Post-election Reflections

Rev. Dr. Roger Jones
Sunday, November 8, 2026
Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento

Hymns: This Boat (Laura Zucker), #188 One More Step. #121 We'll Build a Land.

Special Music: America the Beautiful (tune Samuel A. Ward, piano arr. Mark Hayes), We Are the Power (Pat Humphries & Sandy O., duet sung by Janet and Anthony), Ashokan Farewell (Jay Ungar, from *The Civil War*, PBS Series, piano/violin solo by Irina and Jennifer).

Sermon

It was hard to believe the results of Tuesday's elections. It was such a turnaround from the outcome in 2024, when Donald Trump was elected for the second time and had a hold on both houses of Congress. Last week, large majorities across the nation rejected the federal government's corruption and cruelty of the past two years. Voters repudiated the ruling party's violation of our Constitution and of the norms of decency.

After I learned of the magnitude of the results, it took a while for a sense of relief to settle in. Then I had to figure out what to say to you in a sermon this morning. After all, if the election results had again been heartbreaking for most of you, if the outcome had been yet another cause for despair, I was going to pull out the sermon I gave in November of 2024 and recycle it. But I can't think of a happier occasion to write a fresh one.

For several weeks I've been thinking of a sentence by the late Rev. Dr. James Luther Adams, a UU minister, theologian and professor of social ethics. He lived from 1901 to 1994. As a young minister visiting Germany, he witnessed violent angry mobs during the Nazi takeover, and he watched people who were afraid to speak out against the tyranny. Later, when Adams was a seminary professor in Chicago and Boston, he was active in campaigns for social reform and African American civil rights. He said that when people of goodwill put their energies together for a common purpose, we can find ourselves "making history in place of merely being pushed around by it."

After Tuesday's elections, there's renewed optimism about many areas of our common life, such as the hope that public health officials and researchers in science and nutrition will again have the support and the independence to study diseases, explore possible treatments, and publicize factual information without manipulation. We want to stop the purges and persecutions of the nation's civil servants. We want to respect their service and retain their expertise.

There is renewed hope that all members of the military will again be measured by their performance rather than be threatened or demeaned because of their ethnicity, religion, gender, or gender identity. Concerned veterans and other advocates for military families want the government to stop firing dedicated admirals, generals and other military leaders who have decades of experience. People of all political orientations want us to stop the war on Iran, a war which Congress never authorized.

Positive change is coming for sure, but this country is not out of the danger zone. For example, the streets of our nation's capital city are still patrolled every day by armed members of the National Guard. The current president has two more years in office. He has grown more erratic and unpredictable, his words more vulgar, violent, and threatening. He just appointed as his new chief of staff the man who was the architect of the campaign to terrorize immigrants, tear apart their families, and send masked agents into the streets of American cities.

Last week's election has not lifted from us the responsibility to speak out and insist that this be stopped. We still need to help our immigrant and refugee neighbors. This includes not only vigilance about lawless government cruelty, but also practical kinds of help like tutoring, rides to appointments, assistance in navigating bureaucracies, and ordinary gestures of kindness.

Many of us cared so much about the results of this election because many of our neighbors have been in danger—our neighbors, friends, church members, and coworkers. For example, transgender Americans have been targeted by the federal government and by some states. Anti-transgender ballot propositions were approved by voters in four states on Tuesday. Other groups of people who have been harmed in the past couple of years include those whose health care depends on Medicaid or on the Affordable Care Act. Families who don't have enough to eat are threatened by cuts to the supplemental nutrition assistance program, called SNAP.

Of course, much of the work that remains for people of conscience and faith would still be calling to us no matter the results of this election. For example, in every American city, suburb and small town, thousands of adults and children are living on the streets. In the Sacramento region, unhoused neighbors are sleeping in their cars or hiding from the weather in a tent. State and local governments have not resolved this crisis. Thus, as we keep the pressure on elected leaders, we will continue to provide food, help, hospitality, and kind respect to some of our most vulnerable neighbors.

Even after this election, so much good work remains for people of conscience and good faith to do, it can seem overwhelming. This is why personal balance and self-care are important. This is crucial both in times of emergency *and* in moments of positive change. If you have been heavily involved in this election season or at least emotionally invested in the outcomes, this is a time to celebrate, express relief, and get some rest. It's an opportunity to take a break from watching and reading all the commentary about politics. I'm sure taking a break from it would help all of us. Indeed, I find it refreshing that this weekend the only text messages on my phone that have annoyed me are not the ones asking for campaign contributions, they are the ones telling me that I've been outbid in the church's silent auction. I'll get back to it later today before the online auction closes.

