

Our Values, No Matter What: Post Election Reflection

Sunday, November 10, 2024

Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento

Sermon preached by Rev. Dr. Roger Jones

Pastoral Prayer by Rev. Lucy Bunch

Personal Reflection by Jenni Gouine (printed after sermon)

Hymns: The Tide Is Rising (and So Are We); #318 We Would Be One; I Am Willing

Special Music: Resilience (by Abbie Betinis, choir), Lead the Way, (by Lea Morris, choir),

Shenandoah (trad. American, piano), Lead with Love (Melanie DeMore, Anthony leading)

Reading

This is from words written recently by the Austin Channing Brown, a Black woman writing to other African American women.

Hope for progress is a dangerous thing. But what is the alternative? What would you have rather done with your time and energy? Speaking up was a good use of your time.... Working for change was a good use of your energy. Hope is a duty. And your hope is only tangentially related to the fate of the White House. What is always at stake is the deep belief in your own humanity, in your personhood. What is at stake is dignity and your dignity is always the right thing to fight for. You must hope because you are worthy. You are worthy of equality and equal protection. You are worthy of everything you fought for. Hope is a duty. Even when it hurts.¹

Sermon by Roger Jones

On the day after election day, the poet Rosemary Wahtola Trommer posted this poem:

When You Ask Me If I Can Say Yes to the World as It Is

Today yes is made of lead.

You look at me

and I nod—

and together

we carry the weight.

For the past few days, Reverend Lucy and I have heard many of you express a wide range of emotions, reactions, and reflections about the results of this election. All feelings are natural, even if others can't join you in those feelings. Likewise, among all of us is a wide variety of ways of dealing with our feelings. In times like this, it's crucial that we address our feelings in ways that help us rather than cause more suffering.

For me and a number of people I know, many of our emotions in the past several days are very similar to feelings when grieving a death. Such feelings include shock and flashes of disbelief that this has happened. They include deep sadness, physical pain, and confusion about the future. Feelings may include anger, fear, even dread.

In the wake of any shocking loss, people can fall into "if only" thinking: *If only we'd had done this differently.* Or: *If only they had done something else.* We can second-guess ourselves: *Maybe I didn't do enough.* Or: *Maybe I was wrong to care so much.* Likewise, we can fall into finger pointing—the blame game, as it's been called on the news this past week. I'm appalled by

how soon this happens but also by the righteous tone of it. If this were a grieving family, such blaming talk would be so unkind. It's also a distraction from what many of us need right now, which is to take a rest. Fault-finding and finger pointing bring out our worst instincts.

For the past few nights, in the middle of the night, my half-awake mind seems to race with worries. I don't need to add to my anxiety by reading post-election autopsies, watching videos on my phone about it, or God forbid, sparring with people on Facebook or Nextdoor.com. Let's choose things that make it better. Let's invite the better angels of our nature to show up.

I want to mention that tomorrow is Veterans' Day. This national holiday honors all who have served in the US Armed Forces. We observe Veterans' Day to commemorate all of those who have served a cause larger than themselves. Whether as volunteers or draftees, they took on a duty to something beyond their own wishes and needs. Duty above self.

This leads me to the topic of hope. Hope is not so much a feeling as it is a choice. It is an embodiment of the values we know to be true. Choosing hope is not something we do for ourselves alone. We choose hope for all of us, for all that we love. As we heard in the reading by writer Austin Channing Brown: "Hope is a duty. Even when it hurts."

Today I am so grateful for all the time, work and care which so many people have given leading up to this election and in the last few days. I am proud of the volunteers who wrote letters and postcards to voters in other states, knocked on doors promoting candidates or ballot measures, and staffed telephone banks. I'm grateful to all election poll workers and volunteers for their long hours. I admire those who spoke to their neighbors and relatives and those who donated money. All these commitments of time, care, and money represent actions of hope.

Serving a cause larger than ourselves can tire us out, for sure, but it can give us a sense of purpose, too. In the words of Austin Channing Brown: "What is the alternative? What would you have rather done with your time and energy?"

