

“APPROACHING ELECTION 2024: CONCERNS & CONSIDERATIONS”
Olympic Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
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Quote for slide prior to service

“Equal and exact justice to all ... of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political; peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none.... Freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and freedom of person....

These principles form the bright constellation which has gone before us, and guided our steps through an age of revolution and reformation. The wisdom of our sages and the blood of our heroes have been devoted to their attainment. They should be the creed of our political faith, the text of civil instruction, the touchstone by which to try the services of those we trust; and should we wander from them in moments of error or alarm, let us hasten to retrace our steps and to regain the road which alone leads to peace, liberty, and safety.”

(Thomas Jefferson, First Inaugural Address)

Welcome, Introduction of Theme

Thank you, Dianne, for opening today’s service, and greetings to all of you, both to those of you present here in the sanctuary and to those of you tuning in virtually.

As a very consequential national election is just over two weeks away, in this morning’s service I will be putting before you some of the concerns and considerations stirring within me ... with the idea of engaging your own concerns and considerations.

And I’d like to begin with a Responsive Reading from the Rev. Dr. Phillip Hewitt, who served for 35 years as the senior minister of the Unitarian Church of Vancouver, British Columbia (1956-1991). This Responsive Reading puts before some of the ideals of the religiously liberal association of congregations of which this congregation is a member.

Responsive Reading

MINISTER: From the fragmented world of our everyday lives we gather together in search of wholeness.

CONGREGATION: By many cares and preoccupations, by diverse and selfish aims are we separated from one another and divided within ourselves.

MINISTER: Yet we know that no branch is utterly severed from the Tree of Life that sustains us all.

CONGREGATION: We cherish our oneness with those around us and the countless generations that have gone before us.

MINISTER: We would hold fast to all of good we inherit even as we would leave behind us the outworn and the false.

CONGREGATION: We would escape from bondage to the ideas of our own day and from the delusions of our own fancy.

MINISTER: Let us labor in hope for the dawning of a new day without hatred, violence, and injustice.

CONGREGATION: Let us nurture the growth in our own lives of the love that has shone in the lives of the greatest of men and women, the rays of whose lamps still illumine our way. [break]

MINISTER: In this spirit we gather.

CONGREGATION: In this spirit we pray.

(“From the Fragmented World” by Rev. Phillip Hewitt)

Opening Hymn #318: “We Would Be One”

Our Opening Hymn this morning, in keeping with the ideals of oneness, unity, and seeking a nobler world, is titled “We Would Be One.” The words are those of the Rev. Samuel Wright, father of the Rev. Chip Wright, who served as this congregation’s minister for several years about 15 years ago.

1. We would be one as now we join in singing
our hymn of love, to pledge ourselves anew
to that high cause of greater understanding
of who we are, and what in us is true.
We would be one in living for each other
to show to all a new community.

2. We would be one in building for tomorrow
a nobler world than we have known today.
We would be one in searching for that meaning
which bends our hearts and points us on our way.
As one, we pledge ourselves to greater service,
with love and justice, strive to make us free.

(Samuel Anthony Wright, words; Jean Sibelius, music)

Reading

My reading for this service consists of excerpts from the classic poem “Let America Be America Again,” written by the black American poet Langston Hughes, 1901-1967.

The title – “Let America Be America Again” – sounds similar to the MAGA slogan “Make America Great Again.”

However, there are two quite different visions expressed here: the first looking to a future that never has been for many Americans; the second looking to restore a past that has worked for many Americans but not for others.

The poem “Let America Be America Again” was inspired by a train journey that Langston Hughes took through Depression-struck America in 1935. Written in the non-inclusive gender language of the day, it “focuses on the idea of the American dream and how, for many, attaining freedom, equality, and happiness, which the dream encapsulates, is nigh on impossible.” (quote from “Analysis of Poem “Let America Be America Again,” by Andrew Spacey) And yet ... and yet ... the dream might still be fulfilled.

