

LIVING WITH SCARCITY?
The Rev. Julie Stoneberg
Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
November 13, 2016

OPENING WORDS

~ Clinton Lee Scott

From the east comes the sun, bringing a new and unspoiled day.
It has already circled the earth and looked upon distant lands and far-away peoples.
It has passed over mountain ranges and the waters of the seven seas.
It has shone upon laborers in the fields, into the windows of homes, and shops and factories.
It has beheld proud cities with gleaming towers, and also the hovels of the poor.
It has been witness to both good and evil, the works of honest men and women and the conspiracy of knaves.
It has seen marching armies, bomb-blasted villages and 'the destruction that wasteth at noonday.'
Now, unsullied from its tireless journey, it comes to us, the messenger of the morning; harbinger of a new day.

With prayers that each new day will bring more love and justice to our world, let us enter into worship together.

STORY FOR ALL *A Pocket Full of Kisses* ~ Audrey Penn

(Chester, a young raccoon wishes to 'give back' his little brother, and when his mother assures him that he is loved, he worries that there are not enough kisses to go around.)

PRAYER ~ Rev. Ashley Horan (adapted)

Spirit of Life and love, may we know that we are loved beyond belief...that we are enough, that we are precious, that our work and our lives matter, and that we are not alone. We are part of a great cloud of witnesses living and dead who have insisted that this beautiful, broken world of ours is a blessing worthy of both deep gratitude and fierce protection. Whatever happens tomorrow, or the next day, both our ancestors and our descendants are beckoning us, compelling us to onward toward greater connection, greater compassion, greater commitment to one another and to the earth.

Together, may we be resilient and resourceful enough to say "yes" to that call, and to make it our life's work in a thousand different ways, knowing that we can do no other than bind ourselves more tightly together, and throw ourselves into the holy work of showing up, again and again, to be part of building that world of which we dream but which we have not yet seen. So be it, Amen.

READING *We Are Prophets of a Future Not Our Own* ~ Bishop Ken Unterer

This prayerful poem was written not long before the death of the Christian martyr, Archbishop Oscar Romero, in honor of the many priests who were being killed in their struggle for justice for the poor.

It helps, now and then, to step back

and take the long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,
it is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of
the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete,
which is another way of saying
that the kingdom always lies beyond us.
No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about:

We plant seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything
and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something,
and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders,
ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.

MESSAGE *Living with Scarcity?* ~ Rev. Stoneberg

If you came today hoping that I would speak a little bit about Tuesday's election in the US, you are going to be disappointed. I am going to speak A LOT about Tuesday's election. Not so much about the election itself, but about how to understand it and its possible ramifications. And I want to talk about it from this, our context...living in another country (however fluid the border may or may not be)...as members of this 'small-l' liberal religious community that contains not just a handful of dual citizens and ex-pats...as a people who indeed have dreamed of building a world quite different than the world Mr. Trump has promoted.

Like you, I suspect, I have been pouring over all that has been written and shared in the last few days...looking for wisdom, seeking understanding...feeling at a loss for either. It's been

incredibly difficult to feel wise enough see the long view that Bishop Ken Unterer wrote of, and which Carter read about. I have been despairing for some inkling of understanding that will help me walk through this winter in political history. And, I have been grasping for the straws of hope that I want to believe reside within me, and within you, and within the power of sticking together as one people.

But talk about abundance! There is no shortage of wise and inspiring words and perspectives both about what has happened, and what we need to do next. Some of them...Parker Palmer and Elizabeth Warren in particular...are so eloquent that I'd really rather read their words to you verbatim. I won't do that, but having poured over many rich exposés, I must admit that today's message is more of a compilation of what has touched me than any original words of my own. If one day you want to look up the source materials, you'll find the appropriate footnotes in the printed version of this message.

