

Now What?

Readings: 'Let America Be America Again' by Langston Hughes
'Choose to Bless the World' by Rebecca Parker
'The Thing Is' by Ellen Bass

There is so much we don't know as we gather today. We know that Donald Trump will be our next President. We don't yet know what that will mean for us, the people we love, and the values we hold dear. We don't know what of his campaign talk will be made real in policy.

In the midst of this uncertainty, there are some things that I know for sure. Today I will share them with you.

This is what I know. Many of us are grieving. This grief is only slightly about the us versus them, Democrats versus Republicans electoral system we have. It is about so much more. It is moral. This grief is about what a Donald Trump victory means and could mean. We grieve that someone who built his campaign on xenophobia, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, racism, hatred of disabled people, and other hatreds will be our next president. We grieve that so many of us, so many people that we love, now feel less safe in this world. We grieve that incidents in which people are attacked for their race and religion are on the rise, including here in Kalamazoo. We grieve what this election will mean for our planet, for healthcare, for reproductive justice, for world peace and stability, for immigration, for our economy, for our lives. We grieve that our country is much further from the beloved community, the reign of love and justice, that we had thought it was. We grieve that we have had to explain all of this to the children in our lives, children who are scared about what all of this means for them and the people they love, children who are confused about why a man who acts in ways that we have taught them not to is now rewarded with the presidency.

I know this: even to be grieving right now is a privilege. There are so many in our country who have lived through the hatred and oppression others are just now seeing. Harleen Kaur, an activist who practices the Sikh faith, wrote this on election day:

"This has been a sobering day for most of us. While I felt sick, anxious, and on the verge of tears for the earlier half of the results, I reached a sudden calm shortly before midnight.

This is not new. For people of color, immigrants, Muslims (& those impacted by Islamophobia), queer people, differently abled people, the working class, and more, this has always been our America. It simply did a semi-decent job at disguising itself for the last several years. Sure, the final results aren't in, but we've all seen enough to be told in numbers what we already knew: anti-blackness, white supremacy, and xenophobia are the bedrocks of our society. Not freedom, not liberty for all."

These are harsh words and these are true to the experience of so many in our country. They echo the words of Langston Hughes that America never was America to me. Our country has never yet lived into its promise. This is not to make any of us feel guilty about any grief we might feel today, but we need to hold the experiences of oppression of so many in our country alongside our individual experience.

This is what I know about grief. And some of you might have heard this before because I have said similar things at memorial services, but we need to be reminded about mourning again and again.

When we experience a loss—and for many of us, this election was a loss—our illusions of safety, certainty, and control are shattered. Our universe disintegrates... and the challenge of grief is to put our lives back

together in a new way. We need one another to do this hard and important work. That is one of the reasons why communities gather in times of loss and confusion.

The wise ones tell us that grieving is the process by which we strengthen ourselves for the task of living courageously in a universe in which there is very little security and a great deal of happiness and love. They tell us grief keeps the heart fluid and soft, which makes compassion possible.

If you are living with grief, know this: there is no one way to grieve. We can forget this when people react to a loss in different ways. Normal reactions include anger, sadness, withdrawal, stopping everything to mourn, or not feeling much at all at first and continuing on with one's life. Let yourself grieve the way your emotions and body tells you you need to. Grief ebbs and flows. It ignores our busy lives. It interferes with what we think are our needs. We think we might be over it, but then grief comes rushing back to us. Each loss reminds us of previous losses. If you find yourself grieving your beloved dead more intensely this week, that's normal.

There are ways to make grieving more bearable. We need to take care of our bodies—get enough sleep, eat well, exercise. It is important to have people to listen to us talk when we want to talk. I am here for you for that. It is also important—and this might be the most important—to be patient with the grieving process. Grief is hard work. Grief is slow work. A deeply felt loss is not something you'll be over with and back to normal in a day or two.

Though each of us need time to grieve alone, we also need to be with one another. We need to seek our sources of meaning, nourishment and strength. Today is one piece of that. We will be here for one another again and again. That is what I know about grief.

I also know that we can't stay in our grief forever. We can't let despair have the last word. We must convert our anger into the fuel for the work of love. We cannot retreat forever, but we can step back, gather our strength and recommit ourselves to making our values real in the world.

This is what I know about our values. The electoral college cannot change them. Last Sunday, I stood here and told you that our faith calls us to recognize the inherent worth and dignity of all people. Our faith proclaims that all are worthy of care and love, no exceptions, no matter what. That, along with the other principles written on our banners—is still our faith this Sunday and will be what we hold true regardless of who the president is.

And so we keep doing what we've been doing. We keep being the form love takes in the world. We keep living our values. We love our neighbors. We care for our families and friends. We welcome refugees and help them build lives here in Kalamazoo. We tutor and love our children at Lincoln School. We love our children here at People's Church. We work to end racism within these walls and beyond them. We proclaim the equality of all people, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. We treat people with respect regardless of their political opinions, even if they don't respect us. Again, returning to the sermon from last week, we remember that they—and we—are too smart and too good looking to be full of hate.

