

Where Do We Go From Here?

by Rev. Kathleen Scott

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I. Last Sunday, Anna and Janet led a very moving service. I have asked Mark Bonar, as Worship Associate, to schedule the same hymns as we sang last Sunday because I believe they are so pertinent to what everyone seems to be feeling right now.

A, I have been in touch with a number of folks, listening to their reactions to the recent election of president-elect, Donald Trump, and his appointment of a variety of men who have a long history of supporting racist, homophobic, misogynist and anti-immigrant views.

1. Many of my fellow ministers have attempted to rush people into a way of thinking about the whole thing from a loving standpoint. And while this may indeed be the place for us to go, I believe that folks need to have a chance to be honest about what they are feeling, to honor those feelings and then decide what their role will be in the coming four years as regards action. It has been said that the only thing necessary for evil to succeed is for good people to do nothing. Many people are trying to come to terms with what they must do to keep evil from succeeding.

2. Rev. Peter Morales, President of the Unitarian Universalist Association, put out a statement immediately following the election results, and in response to the reaction of shock and dismay of so many of our fellow citizens:

“This is the time to take a deep breath and a long view. Our role as religious progressives committed to democracy, compassion and human dignity is to help bend our culture toward justice. Think of issues like marriage equality and civil rights. The laws change where attitudes change. Our role is to keep changing attitudes, to lead by example.”

3. And in the Winter 2016 edition of the *UU World* magazine, he wrote: “Demagogues always feed on fear. We live in a nation where a sizable

number of people are deeply afraid. They are afraid of their economic future, afraid of blacks, afraid of Muslims, afraid of Latino immigrants, afraid of Chinese taking jobs. But fear almost always comes in disguise; we don't recognize it for what it is. Fear comes masked as hate, racism, misogyny, homophobia, religious intolerance and even ignorance. It looks like an opinion, but it is a gut feeling. When people are afraid, facts and reason are poor weapons. Have you ever tried to argue someone out of their racism, their climate change denial, their homophobia? It never works. Telling an avowed racist that he should not feel that way is like telling a depressed person to cheer up.

“One thing this election has taught me is how many of my fellow Americans feel left out, hopeless, vulnerable. To support mass deportations, a police state, exclusion of Muslims and the romanticized equivalent of a white American caliphate is not a political opinion. It is a cry of despair...I think we are being called to bring empathy, understanding and healing...We must not only decry evil; we must build a foundation for hope.”

II. How shall we do that? The first step, I believe, is we must keep hope alive within ourselves.

A. In the New Testament, *Galatians* 6:9 (which Hillary Clinton quoted in her concession speech, it says, “And let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season, we shall reap if we faint not. As we have therefore, opportunity, let us do good unto all men.” *Galatians* 6:9

She also said, “Never stop believing that fighting for what's right is worth it. Don't lose heart.” Her speech was very moving. I think she realized what we might be up against.

Some of you may remember in the Italian Oscar-winning film, *La Vita e Bella* (A Beautiful Life), as a Jewish man and his son were walking along, the son saw a shop window on which had been scrawled, “No dogs or Jews,” When he questioned his father, his dad said, “Everyone has something they don't like. What do you dislike?” The son replies, “Spiders.” “Okay,” the father said, “I don't like Visigoths. We shall write, “No spiders or Visigoths on our window.” Whereupon, the son smiled and they went peacefully on their way. This was an attempt to protect his child from the hate that was arising in Italy and German before WWII.

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.”

And Mahatma Gandhi stated, “From time to time throughout history, tyrants have arisen, and for a time they seem invincible. But they always fall – think of it – always!”

I take heart from Gandhi and MLK, Jr. because they faced enormous opposition. They were in the right, standing upon the Truth of the power of love to conquer hate, standing for the dignity and civil rights of all their fellow humans, in the face of years of oppression and hate, yet they kept going. Gandhi was imprisoned many times and so was Dr. King, but they refused to give up, give in or give out.

