

Who Are We Now?, November 8, Rev. Linda Simmons

Dear people, it is a brighter Sunday this Sunday, is it not?

A president-elect who in his acceptance speech speaks of hope, unity, climate, racism, healing and Vice President elect who is a woman of color! My goodness, part of my wants to jump out of my skin and the other part wants to lie down and sleep for a week.

And I noticed, did you, that while my heart leapt, I kept tempering my joy. When did this happen that I cannot feel joy without fear, hope without pessimism, breathe without darkness?

Before I sat before this empty page, this shiny, empty page that mocked me with its perfection this past Wednesday, when everything was upside-down and inside out, I went running. It was Gary who tore the covers off of me and handed me my running shoes. I said a few choice words during this process, but I let the momentum of a habit that has saved my life, grab me up and toss me outside.

We ran in town this time. Couldn't handle starting the car and looking into the rearview mirror to back out of our skinny driveway across a well-traveled sidewalk. We always worry that Joanne Polster will be darting by. Just wasn't sure that our focus was strong enough this morning Wednesday morning.

Gary outpaces me, so we both end up running alone. Breath and pumping lungs and sore knees are my companions. The more I move just beyond my physical capacity, the more my heart opens, and my mind is set free of itself.

I have never run within Prospect Hill Cemetery, though every time I drive or bike past, I let this place of breezes and flowers and stone gently remind me to cease the day.

I noticed the trees first. They are so many gnarled shapes full of muted color and speaking in tongues of other lands and winds and breath and shores. They lean over and around and between. Sentinels guarding sacred ground.

The sky... it is what drew me on. It reached away from me like a huge bird racing for the horizon as if there was a love there that could not be lived another moment without. Every time I looked up, this bird opened its throat and beckoned me on.

And the gravestones, names and blessings and angels and feathers, and wings, so many wings all reaching out to flutter against my skin.

I am a slow runner, so the words, beloved mothers, sister, brother, father, daughter, son, child, friend written on stone after stone, flew to greet me: Mother, sister, brother, father, daughter, son, child, friend.

These words from Rebecca Parker's poem *Choose to Bless the World*, that ran beside me that day, repeated themselves in my labored, loud breath:

Any of [our many gifts] can serve to feed the hungry,

Bind up wounds,

Welcome the stranger,

Praise what is sacred,

Do the work of justice

Or offer love.

Any of these can draw down the prison door,

Hoard bread,

Abandon the poor,

Obscure what is holy,

Comply with injustice

Or withhold love.

I began writing this sermon before we knew that the first woman and the first woman of color ever to be elected to the office of Vice President was preparing to say to women of color, during her acceptance speech: You are the backbone of democracy! What an historic

day. What a day for woman and girls of color to pull the dark cloak of historic, intentional erasing through systematic racism off of their shoulders and be seen and see themselves.

And as Biden and Harris reminded us in their speeches, and as the ancestors' voices echoed all around me on that run: Now is no time to go back to sleep. Now is the time for the living to live, to remember the responsibilities we have to one another, to knit connections strong enough to carry us beyond these flesh and bones, strong enough to write a story that will long after we take our last breaths.

It is a day of reprieve and joy and so many of our people are suffering still, right now, this day. Including those who have no jobs, or sustaining meaning, who have lost their sense of authority and are filled with hate and resentment.

Worrying about how to bridge this gap so that we can all understand one another is not enough. But understanding is not enough. We must worry about building an America where everyone earns a living wage, can attend decent public schools where teachers and education are valued and have access to higher education, where everyone can receive healthcare when they need it, where we are all housed with respect for the inherent worth and dignity of our very souls.

We live in connection to others. And how we do this, this matters today and tomorrow and next week and next year.

Remember, our ancestors cry, remember to build an inclusive, decent, civil, considerate, awake world that can carry you through eternity while leaving a legacy for those who remain strong enough, well hewn enough, considerate and visionary enough- to build the world you could not yet imagine.