Let America Be America Again by Langston Hughes

Let America be America again.
Let it be the dream it used to be.
Let it be the pioneer on the plain
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—
Let it be that great strong land of love
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There’s never been equality for me,
Nor freedom in this “homeland of the free.”)

Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
I am the red man driven from the land,
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—
And finding only the same old stupid plan
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak....

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream ...
To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?
The millions shot down when we strike?
The millions who have nothing for our pay?
For all the dreams we've dreamed
And all the songs we've sung
And all the hopes we've held
And all the flags we've hung,
The millions who have nothing for our pay—
Except the dream that's almost dead today.

O, let America be America again—
The land that never has been yet—
And yet must be—the land where every man is free.
The land that's mine—the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's,
ME—
Who made America,
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,
Must bring back our mighty dream again....

O, yes, I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!...

“Approaching Election 2024: Concerns & Considerations” (Part 1)

Introduction

I’ve been weighing – and struggling with – what can be helpful to us as a religiously liberal congregation as we approach the upcoming national presidential election, just a little over two weeks away.

Let me begin with this: When I began as a clergyperson back in the late 1970s, I made a clear distinction between “religious liberalism” and “political liberalism,” sharply differentiating between the two and not assuming that a religious liberal was more likely to also be a political liberal.

Indeed, the large religiously liberal congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan where I served as an associate minister beginning in 1978 was quite evenly divided in the 1950s, 1960s, and even the 1970s between 1/3rd Democrats, 1/3rd Republicans and 1/3rd Independents. But that has totally changed since then, and by now you will be hard-pressed to find a political conservative in this religiously liberal congregation.

It used to be that both political liberals and political conservatives within most religious organizations in our country held to the same triple values of religious liberty, religious toleration, and religious pluralism – the values that the late Unitarian Universalist theologian Dr. Forrest Church characterized as “The American Creed” in his very fine book by that title published in 2002.

But going back to the Nixon era, the political conservatives started courting the evangelical and fundamentalist Christian religious organizations, such as those who identified with the positions of the Rev. Jerry Falwell, which created a tension, conflict, and, increasingly, a sorting process and polarization between those in these religious organizations who embraced the traditional “American Creed” and those drawn to varieties of “Christian nationalism.”

And, sidebar: The split now in many religions is *within* the particular religions not *between* the religions: the “liberals” within the various religions, who hold to the triple values of religious liberty, religious toleration, and religious pluralism, being closer in many ways to “liberals” of other religions than they are to the “conservatives” in their own religions ... and visa versa: the conservatives of the various religions being closer in some ways to the conservatives of other religions than they are to the liberals in their own religion.

All of this is to say that I still hold to the distinction between “religious liberalism” and “political liberalism” – that is, that one can be a “religious liberal” and a “political conservative.” And, certainly, I hold to the independence and separation of a religious institution, such as this one, from any given political institution – and would not want our religious institution to be beholden in any way to a political institution or party ...

... but, practically speaking, certainly in our religious Association, I realize I am addressing almost exclusively political liberals – of which I am one – and I recognize that it’s awkward and difficult

in our current climate to be a “political conservative” in our religious Association ... to believe, for example, that the political conservatives have some important points to make.

(I have two good friends who find themselves in this position: afraid to reveal some of their opinions with the tide flowing so strongly in a different direction. And, conversely, I have a close relative who is a long-time member of an evangelical Christian congregation who is afraid to speak up about his discomfort with the current Republican presidential candidate.)

So that’s the first thing this morning: the recognition that in approaching this upcoming national election I am speaking almost exclusively – or even totally – to “political liberals.” And, if there are folks here who do support the Republican candidate in the upcoming election, I ask for your forbearance in what I will be saying as both a religious and political liberal.

Anxiety

So, how do we religious (and, as I am assuming, mostly political) liberals weigh and deal with the anxiety that I suspect so many of us share?

We’ve been here before in 2016 ... and, again, in 2020. We thought the attack on the capitol on January 6, 2021 might be a turning point ... but, no, here we are again ... a nation seemingly more divided and entrenched in their positions than ever before ... it’s exhausting, it’s unnerving ... and the stakes seemingly greater and riskier than ever.

