

We Were Made for Times Like These

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(adapted by Rev. Lynda Sutherland)

Sunday, October 23, 2016

“Struggling souls catch light from other souls who are fully lit and willing to show it.” I don’t know about you, but it feels especially challenging for me to try to keep shining lately. It is so, so tempting to react in fear, either to hide my head in the sand and pretend this election is business as usual; or to come out swinging, calling names, shaming those who disagree with me, branding the “other side” as stupid, gullible, or hate-filled.

I admit, I have not always acted as my best self. I have laughed at “jokes” portraying one politician or another as fools and buffoons. And I recognize the urge to laugh, lest I cry, lest I give in to the despair that seems waiting beyond every accusation, behind every call to arms, whether figurative or literal. And I admit that as I have done so, I have at

the same time roundly criticized others who do the same thing to those whose policies I support.

On election day, the relentless political tsunami that has ravaged us as a nation will finally be over, but regardless of who wins, the long process of healing and recovery will begin. Sorting through the devastation to our national soul will **require** that we, who are called to be light workers—beacons of witness, compassion, conscience, justice, and hope—**cannot** shut down from survivors’ fatigue and despair. Indeed, it is for times such as these that we have been called. Still, it is impossible to predict with certainty what we will find on the other side.

What we do know is that the political discourse of the last eighteen months has abandoned all pretense of civility, and it terrifyingly resembles something right out of the playbook of Adolph Hitler. We all know what that inspired.

History has shown us, time and time again, that we never win when we give-in to our lesser nature. Yet, shockingly, here we are in the midst of a world gone mad and we are Germany all over again. The concerns are real, but a knee-jerk, *save-only-the-righteous* response to them could be the beginning of our own demise. I see good people, hard working people, caring people who have become so terrified by the actions of others who, themselves, have been fueled by hateful rhetoric, respond in kind, encouraged by politicians whose sanctimonious vitriol is equally compelling and destructive.

How is it possible that we cannot see both sides of that deadly coin? Those who would save us through divisiveness and fear of the other, are inviting us to arm ourselves to the teeth with self-righteousness, distrust, and hardware, beckoning the Armageddon that we all fear. Lest we think of ourselves as far superior to those Germans who embraced such an ideology of self-preservation by demonizing others, then we might want to think again.

I am reminded, here, of the familiar mantra of some of my Christian friends: *What would Jesus do?* This is an interesting question in this pre-Advent season commemorating the birth of the Prince of Peace. Has his message been lost in translation? The likes of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr, and Nelson Mandela would suggest otherwise.

Indeed, they inspired revolutions of the mind and heart based upon the very principles of peace and justice-for-all that Jesus espoused. They recognized the truth in his teachings that *the light within us is more powerful than the darkness without, but only when we choose to reveal it and only when we choose to kindle it in others.*

Those leaders who embraced the inherent worth and dignity of all people removed the cloak of invisibility from those who had been *disempowered, devalued, and despised because of their otherness*, and reminded them (and the world) of their true value, their dignity and ability to effect positive change thru first recognizing their own self-worth and then claiming it thru peaceful means—courageously joining

with others to **elevate** all of our humanity toward acceptance, tolerance and equality.

How do we then, today, as UUs, engage in our democratic process, on the Side of Love? How do we live and act as our best selves in a time like this?

In his book, Splendid Literarium, author, historian and poet, Aberjhani says, quote, “On either side of a potentially violent conflict, an opportunity exists to exercise compassion and diminish fear based on recognition of each other's humanity. *Without such recognition, **fear** fueled by uninformed assumptions, cultural **prejudice**, **desperation** to meet basic human needs, or the **panicked uncertainty** of the moment, **explodes into violence**.* If the idea of loving those whom you have been taught to recognize as your enemies is too overwhelming, consider more deeply the observation that we are all much more alike than we are unlike.” Unquote.

In this new political climate, decency, diplomacy, and decorum seem to have been summarily dismissed. Many of us have been left adrift in a moral stupor, wondering how we will survive this ravaging storm that is, in one fell swoop, attempting to dismantle all that we have worked so hard to build. It threatens all that we have accomplished so that we might rise to higher ethical standards, to bring dignity and equality into our world.

If you are like me, you might feel overwhelmed by all the verbose thunder swirling around us. The initial inclination might be to withdraw and protect ourselves from this hurricane of destruction, but we cannot stop the storm from affecting us, and we cannot let our fear overtake our true sense of purpose.

You and I need to be reminded of Clarissa Pinkola Estes words, that we have been made for such times as these. *Yes, for years, we have been learning, practicing, been in training for and just waiting to meet*

on this exact plain of engagement. Now is our time to fearlessly and unflinchingly live the principles of our faith.

Those of us who believe in the inherent worth and dignity of all people...those of us who believe we must work hard at building networks of compassion and understanding...those of us who believe in working toward equality and inclusion...those of us who believe that people should be allowed to follow whatever spiritual path that nurtures their soul for the good works of their hands and their hearts...those of us who believe in a free and *responsible* search for truth and meaning...those of us who believe in the right of conscience in a democratic society that takes into account the needs of the many...those of us who believe in the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all...those of us who believe that we **must** respect the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part...

We have been made for times such as these, and we must shine our light boldly!

Are those concerns that frighten us, legitimate? Absolutely! All the more reason that we need to open ourselves to the greatest powers for positive change that we have at our disposal. The salvation of our world depends upon our **courage** and **strength** to shine our light ever brighter in the midst of this storm of despair, that we might see ourselves in each other... that we might welcome into our embrace those who are marginalized, suffering, imprisoned in body, mind or spirit, of a different race, culture, creed or sexual orientation and lift-them-up and prepare for them a seat at our common table. We must become the embodiment of our deepest values: of hospitality, hope, and great expectation, through all the seasons of our lives, and not let our fears diminish the light of our potential to bring healing, hope, and harmony into our world.

Rooting out the issues that divide us is complex, and it requires both a national and a personal response. It is our calling as members of

the human family to use all our powers to heal and not to harm, to help and not to hinder, to serve that Spirit of Life which dwells within us all.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes says, *One of the most calming and powerful actions you can do to intervene in a stormy world is to stand up and show your soul. Soul on deck shines like gold in dark times. Struggling souls catch light from other souls who are fully lit and willing to show it. When a great ship is in harbor and moored, it is safe, there can be no doubt. But that is not what great ships are built for.*

Surely, we have been made for such times as these we have been made for such times as these! Shine on, my good friends. Shine on!

Amen, Blessed be, and Namaste