

Election's Over Now What?

A Sermon preached at the First Unitarian Church, Albuquerque, New Mexico

By Christine Robinson

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Breathe

I won't say that it is going to be all right, because it already isn't all right. It wasn't going to be all right if the liberals had won. Since the nation is split nearly 50/50 politically and philosophically, this week was going to be a hard week for many, many people.

This congregation swings very liberal, politically, but in fact we have a small share of moderates, fiscal conservatives, libertarians and people who are politically disengaged. It is important for us to remember that, even when we are very upset. There is no political creed here anymore than there is a dogmatic creed. Not every member of this congregation is as desperately unhappy with the outcome of the election as the majority is. Even fewer are as frightened as the many are. We strive to honor everyone's worth and dignity and ask only civility and respect from all, not agreement. Let's just say that this is a safety pin congregation: Everybody safe.

Several of you commented to me this week that I must have had to start all over on the sermon and that that must be hard. But that wasn't actually what is hard. What is hard is threading my way through on a very narrow path on a day such as this. On the one hand, I am charged to speak my truth in love and compassion to the majority of this congregation, most of whom have not been so distressed and frightened by a public event since 9-11. And that includes doing this work when I place myself in that category. On the other hand, I deeply value what little

political diversity we have in this congregation, which has already eroded here as it has in our hyper-partisan nation and be everybody's minister.

So if you came this morning in a celebratory mood, or not really that upset, or if you have already recovered from this terrible campaign season and are ready to move on, I know you are there, I honor you, and I hope that you can relate enough to the pain of your religious companions to be willing to do some translating of this sermon and use it for your own purposes. And since hedging every sentence with "some of us", and "the liberals among us," would be incredibly tedious, I ask your indulgence and willingness to be named in the majority on this very difficult day. But I know you are there.

Since I could not begin to write until after the order of service was printed, this sermon has, in my mind, a new title: Hope. Since all of us face times of fear and despair in our lives, in and out of politics, it is a universal topic, but I speak primarily this morning to those who feel that they lost their nation, their future, their respect, and their hope in the political realm this week.

In the book *Moby Dick*, the main characters are out on a small boat, away from the main ship, when a storm suddenly blows up and blows them apart from even visual contact with their mates and their lifeline. To try to shout, writes Melville would be as futile as shouting into the chimney of a roaring furnace. The winds and waves are so high that baling the boat is futile. The oars are, "useless as propellers, performing now the office of life-preservers. They have a lantern, and after many attempts it is lighted and handed to a man to hold aloft on a stick, and the narrator comments, that he sat where with this forlorn hope, "holding up that imbecile candle in the heart of that almighty forlornness. There, then, he sat, the sign and symbol of a man without faith, hopelessly holding up hope in the midst of despair."

The dangers we liberals fear are at least a little further removed than the immediacy of sailors in a blind and drowning boat in a storm. But that last line did resonate with me, and it bolstered me. Our plight may be not so immediately dire, but our job is the same... to ignore our damaged faith and our absent hope and hope anyway.

There are two kinds of hope. The Hope you have after winning a crucial election, for instance, as conservatives feel now and as liberals felt 8 years ago was hope, the emotion. It was the good feeling we get when things are going our way, when victory is in the air, when life is looking better all the time. That kind of hope comes with falling balloons and rising butterflies and the cheers of the crowd. What fun it is to say. See, we were right! See, the nation is filled with people who agree with us, see, the future is bright!

That kind of hope is a very good thing, and it is not necessarily gloating, though it feels like that to the losers and therefore is best celebrated with one's compatriots. But the feeling of hope is a good thing. Life is so often hard, decisions in this 50-50 nation so often go against what we want and think is fair, that we should revel in that kind of hope and remember it clearly. That was what liberals wanted for last Wednesday, I know. White pantsuits had been purchased. We wanted to hold up our little girls and say, "See, you can be anything you want to be!" Liberals wanted to look on a future that seemed more likely to proceed with our values and dreams. It was fun to look forward to. Instead, we were cast into a surprise storm and a quick and brutal darkness.

If you are still there, you don't have to come out yet. Hear what I am going to say, not as a demand for today but as an option for the future.

There is a second kind of hope, not the kind that celebrates clear skies ahead but the kind that holds a lantern in the darkness, waiting for the waters to clear and the new reality to suggest a direction.

That kind of Hope is faith projected into the future, and since it is easy to lose sight of both faith and hope, we need to be reminded of how this works. Faith

and Hope. We have faith in the basic goodness of life now; we have hope that the future will also contain its share of goodness. We have faith in the power of love; we look to a future in which love, in some form, will be a part of our lives. We have faith the democracy, for all it's flaws is the most just kind of government and the one most likely to yield the greatest good for the greatest number. We have faith in a divine power of healing and renewal that works for good in our lives, and know that somehow, that will be manifest in our future as it is in the present. We have faith that the arc of the universe bends towards justice, in that magnificent phrase that Martin Luther King jr. lifted from 19th century Unitarian minister, William Ellery Channing. I think that most of us would say that we do have faith in at least some of those things: The goodness of life, the efficacy of democracy in producing justice, that the universe itself bends towards justice. None of those concepts are proven or provable, and any one of them can be called into doubt with the help of any day's newspaper. They are articles of faith and watchwords of our lives, not facts and figures and sometimes, not even noticeable trends.

