

**Finding the Voice of Unitarian Universalism:
Hate is Rising and Many are Living in Fear. What is our response?
Sermon – Rev. Tracy Springberry - Nov. 20, 2016**

Reading 1

Jon Stewart in a recent interview said that Trump’s candidacy has given a large voice to “that thought that a multi-ethnic, multicultural democracy is impossible.

“I would rather have this conversation openly and honestly than with dog whistles,” Stewart said. “This is the fight we wage against ourselves and each other. America is not natural. Natural is tribal. We’re fighting against thousands of years of human behavior and history to create something that no one’s ever done. That’s what’s exceptional about America.”

Reading 2

by Sam Boswell in a review of the *Reunited States of America* by Mark Gerzon:

Only three out of ten Americans actually feel represented in Washington. Fortunately, from the very roots of our culture, a new narrative, a new story, is emerging that appeals particularly to the other seven out of ten. That story says, "Americans can work together with people different from ourselves to find common ground that can strengthen the country that we all love."

That story does not mean agreeing on everything. Nor does it mean being "nice" or being "moderate" or "splitting the difference." On the contrary, it may mean fighting for what one believes in—but respecting one's adversary for doing the same. It means knowing the difference between an issue on which you are willing to listen and learn, and one where you believe you are not. Above all, it means disagreeing strongly without ever forgetting that "they" probably love America just as much as "we" do.

Sermon:

It has been a shocking and challenging couple of weeks for all of us.

Since the election people have used words like stunned, “hit by truck,” afraid, angry, devastated, sick, achy, reeling, shocky, nauseated, wanting to curl up in a corner, unable to sleep, and dissociative to describe their feelings.

No one, it seems, including the President-elect, saw this coming.

The morning after the election, I woke, still shocked, with one thought: “This changes everything.”

I knew, without a doubt that way I lived and my priorities would need to change. I had not understood many things about America – there was pain I didn’t know the depths of and there was hatred more intense than I ever imagined.

I had images of a wound that I thought was healing – the wounds of racism, misogyny, distrust and hate of immigrants, and fear of other faiths. I knew that wound wasn’t healed, of course, but what I saw on election day was that the scab had come off and underneath was green and foul with infection.

I did not understand.

I did not understand how so many people voted for Donald Trump. I didn’t know how people could vote for someone clearly unqualified by experience, temperament, and lack of basic knowledge of the Constitution, governmental functions, and international relations.

I did not understand how voters could endorse, at worst, and overlook, at best, his blatant white supremacy and the way he stirred up hate toward people of color, immigrants, and Muslims.

I did not understand how people could vote for a man who bragged about sexually assaulting women.

I did not understand how intelligent people could vote for a person who doesn’t believe in climate change – a crisis that will probably become so severe as to cause overwhelming suffering and destruction.

I didn’t understand how Americans could, on purpose, empower bullying racists and misogynists. Leonard Cohen, who we also mourned last week, once said in an interview, “Most of us from the middle-class, we have a kind of old, 19th-century idea of what democracy is, which is, more or less, to over-simplify it, that the masses are going to love Shakespeare and Beethoven. That’s more or less our idea of what democracy is. But that ain’t it. It’s going to come up in unexpected ways from the stuff that we think [is] junk: the people we think are junk, the ideas we think are junk, the television we think is junk.”

So this is democracy, I thought.

And it is coming up in unexpected ways.

I had to understand the junk.

Because I believe in democracy, but the results of this democratic process had violated my deepest Unitarian Universalist values: the inherent worth and dignity of each person and responsibility to care for the interdependent web. How does one deal with that?

So did what I do whenever, I don't understand: I began to read.

And things began to shift.

The shift began with a Trump anti-Semitic ad. I read about the ad in "An American Tragedy," a *New Yorker* article that detailed in painful and vivid language the danger of a Trump presidency. In it the author mentioned Trump's final campaign ad, which he claimed was anti-Semitic. I had not seen a single campaign ad all season, so I decided to watch it.

