lead to the breakthroughs for which we have been struggling. In any case, we cannot allow this setback to stop us as we reshape the world under the banners of Justice and Compassion. This is a bump in the road, a moment when the fear triumphed to win a day, but the long arc of justice will carry us forward to a better future.

Let us take this election as a wake-up call that we had become complacent. We must remain vigilant, aware, mindful so that this will never happen again. We must teach our children higher values, demand more from our society, work harder to make justice, equality, and love the standards of our society as it touches all persons. This is the challenge that faces us now and for the next four years. In that time, we must work to insure the safety of all persons at risk and also find ways to insure that healthier, more responsible and more representative candidates will be chosen by all parties in the future.

At least for today, those are my thoughts, but where are you struggling and where do you see hope? The sermon in a Unitarian Universalist congregation is never the final word on any matter and it is always an invitation to further conversation.

The floor is now open for your feelings and thoughts.

Thank you for sharing your thoughts and feelings! May we each be strengthened and supported within this community we share!

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