I also know this: we need to remind ourselves and remind one another of the full humanity of people who didn't vote as we did. Trump voters and Donald Trump himself have inherent worth and dignity too. And as we prepare to oppose potential policies of the new president, we remember that those who oppose us are worthy of love and respect. This is the challenge of Universalism, the truth that all are worthy of love and care, no matter what. Whatever comes next, we need to remember this. We can't demonize our

opposition, even—and especially when—they demonize us. This is how we maintain our integrity. This is how we live our values. People who disagree with us are worthy of respect – their actions and words might not be, but they, in their inherent humanness, are. We believe that everyone is capable of transformation... and by being in relationship with those who disagree with us, by treating them with respect, by approaching them with curiosity and compassion, we leave open the possibility of transformation for them—and for us.

This is not some naïve call for unity. I am not interested in a unity based on oppression. The unity we need is a unified effort towards transformation and liberation.

I know this: in the coming years, our values might call on us to do more than what we've done before. We are ready for such a time as this. We draw notes to our neighbors on our sidewalk. We lean into the relationships that matter to us, here at church, and beyond these walls. We reach out to the people we worry might be especially fearful in these times—Muslims, survivors of sexual assault, people with disabilities, LGBT people, immigrants and refugees, and so many others. We tell them we care about them and we will do all we can to keep them safe. We vow to act on that promise if the opportunity comes. We start getting organized. We have two months until the inauguration. We start making plans for how to keep ourselves and those we love safe. We make plans for how we can be the form that love will take in this world.

We don't know how we will act to help America fulfill its promise, but we will. We don't know what will be required of us specifically, but we will be required to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly.

In the meantime, we need to make ourselves as strong and resilient as possible. Practice self-care. Take care of your body and your soul. Engage in your spiritual practice. Cling to all the joy you can find and let it wash over you, reminding you of what matters most. If we hold fast to our values in the coming years, a lot will be required of us—we need to build up the inner strength and resilience to do it.

I also know this. There are many stories from history that will provide us a holy example of how we might face the challenges ahead. The stories of the abolitionist movement, including the story of Theodore Parker, who said that the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice. He knew that this arc wasn't some passive thing that we get to trust in – it is an arc that we bend ourselves through our actions, our commitment, and our love. We remember the stories of the confessing church in Germany whose faith called them to oppose fascism. The stories of civil rights movements, movements for the liberation of LGBT people, women's movements, and all liberation movement everywhere. We know that our circumstances are different, but we also know that others have responded to hate with love – and transformed the world. Our chance might be coming.

I also know this. We were made for these times. As Unitarian Universalists we are called to love the hell out of this world.... and in the next few years there might be new hells in this world or we will be seeing the hells that have always been here in new ways. Either way, we are called to meet them with the transforming power of love. Joanna Fontaine Crawford is a Unitarian Universalist minister in Texas. This is what she has written about loving the hell out of the world.

"To love the hell out of the world means to love it extravagantly, wastefully, with an overpouring abandon and fervor that sometimes surprises even yourself. That love flows out of you, sometimes slow and steady, sometimes in a torrent, sometimes filled with joy, sometimes with fierceness, or anger, or a heartbreaking pain that makes you say, "No, no, I can't take this anymore. I can't do anymore. It's too much ... too much."

But it's too late. You've opened up your own heart, your own mind, body, and strength, and yes, it is too much. But there's also so much love that comes crashing down on you, gifts from the Heavens in the form of the smiles and cares from others, a giggle burbling up from a toddler's fat little belly, the soft, sweet smell of star jasmine catching you unaware, not knowing where it came from ... but it's here. And you're here. And just to live, just to exist, swells your heart with enough gratitude and love that you must release it or burst. And so you love, love the hell out of the world again...

To love the hell out of the world means to see with our hearts, fragile and unprotected. To accept that life is shattering and excruciating. To see the hell in a world, in a group, in a person, in a tear. To know that it is the experience of both the oppressor and the oppressed, as we are both...

We love emphatically, actively, with our hands and feet; pushing the wreckage aside, reaching down, stretching until we fear our arms can go no further, but they do, we touch fingers with others, then grab on for dear life, pulling them out to safety, then going back in to remove the hell itself, before it traps someone else. We round a corner only to find hands waiting for us, to pull *us* to safety, to warmth, for we are both the savior and the saved.

The hell is all around, and we work, in great passionate swoops and in slow, plodding routines, to put that extravagant love into action and remove all the bits of [hell] from the world. Misery, ill health, disease, viciousness of greed in the face of want, voices that shout hate or whisper meanness, soul-eating addiction, humiliation, despair, injustice that curls up nastily, poisoning the spirit of giver and receiver ... we do not flee. Bone-chillingly afraid we may be, but we step forward. We are the only form love will take and the work is ours to do."¹

We are the only form that love will take. The work is ours to do.

Let us grieve as we need to.

Let us become stronger and more resilient.

Let us be a source of support and sanctuary for one another.

Let us remember the holy examples.

Let us be firm in our values and make them real in the world.

Let us be guided by love as we carry on the work of bending the universe toward justice.

May it be so. May we make it so. Amen.

¹ Crawford, Joanna Fontaine. 'To Love the Hell Out of the World.' *Boots and Blessings*. Retrieved from <http://bootsandblessings.blogspot.com/2014/01/to-love-hell-out-of-world.html>