The anxiety for us, I believe, has largely to do with the threat to central values of both our religious association and our nation – those triple values of the “American Creed” (religious liberty, religious toleration, and religious pluralism) that I mentioned earlier.

Not a normal election

Thus, this is not a normal election related to policy issues. There is something more “fundamental” at stake here related to the core values of our republic, which are deeper than the particular policy concerns of the present day.

This is what a number of conservative Republicans, such as Liz Cheney, have recognized. She and a number of other Republicans have stepped out of their “normal political lane” to address this more fundamental concern of the threat to the underlying principles and values of our democratic republic.

And this morning I am stepping out of my “normal religious lane” to speak of the threat that relates to both our political and religious institutions ... not entirely comfortable in crossing such institutional boundary lines, but also believing in the importance of doing so.

Identifying the abnormality in this election

A major reason why I believe this is not a normal election is because we have a psychologically abnormal person as the Republican candidate for president. This is something that many of those

who have been closest the Republican nominee also believe ... with some courageously speaking out in this regard.

And a large part of my concern is that we tend to keep normalizing the abnormality of the Republican candidate for president, finding it hard to keep his abnormality in mind, since it is so alien to our normal experience.

And the abnormality is this: I believe the Republican candidate *suffers* – sadly for him but dangerously for our republic – *suffers* – and I use the word advisedly – from what, in psychological terminology, is called a “narcissistic personality disorder.”

And part of the problem of this normalizing process is that psychologists and psychiatrists have been reluctant to diagnose outside of their typical procedures for doing so ... though they finally did so out of a “duty to warn” in 2017 and again in 2019 after Trump was elected president in a book titled *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump: 37 Psychiatrists and Mental Health Experts Assess a President*.

Narcissistic Personality Disorder

In a sermon I gave back on April 24, 2016 – this was before Donald Trump was nominated by the Republican Party as their candidate – I listed the typical characteristics of the “narcissistic personality disorder” from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV, nine characteristics, as follows:

1. Has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements).
2. Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love.
3. Believes that he or she is “special” and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high-status people (or institutions).
4. Requires excessive admiration.
5. Has a sense of entitlement, i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations.
6. Is inter-personally exploitative, i.e., takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends.
7. Lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others.
8. Is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her.
9. Shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes.

(“Narcissistic Personality Disorder” from Wikipedia)

These are the primary symptoms of this condition – of which, as many see it, including me, Donald Trump is a textbook case, checking, as it were, each box in this list of characteristics.

And the dynamic of the Narcissistic Personality Disorder is this: that what you’re seeing in a person with this “disorder” is an elaborate show to cover a very fragile inner core. Here’s a quote on this dynamic from the same source:

“Narcissists have such an elevated sense of self-worth that they value themselves as inherently better than others, when in reality they have a fragile self-esteem, cannot handle

criticism, and often try to compensate for this inner fragility by belittling or disparaging others in an attempt to validate their own self-worth. Comments and criticisms about others are vicious from sufferers of NPD [Narcissistic Personality Disorder], in an attempt to boost their own poor self-esteem.

These are statements, as I said, that I made prior to Trump's nomination for president in April of 2016 ... which, as I see it, have been more than confirmed and substantiated in the eight years since then.

I said that our former president "suffers" from this personality disorder ... for which we may rightly feel sympathy ... and for which psychologists like his niece Mary Trump have given developmental reasons from his early life.

(The recently-released movie *Apprentice* also goes into the development of his person and character. And in this regard, I recommend a recent article by Tony Schwartz, the ghost writer of Trump's book *The Art of the Deal*, who, in his studies, focuses especially on how early childhood experiences influence adult lives.)