I just read something hopeful the other day. Many progressive not-for-profit organizations have been planning for months to confront a possible new takeover by the Trump movement. Did you know that? Under all of the distracting noise of news coverage of campaigns and polling data, non-partisan progressive organizations have been learning, training, and networking. They have been creatively preparing to meet the challenge. They want to be poised to protect vulnerable people and places. They want to be ready to defend the values of justice, fairness and freedom. It helps me to know this.

In his online journal *Waging Nonviolence*, Daniel Hunter explains that every authoritarian government's power "is derived from [people's] fear of repression, isolation from each other and exhaustion at the utter chaos." In other words, the chaos and cruelty are intentional; they want to wear us down, to exhaust us. "We're already feeling it," Hunter says. But we can deny this power to autocrats. While we may feel our fear, we need not surrender to it. We can weaken the power of fear when we build resilience.

Here is some of Hunter's advice for doing this: "Start with trusting your own inner voice." Trust yourself. For example, he says, "If you need to stop checking your phone compulsively, *do it*. If you don't want to read this article now and instead take a good walk, *do it*." Trust yourself, Hunter says, "because *trust* in oneself is part of the foundation of a healthy movement [for change]."

Next, he says, "Find other people whom you can trust." Build out from there. This includes joining with others not only for working together but for *being* together. Share food, music, nature, culture, spirituality, and fun. We build resilience by sharing time together.

It's clear that some of you decided you needed to be at a service in church today—just a few! (In case you're joining us by Zoom and can't see the whole sanctuary, it's full here.) Joining the service today is an act of self-care. It's also an act of love and support for everyone else. Thank you for this kindness.

Earlier I said that for many of us, this election's aftermath feels like we're grieving a death. Daniel Hunter agrees, and he urges us to grieve what has been lost. Instead of "compartmentalizing, rationalizing, or intellectualizing" the loss, he says, *grieve* the loss. As we know from counseling and medical professionals, the *denial* of grief is bad for mind and body. Moreover, Hunter says: "The inability to grieve is a strategic error." That's because ignoring or numbing our feelings about the losses we've sustained will set us up for further shocks in the future. Grieving, on the other hand, can help us come to terms with our new reality. And we need to acknowledge this reality in order to confront it.

One more piece of advice is this: Let go of what you cannot control. Don't stretch yourself beyond your own usefulness. Forgive yourself if you can't do it all, because you *can't* do it all. Hunter says this is difficult for committed and caring people, but it is a necessary discipline. It's necessary for those of us who work for justice to sustain ourselves. It is not only a matter of our human dignity and our health; for a justice movement, it is resource management.²

Before long we will come to learn how we can provide care and solidarity to those most at risk. As people of conscience and faith, we want to be ready. Now is not the time to make unreasonable demands of ourselves or those around us. It's the time to take care of ourselves—body, mind and spirit. First things first. Self-care is not an indulgence; it's an investment in strength and resilience.

We need these investments because the stakes are very high. It is a scary time. I'm scared. I would love to assure you that everything will be okay, but I cannot do that today. I have no guarantees to offer. Nevertheless, I am sure of a few things. The power of love is greater than hate. Love is more durable than fear. We can *rely* on it.

Michael Curry was the first Black presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church in America. He wrote that "the way of love will show us the right thing to do, every single time. It is moral and spiritual grounding—and a place of rest—amid the chaos [of life]. It's how we stay decent in indecent times."³

In the Unitarian Universalist movement, our values are centered on love. Love is an ethic, a calling, and a feeling. If we did not *love* and care about the common good, we would not be so upset by the outcome of this election. We love the human family, and we care about the most vulnerable members of it. We are concerned about climate chaos and pollution because we love the beauty of this earth, its mountains, meadows, rivers and seas. It is love that calls us together and calls us forward.

Nadia Bolz-Weber is a young Lutheran pastor and an author. The day after the election she posted a prayer asking for guidance from her God because she didn't know what to say. She wrote: "God, If it is possible to remind us that millions of human beings throughout history have lived through worse political situations and still managed to make art, and find joy, and share meals and resist despair, could you do that for us please? And then keep guiding us toward their wisdom."⁴

Indeed, human communities have gone through devastating and brutal times over hundreds and thousands of years. Yet after all that has been lost, amid all the defeats that humans have suffered, the human spirit has not lost the power to choose hope. The Spirit of Love equips us to put hope into action. Communities of conscience and faith have not forgotten the ancient call to freedom and justice. We have not lost the basic impulse to embrace one another.