This kind of hope is not an emotion, it is a discipline, the kind of discipline that, even when there is no rescue in sight, fumbles with the matches and lights the lantern. In Christian life, Hope is called a virtue...that is, not a lucky trait of personality that some people have and some don't, but a think to practice, to pray for, to just do.

Here are some of the practices of hope, the virtue, for use after you lose elections, when you face terrible news, when grief strikes. They are even useful while enduring depression.

1. Be rigorously rational. Our hopeless minds tell us that we are doomed or alone or unloved long before we actually are. So...remember that choosing judges for the Supreme Court is a notoriously iffy process, that there will be an election in only two years and a president who doesn't want to be hounded out of office will be reminded of that on every side. Remember that there are actually more people of liberal persuasion than conservative persuasion and silence the voice

that says that everyone is against you. Don't believe everything that flits through your own mind, much less your social media. Think.

2. One of the things to always remember is that we are pretty much at the mercy of a media which makes money by attracting our attention and feeding our fears. They brought us this circus of a campaign by focusing on the sensational rather than giving us the bread of analysis. They are already at it again. Turn it off. If you get your news only once a day or even once a week, you will remain an informed person. Turn it off!

3. Get Outside While the Getting is Good. Garrison Keeler wrote in the Washington Post, a mostly doom and gloom piece for "liberals like us", as in, he says, " I mean librarians, children's authors, yoga practitioners, Unitarians, bird-watchers, people who make their own pasta, opera-goers, the grammar police, people who keep books on their shelves, that bunch. " he says, " We are so exhausted from thinking about this election, millions of people will take up leaf-raking and garage cleaning with intense pleasure."

Good idea. We are in a time of waiting for the storm to clear, so we know where we are and what our tasks should be. Very few actions are appropriate yet, they will just exhaust you and might do more harm than good. Since most of us can't wait while sitting still, and we've drained our bodies with massive excesses of stress hormones, work it off. Preferably in the fresh air.

4. It is still true that we are better together. Reach out to friends. Come to church. Proclaim a family night, make popcorn, and cuddle. Pat the dog who is going bonkers wondering what is wrong with you. Strengthen your connections. Watch your temper. Smile at your neighbors and even people on the street. Let me tell you a story. Deb and Dan Goldman volunteer with Catholic Services refugee resettlement, with a newly immigrated Syrian couple, Fatima and Yassir, helping them to assimilate to the US. They said that that couple landed on their doorstep in a panic on Wednesday, afraid that because of what "ALL AMERICANS" are like and want, they would have to move to another country immediately. Dan and Debbie tried to calm and comfort them, but were still hearing a lot of "all americans", based on what they had learned on Arabic TV.

Debbie and Dan introduced them to the word, “some”, as in “some Americans believe differently, eventually suggested that they come to the gatherings we had on Wednesday evening here. Their English is very limited, but they understood that they were warmly welcomed and that “some Americans” were very upset, too. Thanks to Susan’s quick thinking, we even sang a song in Arabic. As they left, Yassar said to them, “many Americans, white heart, no black heart.”

That’s the power of community. Partake in it.

5. Remember your faith and your values and light a lantern to see you and your boat mates through this hard time of waiting. There would be lots of ways to do this, but I have a suggestion. Take a safety pin. We have enough for adults, too. Remember, displayed on a lapel, a badge lanyard, or a backpack strap, that it means that you mean to be a place of safety for those endangered by bullying, intolerance, or harassment. It means that someone who is feeling vulnerable could be next to you in line and feel a little safer. It means that you will have practiced your, “That’s not ok!” to have it ready when needed. And because this is becoming a powerful symbol just putting it on in the morning will bolster your own hope for the future.

Let it also remind you that safety applies to you, and that you are taking care of yourself in some of the ways I’ve outlined, and that it also applies to those with whom you disagree. In this space between what has happened and what is to come, let us be as gentle with each other as we possibly can be. Burn no bridges! Be curious. Look for the best motives in those around you and reinforce them. Breathe in peace and breathe out love until those waters clear and the time for strong words and strong actions comes.

If somebody asks you why you have a safety pin on your clothing, you can tell them about safety: for the threatened or bullied, for yourself, for those on the other side. Tell them that it is a symbol of what you value about America. If you carry an extra you could give it away. If you take a selfie of your safety pin and explain yourself on social media, you’ll extend the meme. And you will bolster your own hope.

This is an article of my faith; that the arc of history is long, but bends towards justice. And while I believe that very firmly, I notice that sometimes it bends into an S curve, and sometimes its movement is very slow. Therefore I nurture my faith in all the ways I know. I invite you to do the same. Let's sing a song together to remind us of our strength, and our resolve, get yourself a safety pin, and go home and clean the garage while we wait for the storm to pass and the directions we might go to become clear.