(See "I Was Trump's Ghostwriter. A New Biopic Gets the Most Important Thing Right" (Link: <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/11/opinion/trump-movie-apprentice>)

Recent examples of this personality disorder

Let me give you some quick, recent examples of how this narcissistic personality disorder plays itself out:

1) One of the characteristics of those who suffer from a Narcissistic Personality Disorder is, as mentioned, a lack of empathy ... including, importantly, a lack of empathy toward their own tender needs as a young child ... having had to extinguish, as it were, empathy for their own inner needs in order to protect themselves in their early years from neglect or even abuse of those early childhood needs.

But as one who has carefully watched over the last eight years, there have a couple of times where I thought I detected empathy in Trump ... and most recently in the assassination attempt on his life in Butler, Pennsylvania on July 13, in which, after being struck in the ear by a would-be assassin's bullet, he was knocked out of his shoes as he was taken down by Secret Service agents, then requesting several times for his shoes to be put back on before coming up and fist-pumping "Fight, Fight, Fight."

A close aide indicated that, later, Trump watched the 7-second clip of that assassination attempt over and over ... and something related to his personal mortality and our common precarious humanity seemed to have broken through so that he, initially, spoke of going forward in a different way and of being a uniter of people.

Unfortunately, that approach was short-lived and, after vowing at the Republican Convention to never discuss the event again — "It's actually too painful to tell," he said — he quickly reverted to his normal narcissistic exploitative outer personality selling Trump sneakers and other footwear with the words FIGHT FIGHT FIGHT printed on them.

Yesterday, I went to the Trump website and found that you can get the silver hightop sneakers for \$299, while THE NEVER SURRENDER GOLD LOW TOP SNEAKERS – FIGHT FIGHT FIGHT EDITION can be pre-ordered in time for Christmas for \$499. (Link: (<https://gettrumpsneakers.com/>))

2) I think we saw another aspect of the narcissistic personality disorder in the recent debate between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump ... in which Harris delivered blow after blow to his fragile ego, so much so that he could not look at her in the debate. Opinion columnist David Frum, following the debate, wrote:

“It’s said that narcissists cope with ego injury by refusing to acknowledge the existence of the person who inflicted the hurt. If so, that might explain Trump’s behavior. Harris bruised his feelings, and Trump reacted by shutting his eyes and pretending that Harris had no existence of her own independent of President Joe Biden, whose name Trump was somehow able to speak.”

Personally, I think Harris took no great pleasure in doing this, but she and her team felt it was a necessity ... a necessity to pierce Trump’s normal bluster protecting his outer “false self,” revealing just how fragile and weak his inner “real self” is.

3) Thirdly, a comment on bullying in relation to the Narcissistic Personality Disorder:

Trump’s typical behavior is, as we have seen time and time again, is that of a bully ... *except* when he is in the presence of other bullies and “strongmen,” whom he so admires and wishes to be like – to have the apparent adoration and deferential obeisance of the people like dictators Vladimir Putin, Victor Orban, and Kim Jung Un. As British writer Nate White has put it:

“He [Trump] punches downwards – which a gentleman should, would, could never do – and every blow he aims is below the belt. He particularly likes to kick the vulnerable or voiceless – and he kicks them when they are down.”

4) A fourth and final aspect in relation to Trump’s Narcissistic Personality Disorder is his “transactional” character.

As I see it, the category of “truth versus lies” doesn’t really apply in his case ... but, rather, whatever serves ... whatever serves to bolster and protect his fragile self-identity ... whatever serves to make him appear strong and powerful.

If some positions he has taken or statements he has made no longer serve that end, he can turn on a dime, dismissing out-of-hand whatever he previously said or did ... and inventing things he never said or did ... trying out different lines to see what might fly ... experimenting with a different transaction to see if it might work.

Thus, he is extremely vulnerable to flattery and will court anyone who will “love” and “admire” him ... be that Kim Jung Un with whom he “fell in love,” exchanging beautiful “love letters” ...

or “Christian Nationalists” for whom he is willing to put himself forward as a champion, a savior ... if they will only love him.

This past July 7, Trump was speaking at an event organized by the conservative group Turning Point Action in West Palm Beach, Florida. There he said:

“Christians, get out and vote, just this time. You won’t have to do it anymore. Four more years, you know what, it will be fixed, it will be fine, you won’t have to vote anymore, my beautiful Christians.”