Without thought to the impending election, I planned to talk today about fear and scarcity.... fear of not having enough, fear of not being safe enough, fear of not knowing enough. And it is still going to be about scarcity and fear, because if anything seems apparent in the wake of Tuesday's election, it is that there are millions of people in the US, and in Canada, and around the world, who live in fear of not having enough, and fear that what little they have is going to be taken away from them.

But this message will also be about abundance. Because I have to believe...I insist on believing...that there is no scarcity of the human spirit...no scarcity of our human capacity to choose love, to hold hands, to share, to care about one another. I simply have to believe that humanity is abundant in the resources that can save us.

Before I go any further, I need to tell you that there are many times in this message when I will say 'we'...even knowing that some of you will feel that you do not belong to the 'we' of which I speak. Let me assure you that you always have the right and duty to self-identify as is appropriate for you; but let me also implore you to examine your own role and responsibility in the issues of which I speak. Okay?

So, of course, I know that for many millions of people, scarcity is real. Using Maslow's theory, each and every one of us needs certain basic things to survive: nutritious food, clean air and water, appropriate clothing for the climate conditions in which we live, and shelter. Sadly, for far too many...and one person would be too many...these basic needs are unavailable. I'm not sure if the absence of such basic needs was a factor in the election, but certainly the fear of losing them was.

The next level of human need, not quite so crucial to survival, posited Maslow, are things that have to do with safety and stability...personal, financial, and employment security, access to health care and education, opportunities to better oneself. I believe that the lack of these things...or the imminent fear of losing them... played a huge role in the election's outcome. To feel secure in these things is deeply imbedded in our ideas of good government and the American dream (ideals from which Canadians are not immune.) These things...a better income, a better education, better health care...are what is purported to be fundamental to a good life.

The pundits I have been reading make it clear one of the liberal blind spots was the inability to see how many people are feeling disenfranchised...how many people are living with despair and disappointment...how many people want something, anything, to change...above all else. While so many correlate a vote for Trump with a vote for hatred, what most were voting for was something different...that is, not business as usual.

(Let me be clear that I am not dismissing the reality that there are those who did indeed vote for hatred. I am not blind to the outcropping of crimes committed by a very dangerous few who think they have been given a license to hate. This is real. But I do not believe that they represent the majority of Trump voters.)

The disenfranchised have been taught to fear. Many of them believe that the 'other'...whether that be refugees, or Blacks, or women, or gays...are going to take away what little security they have. They have truly been losing hold, feeling things slip away, and fear that they will lose it all. They want someone to blame. They have developed a scarcity mentality, in which there is only so much to go around, and where material possessions must be jealously guarded. Within such a scarcity mentality, there is no hope for long term satisfaction of even basic needs, and their focus then shifts to whatever gives immediate gratification¹...for example, winning...finding feelings of power wherever one can. (Some doing gender analyses of the election are talking about the significant share of males who voted for Trump because he symbolizes a return of the 'real man.')

But let's talk about what this means for us....you and me. Here.

Parker Palmer suggests that some of us may be shocked because "our lives have not been directly threatened by sexism, racism, religious bigotry, and kindred evils." Perhaps now, he writes, "more of us can empathize with our fellow citizens who've been wounded by a culture of cruelty" and can "find the compassion and courage to join the dispossessed in a struggle for economic justice that's aimed at the true sources of the problem."²

You may be familiar with *The Invitation*, written by Oriah Mountain Dreamer³...a poem in which she lists the many things she would like to ask in order to truly know someone. One of her questions is this... Can you get up after the night of grief and despair, weary and bruised to the bone, and do what needs to be done to feed the children?

And that is the question I pose to all of us today. Can we get up after the night of grief and despair...after touching deep feelings of scarcity, worried that there is not enough good in the world to overcome all this hatred...can we get up and do what needs to be done? Oh, trust me. I already hear you answering, yes. Yes, we must get up. We must not fall victim to despair. And yet...and yet...the task before us feels overwhelming. And the reality is that many of us, and I count myself in this number, are just privileged enough to be able to hide our heads in the sand and ignore it all...if we so choose.