Embarrassingly, I couldn't figure out the anti-Semitic part. I had to read the analysis to understand, but I can assure you that it was very anti-Semitic, and intentionally so. You just had to know things I didn't know, like, for example, that it was modeled on early anti-Jewish ads in Hitler's Germany, or that the "bad" elites whose pictures flashed on the screen were all Jewish, except for Hillary Clinton.

But more shocking for me than the hidden-in-plain-sight hate, was how much I liked the ad and how convincing I found it. Donald Trump narrated in a very calm, assured, authoritative voice I had no idea he had. He talked about how the powers in Washington didn't work for the average person, only the elites. The words spoke perfectly to all the Americans who the current economy has left behind. Pictures of people of different ages, classes, and races flashed on the screen. Trump told America he would make their lives better.

When it was over, I realized that if this ad was the only thing I ever knew about Donald Trump, I would vote for him. I wanted what he wanted: a United States that worked for ordinary people and not just the people at the top.

The ad shook apart my after election lumping of Trump supporters into a cohesive group that stood for hate.

I began to read what Trump voters said about why they voted for Trump.

It turns out lots and lots of people who voted for Trump didn't like him.

Many were worried that their gamble—that he will stand for their values and make their lives better—wouldn't work out; that it would be a disaster.

So why did they vote for him?

Many wanted an assurance of a conservative Supreme Court.

Others could not stand Clinton. For many Americans, as challenging as that can be for people on the left to understand, Clinton was as bad or worse than Trump in terms of character and values. So their vote for Trump wasn't really a vote for Trump at all, but instead a vote against Clinton, who they genuinely felt would bring utter disaster to the country.

Others Trump voters were simply angry. They voted for Trump because they were desperate for a change in their economic situation. Manufacturing jobs disappeared after Bill Clinton signed NAFTA in the 1990s and neither Bush or Obama helped them with their difficult new lives or tried, as far as they could tell, to make them better.

Instead of ignoring them, Trump listened to them. He promised to end the trade deals that had moved their jobs to other countries, and promised to bring back desperately needed living wage jobs. Many voters acknowledged that he might not be able to bring back living wage jobs, but at least he noticed their pain and addressed their needs. Unlike most politicians, he didn't tell them the economy was fine. He didn't point out that stock market was up (not relevant if you don't have retirement accounts or are not wealthy) and unemployment was down (but employment you could live on was not up). He didn't say, there are plenty of jobs but you have go to college to get them while avoiding mentioning the \$25,000 to \$35,000 a year price tag for such an education.

I heard part of an interview on public radio with a mayor from a steel town in Pennsylvania. If ISIS came through his region, he laughed, they would keep on going; it's that destroyed. The mayor said that when he started at the steel mill, it employed 8000 people, but now, with technology, the company can produce the same amount of steel with just 400 people. There wasn't good work anywhere.

The reporter reminded the mayor that in an earlier interview the mayor had acknowledged that Trump could not bring back the steel jobs.

"Yes, that's true," said the mayor.

"Then why did you vote for him?" asked the reporter.

"He gave us hope," he said.

Hope.

Trump gave so many people hope.

It was simple.

He offered hope.

And Hope matters.

When life is hard or empty or painful and one is poor or lonely or afraid, the best elixir there is is hope.

Hope gets you up in the morning, keeps you moving during the day, and lets you sleep at night.

A person will vote for hope.

It turns out that a person will throw the worth and dignity of their fellow Americans under the bus for hope.

One should not underestimate its power.

Hope matters.

Barack Obama gave voters hope. Bernie Sanders gave people hope.

Hillary Clinton did not offer hope. If we voted for her, we understood she would be a good president, hard-working, offering the same solid centrist positions as Barack Obama.