He added: “I love you, Christians. I’m a Christian. I love you, get out, you gotta get out and vote.” (<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-tells-christians-they-wont-have-vote-after-this-election-2024-07-27/>)

I want to conclude the first part of this sermon with what I find to be outstanding opinion piece by Peter Wehner writing in *The Atlantic Magazine* from September 9, 2019.

Peter Wehner has been a life-long Republican, serving in the Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations and in the George W. Bush White House. Here’s what he wrote concluding his lengthy opinion piece titled “Trump Is Not Well.”

It’s said that speculating on Trump’s mental health is inappropriate and unwise, especially for those who are not formally trained in the field of psychiatry or psychology.

That’s true, up to a point. Yes, it is best to leave it to experts to determine whether Trump satisfies the criteria for a clinical diagnosis of antisocial personality disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, some combination of both, or nothing at all.

But if a clinical diagnosis is beyond my own expertise, Trump’s psychological impairments are obvious to all who are not willfully blind. On a daily basis we see the president’s chaotic, unstable mind on display. Are we supposed to ignore that?

An analogy may be helpful here. If smoke is coming out from under the hood of your car, if you notice puddles of oil under it, if the engine is overheating and you smell burning oil, you don’t have to be a car mechanic to know that something is wrong with your car.

Accepting the reality about Trump’s disordered personality is important and even essential. For one thing, it will help us to better react to Trump’s freak show. Even now, almost a thousand days into his presidency, the latest Trump outrage elicits shock and disbelief in people. The reaction is, “Can you believe he said *that* and did *this*?”

To which my response is, “Why are you surprised?” It’s a shock only if the assumption is that we’re dealing with a psychologically normal human being. We’re not. Trump is profoundly compromised, acting just as you would imagine a person with a disordered personality would. Many Americans haven’t yet come to terms with the fact that we elected as president a man who is deeply damaged, an emotional misfit. But it would be helpful if they did.

Among other things, it would keep us feeling less startled and disoriented, less in a state of constant agitation, less susceptible to provocations. Donald Trump thrives on creating chaos, on gaslighting us, on creating antipathy among Americans, on keeping people on edge and off balance. He wants to dominate our every waking hour. We ought not grant him that power over us.

It might also take some of the edge off the hatred many people feel for Trump. Seeing him for what he is—a terribly damaged soul, a broken man, a person with a disordered mind—should not lessen our revulsion at how Trump mistreats others, at his cruelty and dehumanizing actions. Nor should it weaken our resolve to stand up to it. It does complicate the picture just a bit, though, eliciting some pity and sorrow for Trump.

But above all, accepting the truth about Trump’s mental state will cause us to take more seriously than we have our democratic duty, which is to prevent a psychologically and morally unfit person from becoming president.

The office is too powerful, and the consequences are too dangerous, to allow a person to become president who views morality only through the prism of whether an action advances his own narrow interests, his own distorted desires, his own twisted impulses. When an individual comes to believe his interests and those of the nation he leads are one and the same, it opens the door to all sorts of moral and constitutional devilry.

Whether or not his disorders are diagnosable, the president’s psychological flaws are all too apparent. They were alarming when he took the oath of office; they are worse now.

Every day Donald Trump is president is a day of disgrace. And a day of danger.

Interlude Hymn #1012: “When I Am Frightened”

Let’s take a musical break. I’ve asked Harmony to sing the verses of the hymn “When I Am Frightened,” written by Shelley Jackson Denham in the context of a child looking up to an adult for acceptance and guidance, but also having a more general applicability.

(See notes by Kimberley Debus <https://farfringe.com/2017/11/30/stj1012-when-i-am-frightened/comment-page-1/>)

1. When I am frightened, will you reassure me?
When I’m uncertain, will you hold my hand?
Will you be strong for me, sing to me quietly?
Will you share some of your stories with me?
If you will show me compassion,
then I may learn to care as you do,
then I may learn to care.