¹ www.uuama.org/resources/sermon-library/2016-sermon-collection/9531-2/

² <http://www.onbeing.org/blog/parker-palmer-our-november-surprise-i-predicted-the-winner/9033>

³ <http://www.oriahmountaindreamer.com/>

But who will suffer if we do that? Paraphrasing writer Meagan McGovern⁴...those who suffer will be the guys who pick our organic strawberries and potatoes, and their families...the thousands of black people who are finally getting out the word that perhaps things aren't as equal as we all thought...the people on our First Nations reserves whose water is contaminated and making their children sick...the woman who really needs to have some choice about an unplanned pregnancy...the thousands who subsist on unlivable incomes from ODSP and OW....gay teenagers who had been coming bravely forward instead of cowering in the background...all these, to name a few, will suffer if we turn away. We need to open our eyes and see where our governments and our systems and our programs are failing. We need to face the deep suffering in our community and our world, and be willing to talk honestly about "the extent of our losses, the nature of our struggles, and who we have asked to endure them."⁵

This is a time when we must kick our abundance mentality into gear...an abundance mentality that assures us that there is enough of both opportunities and love for everyone...that reminds us that it is through connectedness and relationship that we are guaranteed personal security and health...that propels us to share both possessions and knowledge, knowing that it is in giving and receiving among and between us that abundance flourishes.

This is a time when we're called on to do things we may not have done before. To face down bigotry and hate, and to reach beyond our comfortable liberal bubble in trying to do so.⁶ We've got to figure out how to listen to 'the other.'

This is a time when our Unitarian Universalist values are needed more than ever. This is a time when the opportunity to be part of a community such as this is more life-changing than ever. Our faithful voices are needed now, because we believe that healing and transformation are possible....because we believe that each and every person has inherent worth and deserves to live with dignity....because we believe that each of us – individually and collectively – can help bring about a more just world.⁷

Inspired by the words of Elizabeth Warren, I implore us as a people of faith, to face down bigotry and hatred wherever it exists...to hold both the government and the corporate machine accountable...to stand up for the rights and respectful treatment of individuals and families no matter their citizenship status or the colour of their skin or their gender...to work to keep our socialized medical system healthy and strong...to fight for living wages, affordable education, and secure retirements...to ensure every opportunity, not just for some of our children, but for all children.⁸

And here. Let us continue to raise our children to be caring citizens, and to embrace difference. Let us continue to work to dismantle white privilege. Let us continue to deepen

⁴ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/were-not-moving-to-canada-were-here-and-were-mad_us_5822ad03e4b0102262411e95

⁵ <http://hds.harvard.edu/news/2016/11/09/after-election-seeking-out-lost>

⁶ <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/11/election-hate-trump-president-racism>

⁷ <http://religiousinstitute.org/2016-election-statement/>

⁸ <https://www.boston.com/news/politics/2016/11/10/read-elizabeth-warrens-speech-about-working-with-president-elect-donald-trump>

to drink the cool water.

The woman of that place, shading her eyes,
frowned as she watched – but not because
she grudged the water,

only because she was waiting
to see we drank our fill and were
refreshed.

Don't say, don't say there is no water.
That fountain is there among its scalloped
green and gray stones,

it is still there and always there
with its quiet song and strange power
to spring in us,

up and out through the rock.

*** CLOSING WORDS**

And yet..... ~ Ziy Sah

And yet, the sun is rising.

And yet, the planet spins.

And yet, the children, Anishinaabe, Syrian, Jew, trudge up the hill toward school.

And yet, the duck sits idly on the Otonabee, drifting slowly tailward.

And yet, the oak leaves rustle in the iridescent breeze.

And yet, the lips part, the ribs stretch, the heart beats.

As long as your veins are still home to blood coursing, there is more to the story.

There is more to the story.

Keep on.

Take courage my friends. Let us go out into the world, and keep on keeping on in our work
for love and justice.

Amen.