But Clinton never said how she would change the U.S. in ways that made people's lives significantly better or stopped their suffering or pain or loneliness. She never offered to Make America Great (for the first time or any time.). She said it was great already, which wasn't very empathetic for all those struggling to survive in a service economy, for those who couldn't afford housing, and for those with life circumstance or health situations that made working extremely difficult. For them America didn't feel so great. Clinton in her matter-of-fact, smart, polished way, did say the U.S. she would lead would be better for everyone, but in small pragmatic ways. Which also isn't that comforting if you feel like you are barely getting by.

It is now almost two weeks after the election, and half the country feels that President Trump will make their lives better or at least promote the values they care most about.

And the other half is still outraged and afraid looking anywhere and everywhere for hope that the diverse world where all are loved and respected still exists.

Maybe, just maybe, marginalized people will not be bullied, assaulted, deported, watched, or tracked; climate change and the environment will be taken seriously; the shredded safety net won't vanish, and people can get health care.

Part of me keeps looking for any sign that the unpredictable Mr. Trump will move to center. Or that when he looks at the mess that the Affordable Care Act truly is, he will throw up his hands and push for Universal Health Care, which he once wanted.

But then I listen to the reports of increasing bullying and hate crimes against marginalized people, including children. I hear of a nine-year-old girl who doesn't want go to school because she is afraid when she comes home her mom might have been deported. I hear of a six-year-old boy who tells his moms that he doesn't want to be Mexican because the President wants to kill him.

I feel sick, completely sick, when I hear these stories...

But then there are the other stories...

The stories of all the people who also saw the scab ripped off the wound and woke up.

People are marching in the streets and going to rallies. Their purpose? To say no to Trump's hateful vision of a good world and to say, "We love you" to those Trump has maligned publicly.

Others have started a safety pin campaign. This campaign tells people of color, LGBTQ people, Muslims, and others that a person wearing a safety pin is safe person who they can turn to for help if things get difficult or dangerous.

People are writing, talking, making videos, creating art, developing rituals trying to find traction in this scary, messed-up moment where all they have held sacred and important seems ready to disappear.

One of the fundamental purposes of faith traditions has been to offer hope. Religions provide world views that tell those who follow them where the power is, what saves us when we cannot save of ourselves, where good and where evil come from, what to hold onto when life falls apart, and where to find hope. This direction helps people know what to do when crisis hits.

Unitarian Universalism is, many say, an adolescent faith. Full of energy and ideas, but clearer about what it is not than what it is. It is not a faith with a clear message of hope.

To be broadly meaningful, we must transform so we can articulate clearly how our faith gives us hope.

Crisis— if handled well— creates the perfect medium for such transformation.

Crisis is a moment when you realize your way of being in the world has not prepared you for what is happening, and you have to become different in order to survive and flourish.

The election of Donald Trump was one such moment for many of us and for Unitarian Universalism.

The questions before us are:

Will we be the people we have waiting for?

Will we be the people we say we most want to be?

A compassionate people ready to alleviate suffering and create justice?

A people so grounded in the miracle of life that we live our days with gratitude, prepared for joy?

Will we allow ourselves a shared vision that offers hope?

A vision of a world where compassion abounds, all flourish, gifts are shared, and everyone belongs?

Where the air is pure and the water fresh, wonder and joy are common, and creativity offers endless possibilities?

A vision that reminds us we do not need to think alike to love alike.

I have been wondering if the election of Donald Trump might be better for the quest to create Beloved Community than the election of Hillary Clinton might have been.

If Clinton won, we could have ignored, if we chose, the festering rage and pain that divides us as Americans — that keeps the white working class, people of color, evangelicals, and progressive white liberals all in different worlds, with different values and perspectives trying to share the same space and the dregs left over in a capitalistic system that overly awards a small minority of people.

Now we can hear each other's voices. It is painful to hear, but we can't ignore them. Maybe being able to hear each other's voices means democracy *is* working.