2. When I am angry, will you still embrace me?
When I am thoughtless, will you understand?
Will you believe in me, stand by me willingly?
Will you share some of your questions with me?
If you will show me acceptance,
then I may learn to give as you do,
then I may learn to give.

3. When I am troubled, will you listen to me?
When I am lonely, will you be my friend?
Will you be there for me, comfort me tenderly?
Will you share some of your feelings with me?
If you will show me commitment,
then I may learn to love as you do,
then I may learn to love. (Words & Music: Shelley Jackson Denham; Jeannie Gagne, arr.)

“Approaching Election 2024: Concerns & Considerations” (Part 2)

Introduction: What is the appeal/staying power of Trump and how do we deal with this?

In the past few years as religious and political polarization has continued apace, within my “liberal bubble” I’ve been a contributing part of many conversations of persons in these liberal bubbles shaking their heads in disbelief and puzzlement at how anyone could possibly even consider voting for Donald Trump.

But I pay at least enough attention outside of my liberal bubbles to know that others in “conservative bubbles” are equally shaking their heads at those of us in our liberal bubbles. I suspect that these conversations, understandable as they are, are not doing any of us much good.

So, for the second part of my message this morning, I want to turn to what the appeal and staying power of Trump and the MAGA doctrine is for so many in our country ... and then conclude briefly with how we religious liberals can find our way in regard to this.

And, here, the person and character of Trump is less important than Trump as a symbol, less the cause of our polarization and more a symptom of it, less important in his person than as a resource for those who might find him useful for their given ends.

“America first”: An incident in Sheridan, Wyoming

1. Let me begin with a personal incident that took place in the lobby of the Wyoming Hotel in Sheridan, Wyoming a couple of weeks ago on September 27, as Flossie and I were driving on our way back from visiting friends and family in Michigan and beyond.

Having been in the East for several weeks, I was adjusted to the Eastern time zone and couldn’t sleep ... so in order to allow Flossie to keep sleeping in our hotel room, I took my computer to the breakfast room at 5am in the morning.

Presently, a person probably in his mid-50s on assignment for his company, perhaps, a construction company, came in to get some coffee ... and we got into a discussion of working at night, and what it is that has us up in the dark.

We're talking across the breakfast room for some time in fairly loud voices (I didn't have my hearing aids in) ... enjoying our discussion. Flossie, then, comes into the breakfast room in her night clothes from her room about fifty feet down the hall and politely indicates that our strong, male voices can be heard all the way down the hall inside her room.

Ray – that's my conversation partner's name – asks if he is disturbing her. Flossie indicates that's she concerned that others will be disturbed, since she is several rooms down the hall and can hear us even there.

Ray, then, strongly counsels her not to worry so much about others but just be concerned about herself, saying, "The great thing about America is that you only have to worry about yourself ... oh, and maybe your husband."

Flossie responds, "I don't quite agree with that; we do have to care about others."

"Harris or Trump?" Ray responds.

To Flossie, this is such a non-sequitur that she doesn't understand what he said and asks him to, please, repeat his question.

"Harris or Trump?" Ray repeats.

This time Flossie does understand and, reluctantly, answers "Harris."

"I thought so!" says Ray.

Flossie returns to our room ... and, Ray, before returning to his room, comes over to shake my hand saying, by way of apology, "I hope I have angered your wife."

I reply, laughingly, "Ah, she'll be fine; don't worry."

Later, before leaving for work, Ray comes back into the breakfast room and says: "Good luck on your volunteer work in the state of Washington."

So, in terms of the appeal of Trump, he appeals to those with the belief that they should care, first of all, for themselves, their families, and their country and not become "socialists" or "bleeding heart liberals" ... though, Ray, in my experience of him was probably more of a "good Samaritan" in his practice than his theory would indicate.

Thumb in the eye of establishment representatives

2. A second aspect of Trump's appeal is that he has been willing, as it were, to "put his thumb in the eye of the elites" and to put himself forward as a champion for the "disestablished." (Actually, as I read it, Trump craves the admiration and respect of the "established elite," but failing to receive such respect, attacks them.)