Finally, too worn out to take another loop, I headed toward the gates. And there a sign graces us as we leave: Sacred Ground, please treat respectfully...and just above it, a sign to pick up your dog's poop. After a good chortle, I remembered: everything we do affects something/someone/somewhere and when we call those connections sacred, when we wake up enough to live on purpose, no matter if it is picking up pooh or kneeling to kiss the ground, what we do and how we do it, creates the next day, the next opportunity, the next building or smashing of hope and possibility.

When Gary and I were in Katmandu a few years ago, being made into a version of ourselves that is still hard to name, so outside of this here and now is it, walking in these bones and casting shadows made of other bones: as pollution choked our lungs and motorbikes clipped at our heels and more naked grace and poverty than we had ever known walked through us, it was the Vajrayana Buddhism, the Buddhism of Nepal, that helped us make sense of it all. Vajrayana means to weave the sacred and profane until we know that without one, the other is not possible.

Vajrayana is said to be the quickest way to enlightenment but the most dangerous. It is likened to licking honey from the razor's edge. It requires concentration of mind, focus, awareness, and the purified motivation of an open, loving heart of compassion.

Vajrayana Buddhists let it all in: the hatred and the love, the fear and the hope, the sacred and the dog poo- and in leaving room for *what is* to be known, it creates space for *what else can be*.

How are you making use of the sacred the hope, longing and compassion mixed with sacred fear and anger and disbelief? The answer to this question matters then, now and always, it matters to us in a unique way because we are a liberal religious people.

People are watching; they have always been watching as we negotiate faith and meaning without god or heaven or hell. What happens to those of us who have no god or dogma to watch over us while we pluck meaning from the razor's edge? We are left with this world, with each other, with this moment and the next one too. We are the light we carry into the darkness.

This is no time to turn away from what we fear.

This election was not a landslide. We are not united in feeling this is a beautiful new day. How will you make new meaning in these times, the kind of meaning that can sustain hope and roll up its sleeves and do the work of giving hope the shape of housing, food, work, healthcare, and meaningful education?

This time, we cannot go back to sleep and pretend that democracy will go on without us. This time, we must rise with the rising tides of justice, truth, compassion and unity and choose to bless the world. From Rebecca Parker's poem:

The choice to bless the world is more than an act of will,

A moving forward into the world

With the Intention to do good.

It is an act of recognition, a confession of surprise, a grateful acknowledgment

That in the midst of a broken world

Unspeakable beauty, grace and mystery abide.

There is an embrace of kindness that encompasses all life, even yours.

And while there is injustice, anesthetization, or evil

There moves

A holy disturbance,

A benevolent rage,

A revolutionary love,

Protesting, urging, insisting

That which is sacred will not be defiled.

Those who bless the world live their life as a gesture of thanks

For this beauty and this rage.

Choose to bless the world my friends. Gather the blessing of all of those who have come before you, who endured, and who kept knitting the kinship, kept weaving the strands of life, kept covering with a quilt those who shiver in the darkness while sharing the yarn of justice to make the next, needed thing.

Listen to the ancestors: Mother, sister, brother, father, daughter, son, child...you are what life means. Connection is all that is left to speak when the tongue can no longer make words.

Look for the light, your own first. Kindle it. Nurture it. Tend it. And then offer it to the world.

Decide what the story of your life will be as you negotiate honey on a razor's edge: justice on the edge of violence, hope on the edge of fear, love on the edge of hatred... and be fully alive, be all of your life. Honey is no less a product of cooperation and community because licked from a razor's edge.

This is our world. We are here because we have been called to exist here and now. Take the deep breath that democracy just gave us, and take a hand that is reaching for yours just out of sight, and hear the ancestors singing:

Your life matters, and always will because of connection, because of hope, because of truth, because the world has ordained you to be here and awake right now, in these days of days. Choose to bless the world.

Amen.