Leonard Cohen said in the same interview quoted earlier, "That this (America) is really where the experiment is unfolding. This is *really* where the races confront one another, where the classes, where the genders, where even the sexual orientations confront one another. This is the real laboratory of democracy."

We are in the real laboratory of democracy right now.

We are trying, as Jon Stewart told us, this last week, the unnatural. Tribal is natural. Real diversity is not.

So, we must ask ourselves — how do we make this work? — democracy and diversity.

I heard an interview with a White Nationalist the week of the elections. He believes as he does because he does not believe mixing of people with different cultures, ethnicities, and values can work and leads to painful and unresolved conflict. Only if our country is 80% white and Christian, he believes, will we have peace.

Unitarian Universalists believe the opposite. We believe we don't need to think alike to love alike.

Our message and vision of what the world can be matters now.

We have been living this experiment — democracy and diversity — in our congregations for a century and in the world for four centuries.

Now we must show that it can be done.

We must show that we can fight and that we can disagree without hate and, indeed, with respect and love.

So, you may be asking, what about today? What do we do now?

Cohen sings in the chorus of *Anthem*:

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.

There is a crack in everything, he says.

It is time to let the light in.

Living our UU faith, full out, lets the light shine in.

This means when people are dehumanized in any way, that Unitarian Universalists stand up and say, "No". Clearly, firmly, persistently. With courage and kindness.

This means when the interconnected web is threatened we stand up and say “No” “No”. Clearly, firmly, persistently. With courage and kindness

We do this in our personal relationships and together in the public world.

But we are not a social justice organization.

We are much more. We are a faith tradition. We offer a vision of what a good life and good society are like:

A vision of a world where compassion abounds, all flourish, gifts are shared, and everyone belongs.

Where the air is pure, the water fresh, wonder and joy are common, and creativity offers endless possibilities.

A vision that reminds us we do not need to think alike to love alike.

It is time to shine our vision into the world.

“Ring the bells that still can ring,” says Cohen.

What are those bells he refers to?

The bells are our soul work.

Gratitude is a bell. What are you grateful for?

What is it you live for? Why does this life matter?

Relationships are another bell.

Nurture the friendships that sustain you. Find people who will go with you when you can’t go by yourself.

Spiritual practices are bells we ring.

They keep us present in the world. They teach us patience and give us the skills to take a moment before reacting to whatever just happened.

Self-compassion is another bell. We are good people, but fallible people. Be kind to yourself. Be forgiving.

“Forget your perfect offering,” says Cohen.

What does that mean?

It means we are not going to respond to what happens perfectly.

It means we won’t necessarily know what to do and we certainly won’t know the perfect thing to do.

It means we will make mistakes. And that’s ok.

We have to forget our perfect offering.

But we still can act.

We can still make offerings.

We can stumble along, listening, being kind, showing up best we can,
and saying “No,” even through stuttering lips, when “No” seems the right thing to say.
“There is a crack in everything,” says Cohen.

That means us: All people in this country; our economic system; our democracy.
There is a crack in everything. So be humble. Be kind.

“That’s how the light gets in,” says Cohen.

So many people’s hearts broke and cracked last Tuesday — people who believed
democracy and diversity can work and people who have much to fear from what candidate
Trump said he would do.

And so many hearts were cracked before last Tuesday: the marginalized, those left
behind by globalization, and those stranded by the vast changes in American culture.

The country we love is cracked and in pain.

Let us bring our light: our vision, our love, our action.

Let us stand or sit next to those cracks. Let us show up with courage and kindness,
glowing brightly, bringing the promise and hope and the vision of Unitarian Universalism.

A world where compassion abounds, all flourish, gifts are shared, and everyone
belongs. Where the air is pure, the water fresh, wonder and joy are common, and creativity
offers endless possibilities.

A vision that reminds us we do not need to think alike to love alike.

Let us take our light out from under a bushel and build that land.

So let it be.