And the "established elite" have often enough played their part in this process. I remember the outrage in relation to Hillary Clinton's statement at a September 9, 2016 LGBT campaign fundraising event in New York City in which she used the phrase "basket of deplorables" to describe half of the supporters of her Republican opponent, a phrase that may have lost her the election. She said:

I know there are only 60 days left to make our case – and don't get complacent; don't see the latest outrageous, offensive, inappropriate comment and think, "Well, he's done this time." We are living in a volatile political environment.

You know, to just be grossly generalistic, you could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the **basket of deplorables**. *(Laughter/applause)* Right? *(Laughter/applause)* They're racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic – you name it. And unfortunately, there are people like that. And he has lifted them up. He has given voice to their websites that used to only have 11,000 people – now have 11 million. He tweets and retweets their offensive hateful mean-spirited rhetoric. Now, some of those folks – they are irredeemable, but thankfully, they are not America.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basket_of_deplorables)

In general, I respect Hillary Clinton, but this was not a good moment for her ... nor a "religious" approach that I can endorse in, apparently, believing that some people are "irredeemable."

(Fortunately, I think the current Democratic candidate Kamala Harris neither feels this way nor would she utter such a phrase as a "basket of deplorables" ... as evidenced in her interview earlier this week with Bret Baier on Fox News, where he asked her if she thought the American people were "stupid" ... to which she immediately replied, "I would never say that about the American people.")

Who embraces the "disenfranchised"?

With respect to the other basket of Trump supporters, in that same speech in 2016, Hillary Clinton said:

But the "other" basket – the other basket – and I know because I look at this crowd I see friends from all over America here: I see friends from Florida and Georgia and South Carolina and Texas and – as well as, you know, New York and California – but that "other" basket of people are people who feel the government has let them down, the economy has let them down, nobody cares about them, nobody worries about what happens to their lives and their futures; and they're just desperate for change. It doesn't really even matter where it comes from. They don't buy everything he [Trump] says, but – he seems to hold out some hope that their lives will be different. They won't wake up and see their jobs disappear, lose a kid to heroin, feel like they're in a dead-end. Those are people we have to understand and empathize with as well.

Who better represents this “other basket”?

Certainly, it has been Trump who was more embraced by this “other basket” in 2016, who was willing to identify and be a spokesperson for a large portion of the population that increasingly felt disenfranchised, alienated, and disrespected.

In this regard, let me read some excerpts from an email I received following the election in 2016 from a member of the congregation in Port Townsend that I served, who gave me permission to quote him on his sense of what happened:

“So who represents all of the middle-class families that have fallen off the face of the earth? They have lost their income. They have lost self-respect. They have seen their families and neighborhoods disintegrate. They have seen their future turn into a blank wall.

“... half of America [is] totally disenfranchised. They have had no representation, and they suddenly have no future. And, despite the media, they are men, women, black, white, young, old.

“What we saw [in this election] was a desperate half of our population staging a revolution. Trump voiced what they felt. He was, in fact, the only one who did. It doesn’t matter to desperate people that he really isn’t one of them, or that he is a sexist, racist, xenophobe, or hater of ... He acknowledged them, and they feel that he is speaking up for them.... And, in fact, they had to swallow all of the above issues to accept him.

“And what else does he [Trump] stand for? He stands for America. The disenfranchised do not want to be a part of the New World Order. They have been abandoned by the New World Order.... They are proud to be Americans, not just citizens of the world.... Trump promised to keep America for Americans....

“So, basically, we are looking at a revolution by the disenfranchised against a political system that has not only marginalized them but actively turned its back on them. What else goes along with this? Heroin addiction by hopeless people, a sense of uselessness, a lack of direction, a lack of any future. The list is long, and they see no way out.... What you have is a revolution by half of this country.

“And Trump? Who knows what he is really going to do, or the consequences of his actions for all of us. No one is likely to get out of this unscathed.”