So much has been changed by this election; so much is unclear and unknown about the days to come. Let's remember, however, that our values have not changed. Of course, in the days to come we will be called to live out our values in a variety of new ways. But our values have not changed. The call to human dignity, freedom, interdependence and social justice – this call remains.

How we follow this call will honor those who came before us. Bearing witness to our values will leave a legacy of commitment and hope to those who come after us. And building on our values now, together, will guide our way forward, with love.

I love you. I am grateful and blessed to be with all of you now and in the days ahead of us. Our faith and our values will see us through this. So may it be, blessed be, and amen.

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Personal Reflection by Jenni Gouine

On election day, my husband Michael and I volunteered as election observers with the Asian Law Caucus. This nonprofit advocacy group sends over 300 volunteers to about 900 polling sites in 26 counties across California to evaluate physical accessibility and language access and report any issues back to Caucus headquarters. Michael and I were assigned to visit 5 polling sites in Sutter County. My previous experience had been in Sacramento County and I was nervous. I imagined we'd be harassed in Sutter County but what we found was a group of friendly and diverse folks as interested as we were in ensuring a free and fair election. Some election workers were gently curious about us and some even thanked us! I made sure to thank them in return because I knew they were in for a long, difficult day.

As we drove back to Sacramento County, I felt good about what Michael and I had done. We participated in democracy. I felt some hope. However, my mood soon soured as we sat on the couch, our eyes glued to PBS. The numbers and the commentary grew bleaker as the night wore on. Around 10:30pm, I decided to go to bed. Whatever was going to happen was going to happen and I had to work the next day. On the day after the election, I tried to keep myself together, but it was difficult. I was grateful to be working from home and able to take moments to sit and stare into space with a heart full of disbelief and grief.

How could so many people have chosen to elect someone who openly campaigned on hate? AGAIN? Or just not voted at all?

Michael and I consoled each other throughout the day and welcomed Reverend Roger's email with the notice about an in-person vigil that night. When we walked into the welcome hall, a young girl came up to me and said, "You look like you could use a hug". She was right. After the welcome hug, we walked into the sanctuary where about 30 people were seated in a circle, all grieving, heartbroken, angry, and in disbelief. But sharing their grief and pain in community.

I was weeping too much to speak but I didn't need to – I found myself nodding in resonance with every person who spoke. That experience of being with other hearts in pain, laying our pain in the circle and seeing ourselves in one another, was a balm to my heart and my nervous system. I walked out of the hall feeling lighter and a bit more hopeful.

As a cis-gendered, middle aged white woman, I don't think I'm a member of a targeted group. So, it feels necessary for me to do the work to protect the rights of my transgender, non-binary, immigrant, Black, brown, Asian, disabled, low-income, and women friends, neighbors and fellow human beings– the right to exist and the right to experience joy. The threats and the persecution are real. I need the community here and the hope it brings in order to strengthen me for this work.

This is a hard time, and I am not yet OK. I imagine many of you feel the same. But coming here and being with you, knowing that we share values of justice, equity, transformation, pluralism, interdependence, and generosity, knowing that we share hope and the will to work hard to protect one another brings light to the darkness. Thank you for being here.

¹ Words of Austin Channing Brown, on Instagram, accessed Nov. 9, 2024:

https://www.instagram.com/austinchanning/p/DCCq1ywSe_4/?img_index=1.

She is the author of *I'm Still Here* and she posts on Holy, Wild, and Free: <https://austinchanning.substack.com/>

² **I highly recommend this entire article** by Daniel Hunter, "Ten Ways to be Prepared and Grounded Now that Trump Has Won," in *Waging Nonviolence*, posted Nov. 4, updated Nov. 6, 2024.

<https://wagingnonviolence.org/2024/11/10-things-to-do-if-trump-wins/>

³³ Michael Curry quoted in "Love Takes Commitment," in the online Daily Meditations of the Center for Action and Contemplation, Nov. 7, 2024. <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/love-takes-commitment/>

⁴ Nadia Bolz-Weber, "I Got Nothing for You But this Shitty Little Prayer," in *The Corners*, Nov. 6, 2024.

<https://thecorners.substack.com/p/i-got-nothing-for-you-but-this-shitty>