I once saw a film about the march to Selma of Dr. King and his followers to register African-Americans for the vote. There was a huge crowd of people, policemen with dogs and fire hoses, and one man stationed in front of the voter registration door to guard it and to keep black people out. He looked very stressed out. As Rev. King approached him to request that he allow people to register to vote, the man’s face got very red. He knew everyone was watching to see what he would do. Dr. King was very loving and gentle with the man and spoke very quietly and gently to him. The man’s face got redder and redder and finally he hauled off and punched Dr. King in the face. Dr. King fell off the steps onto the ground, but immediately got up and said, “You are my brother. I love you and mean you no harm.” He continued to speak to him in a loving way. As he did so, tears began to run down the man’s face, but he could not relent because of all the people watching him.

Gandhi routinely urged his followers not to hate their oppressors, even when they were beaten and imprisoned, but to treat all with respect, even love and compassion. He said those who oppress and hate are suffering, too. They are experiencing the poison of hate and violence within themselves, for they know what they are doing is wrong and they are tormented inside. A British official, the Viceroy, I believe, was being replaced by the new Viceroy and he said to him, “Be careful of Gandhi – he’ll get you.” He had started out hating Gandhi, but came to respect and care for him, and was won over by his love and respect and good will. It is hard to continue to hate someone that is routinely loving and respectful no matter what you do.

B. It is important to remember that one person can impact thousands and change history: Gandhi was one person; Rev. King was one person; so was Mother Teresa, Cesar Chavez, so is the Dalai Lama, Thich Naht Hanh, Deepak Chopra, Oprah Winfrey, Marian Williamson all just one person, standing for love and peace, compassion and healing and influencing thousands.

“In the Native American tradition, one member of the tribe assumes the roles of ‘Faithkeeper.’ This person’s role is to remain at peace, centered in spiritual vision, no matter what events befall the tribe. Even if everyone else in the tribe slips into pain, fear or dissension, the Faithkeeper is the one person the tribe can rely on as a lifeline to the Presence. This our role now.” (Alan Cohen)

1. I volunteer to be the Faithkeeper for our community. And I know that you can assume that role in your families, at work, in any other groups with which you interact. I am available for pastoral counseling if any need it. We may be faced with many more days and months and even years of challenging events. So this community must be a safe and comforting place, a beacon of light whatever darkness tries to come about.

2. There was an editorial in the *Visalia Times-Delta* on Saturday by Stephen Prothero, an author and professor of religion at Boston University entitled, “So much for our exceptionalism,” wherein he observed that this slide to the extreme right is actually not only happening here, but has already occurred in England, the Philippines, Turkey and elsewhere across the globe. The US was always seen by the rest of the world as the exception to such thinking: a place of reason and safety, free speech, freedom of religion, a free press. But with this election, no more.

I heard on the news a couple of days ago that the new government has a plan to install a registry of Muslims entering the country. On a news show, a man who was defending this plan said something shocking, “There’s precedent – the Japanese during WWII.” The journalist interviewing him was very shocked and said, “Surely you are kidding! You’re not planning internment camps for Muslims are you?” The man replied, “Well there’s precedent....”

It is important for us to be willing to take stands to protect our black, immigrant, Muslim, gay and Latino brothers and sisters. But also to have compassion for those who are entrenched in ignorance, hate, prejudice, and other disguises of fear. Wherever we are now in our consciousness and attitudes, in our reactions of shock and dismay, our nation will need for us to lift our lamp of love

and reason, to embrace the power and compassion of a Gandhi and a Martin Luther King, Jr.

3. A dear friend of mine, a singer and workshop leader wrote on Facebook: “Don’t pray for Trump’s failure. Pray for his awakening. Don’t pray for his downfall. Pray for him to become so moved by love and oneness that he has no choice but to stand in Truth. Don’t pray for harm to come to him. Pray for him as if he is your brother.” Ester Nicholson

And one of my favorite quotes from a minister in my former spiritual teaching, Dr. Robert Bitzer: “Never abandon Principle, even on special occasions.”

I heard Neil deGrasse Tyson, a respected physicist, say on the Stephen Colbert show one night last week, “Over the next four years, we have a mission: Make America smart again!”

Let’s do what we can to help and support one another along the way so that we do not lose hope or give in to fear! Let us pledge to lead by example: to love, to include, to stand up for what is right and not “weary of well-doing.” Let’s be Faithkeepers in our family, in the community, for those who are oppressed or persecuted, or depressed and discouraged. As it says in *Galatians*, “We shall reap if we faint not!”