The question is: “Will this again be the case in 2024?” How many, tired and dissatisfied with the present and hopeful for a better future and/or a restored past, are willing to roll the dice once again for a dicey Trump to see what happens?

The Trickster

3. There's much more I could go into here ... such as Trump as the embodiment of the Trickster energy that turns things on their head, a representative and catalyst of underground shadow energy ... the other side of the coin from our rational, well-behaved, polite, and considerate selves. But that will have to be for another time.

Where do we go from here?

So where, very briefly, do we go from here?

Up until this past week, I have not been willing even to consider living under a second Trump presidency ... and many advise: "Don't even go there! Spend your time trying to make sure that doesn't happen."

But this past week, in a conversation with a friend, I did think about that very real possibility and even tried to be prepared mentally/emotionally for it.

And one of the things I found in this exercise was realizing that whoever loses this election will have to deal with a similar blow to their hopes and wishes.

And so the question: Can we still be one people? Can we show some grace whether winning or losing? Can we see the humanity in those with whom we differ?

And are we, as religious liberals, open enough, resilient enough, and humble enough to maintain our religious values of expansive love and compassion in the face of whatever this upcoming election brings – whether our hopes for the outcome be either fulfilled or dashed?

The meaning of compassion

A couple of months ago in a service here on Sunday, August 18, I quoted Imam Jamal Rahman, who regularly speaks here at the Olympic Fellowship, in relation to dealing with adversaries.

I want to conclude this sermon by again quoting him. It's a quote from a sermon he gave at the Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (when I was the minister there) on February 12, 2017, which was about a month after the presidential inauguration of Donald Trump on January 20 of that year. The sermon was titled "Finding Compassion in a Time of Turmoil," and I transcribed the following statements from a tape of the service, as follows:

“What does it mean to be compassionate with others? In all traditions, and certainly in Islamic mysticism, there is a great emphasis that especially in dealing with somebody who is adversarial, please, please, become aware of the distinction between behavior and being.

“I am angry at that person's behavior not at that person's being, which is Christ-nature, Buddha-nature, Allah-nature, Elohim-nature. I am fighting the antagonism not the antagonist.

“A wonderful sage, Kabir, 16th century, says, ‘I beg you, do what is right; protect yourself; don’t allow yourself to be abused. But as you do this, I beg you, I beg you, please do not keep this person’s essence out of your heart.’

“And just making this discernment in your mind and heart has the power to shift heaven and earth.” (Imam Jamal Rahman, “Finding Compassion in a Time of Turmoil”)

Closing Hymn #1015: “I Know I Can”

1. Though days be dark with storms
And burdens weigh my heart;
Though troubles wait at ev’ry turn,
I know I can go on.
2. When sorrow heals my soul
And burdens make me strong,
Though troubles wait at ev’ry turn,
I know I can go on.
3. My sister in my heart,
My brother in my song,
Though troubles wait at every turn,
I know I can go on.
4. And though the journey is long,
The destination is near,
Though troubles wait at every turn,
I know I can go on.
5. So brothers take my hand,
And sisters sing my song,
When hope awaits at every turn,
I know we will go on.
(Words: Dennis Hamilton; music: Jeannie Gagne)

Closing Words of Benediction

Our Closing Words are those of Rabbi Tarfon from the first and second centuries of our Common Era, drawing on the words of the prophet Micah:

Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief.
Do justly, now.
Love mercy, now.
Walk humbly, now.
You are not obligated to complete the work,
But neither are you free to abandon it.

Extinguishing of Chalice

We extinguish this flame,
But not the Light of Truth,
The Warmth of Community,
The Fire of Commitment,
Or the Power of Transformation;
These we carry in our hearts
Until we are together again.

(NOTE: This is a manuscript version of the service "Approaching Election 2024: Concerns & Considerations." It was given by the Rev. Bruce Bode on October 20, 2024, who retired as senior minister of the Quimper Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Port Townsend, WA in June 2018, and where he is now minister emeritus. This manuscript version of the service contains more than was spoken in the service itself.)