In the wake of this election, we have so much to be grateful for. I feel gratitude for the state and county election officials and their staff members around the country who have been doing their duty to the Constitution. In the face of intimidation and meddling by the President of the United States as well as by their own community members, they have kept faith with the voters. We can give thanks for their work and their integrity.

No matter how any individual might have cast their vote, we can be grateful for everybody who made the effort to vote. This year, that was 124 million citizens, a number which represents 63 percent of eligible voters. In a midterm election in this country, 63 percent is a strong rate of turnout.

It's likely that many Americans came to understand and believe that they really could make a difference because a volunteer wrote them a post card encouraging them to vote, or called them on the phone, or knocked on their door. Every effort at outreach was a gesture of community and an act of hope. To be sure, donations of money in large and small amounts enabled campaigns to get their message out, help with travel expenses, and so on. In recent weeks and months, many campaign staff members as well as candidates gave up hours of sleep, and they probably didn't eat very nutritiously. So many people have given so much of themselves to make a difference. As James Luther Adams put it, this is "*making* history in place of merely being pushed around by it."

With an election behind us, it's a good time to remember that people don't come to a congregation for a validation of our political preferences. Our religious movement is not defined by a partisan agenda any more than we are defined by a theological creed.

We are defined by a set of ethical and spiritual values. We affirm the inherent dignity and worth of every person, every member of the human family, in this land and in other lands. We recognize the web of life which makes us interdependent with all people and all of the natural world. We promote democratic decision making for the issues of our common lives. We celebrate the many ways that people express their identities, choose and create families, and build relationships of love. We try to put into practice the ancient call to love your neighbor as yourself. The reason that so many of us got involved in the recent elections is that we could not bear to see these values attacked with such viciousness as they have been in the last two years.

In his teaching and writing about social ethics, James Luther Adams talked a lot about voluntary associations. By this he meant organizations that people belong to and support. Voluntary associations help individuals to engage with a society that is too big for us to navigate by ourselves alone. Adams wrote about religious congregations, neighborhood groups, political parties, service organizations, libraries, arts organizations, activist organizations, and all kinds of clubs in all kinds of communities. Such groups, he said, are crucial to keeping a society vital and a democracy strong.[i]

In the past several years, institutions have come under attack in the fields of journalism, higher education, science, the creative arts, and health care. In response, many Americans demonstrated new vigor and creativity to protect those organizations. We must continue to sustain and strengthen all forms of community and belonging. Doing so will guarantee that, no matter the challenges that we confront in the years to come, we will be as connected as we can be.

In the past two years, many of us were drawn into public demonstrations against the autocratic actions of the government. There were marches and rallies large and small, including the No Kings demonstrations. Yet we couldn't be sure that any of this would help. After all, things were just seeming to get worse in this country. I went to three No Kings demonstrations, but as I headed there I wondered: Will this be helpful? After all, I'm just one person.

It turned out that that millions of individuals who might have thought, "I'm just one person" made an important discovery. We discovered that we were not alone in loving our country and caring for our neighbors. Showing up did make a difference, a difference that started within us. Perhaps we didn't put fear into the White House, but we found courage in one another.

On March 29, there were 3,300 No Kings rallies and events nationwide. More than 8 million people created the largest single-day mass protest demonstration in U.S. history. It is a blessing to realize that you are part of something larger than yourself.

It's worth hearing what a minister in another denomination wrote online this week about the difference between government and what we do in church. He wrote:

> No Congress, however it may be composed, can turn strangers into friends or enemies into brothers and sisters [and siblings]. [Congress] can't turn anxious people into patient ones. [Of course, government] can restrain evil and secure some real goods, but it can't form human beings who will be able to tell the truth, who will be able to welcome a stranger, who will be able to forgive. [ii]

As he points out, that is not what we elect public officials to do. That is what we come here to do. Here is where we can learn and remember who we are, grow in spirit, and practice living by the values that we profess.

This week, as we exhale deeply, as we feel a renewed sense of pride and hope in the country, let us also appreciate the blessing of true community which holds us in times of danger as well as times of promise.

I am grateful that this congregation exists. This is a place where we can join with other people of conscience and faith beyond these walls in order to build a land that is more free, safe, caring and fair. It is a joy to envision a world where all can flourish and all can create peace. It is a blessing to be here together. It is a joy to be alive on this new day. It is a blessing to be alive. Amen.

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[i] James Luther Adams, *Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography*. https://www.uudb.org/adams-james-luther/

[ii] Rev. Samuel Cripps, rector of an Episcopal church in Wausau, Wisconsin, *The Living Church*. Livingchurch.org