

Viet Nam. April 11, 1969. Men were down. The firefight continued. The pop of rifle fire and explosion of hand grenades. Under heavy fire, Marine Lt. Bobby Christian moved forward to help a wounded comrade. Kneeling next to the man, Bobby pulled the pin from a grenade and threw it, just as he took a shot between the eyes. Bobby died instantly.

My friend and colleague, the Rev. Jan Christian, is Bobby's younger sister. Her memoir, "Leave No Brother Behind: A Sister's War Memoir" tells the story of her personal and shared journey of healing with comrades of her brother.

The late 1960's and early 1970's were another deeply divided time in our nation's history. Then, as now, the divide played itself out mostly along socio-economic lines. The white working class largely supported the war, felt that our country could do no wrong, believed the party line of President Johnson's administration that justified the war. On the other side were the liberals, the college professors and student bodies, the hippies, the counter culture. While we were inundated daily with scenes of carnage and bodies in Viet Nam, we also saw images of police bludgeoning protestors in Chicago and elsewhere. There were tanks on the UC Berkeley campus, under the orders of Governor Ronald Reagan. We witnessed National Guard troops in Ohio, under the orders of Governor Jim Rhodes, opening fire on students, wounding nine and killing four of them (May 4, 1970). I was a freshman in high school, 30 miles from the Kent State campus. My friends had brothers and sisters attending Kent.

Simultaneously, there was a civil rights movement that was playing itself out here at home and on the battlefields of Viet Nam. The Black Power movement was challenging the legitimacy and efficacy of Martin Luther King's non-violent approach to civil rights. Heeding the call of Dr. King, our first called minister, Art Wilmot, went to Selma, Alabama in 1965 to march. James Reeb, another UU minister, was killed there and the nation, which had ignored the deaths of so many blacks, was shocked (March 11, 1965). Shortly thereafter, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act and President Johnson signed it into law on August 6, 1965. (A

key provision of the voting rights act was struck down by the Supreme Court in 2013, see LA Times 11/09/16)

Fast forward to this week. Those blue collar Democrats who supported the war in Viet Nam, who supported the illegal activity of J. Edgar Hoover's FBI, who said "America, love it or leave it" (a phrase that had its origin in the McCarthy era of anti-communist witch hunt)(and many of draft age did leave it); those Democrats are now Republicans. To be fair, I think most of the liberals in the 1960's and 70's were also Democrats. The Democratic Party was as divided then as the Republican Party now seems to be.

And now, through the strange but legal workings of our electoral college system, a self-styled Republican has been elected as President of our United States.

While there may be some in this room who think that this is a good thing, if you are here, you keep a low profile. Understandably. I would like to hear from you privately.

The reactions I've heard this week from members and friends and family, from fellow UU ministers and from my interfaith colleagues who joined us here for my ordination...the reactions I've heard have been shock and dismay. I've also heard a great deal of fear.

I, too, have felt and still feel these emotions. I grieve for the lost opportunity of having the first woman president of our United States. I grieve for the lost opportunity of what she might have accomplished, although realistically, given the state of national politics, I think she would mostly have been fighting a holding action.

I fear for what this election may mean for the safety of my daughters and all women. I fear for what it may mean for the safety of millions of undocumented and documented immigrants. I fear for the safety of persons whose sexuality is not mainstream. And, perhaps most of all, I fear for the future of tens of millions of people and countless billions of organisms whose survival is being jeopardized by

climate change. I fear for the effects that rejection of the Paris Climate Accord by this country will have on the world wide effort to keep our planet livable. America is great in many ways, not least of which is that our leadership matters on the world stage.

LT Bobby Christian gave his life, not for a war that he believed in; he wrote to his father while he was going through basic training in Quantico, Virginia, that he had grave doubts. He did not join the Marine Corps out of a belief in the war. He joined because he was going to be drafted after he graduated from college and lost his deferment. Bobby did not give his life out of loyalty to a President who had let all of us down in Viet Nam.

Bobby gave his life for something much more personal. He gave his life for his men. He died trying to rescue a wounded comrade. He gave his life out of love. This happens often in our armed services. He was afraid. But fear did not control his actions.

This election campaign preyed on fear. On the Republican side it preyed on fear of immigrants, fear of women, fear of transgender and queer persons, fear of jobs going overseas, fear of blacks and other minorities who are becoming a larger percentage of who we are in America. But the Trump campaign was not alone in this. Hillary's campaign preyed on fear of what a Trump presidency might mean. It preyed on the fears that I have mentioned that I hold. It preyed on the fear of what Trump may do as Commander-in-Chief.

We are afraid. While some of what we fear may come to pass, much may not. I ask you not to live in your fear, not to act out of your fear. Process matters. How we do things matters. In the concluding paragraphs of her memoir, "Leave No Brother Behind," Jan Christian says this about fear.

"Fear is the opposite of faith. When we act out of fear, we are in danger of inadvertently creating what we most fear. My faith is in the power of love and acceptance. It is in the understanding that we are already

connected . Faith is not the same as belief. It is a radical openness to possibility and truth. It is an ability to live well in uncertainty and in mystery."

In the uncertainty, here are some reasons that I am hopeful that things will not be as bad as we fear.

In Republican strongholds along the southeast coast of this country, places where one cannot use the words "climate change," leaders and civil servants are dealing first hand with the effects of rising oceans. At enormous cost, they are raising streets and altering storm drainage to counter the increasingly frequent flooding. They understand that they are on the front line of climate change. I hope that they will serve to counter the party line.

Another example: The day after the election I listened to Terry Gross interview James Fallows on Fresh Air. He has recently completed a three year journey of crisscrossing America in his personal light airplane. He visited heartland cities and towns, places ignored by media except after natural disasters or heinous crimes. He observed that the hate and discontent brought forth in this election are a disconnect from what he saw on the ground in the day-to-day lives of people. He described a city, I think it was Sioux Falls, SD, that is one of the destination cities for immigrants. More than ten percent of this city are recent immigrants, many from Syria. These immigrants are accepted and part of the social fabric. This gives me hope that maybe we are not as divided as national politics and media would lead us to believe.

We, as UU's, hold a responsibility to act out of justice and compassion. We aspire to believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person, even those who voted for Donald Trump. We have stated again and again, in actions and words, that we are "Standing on the Side of Love."

And yet, we grieve. We grieve what we have lost this week and may lose in the future. Grieving is a complex process. It is tiring. As I said just a couple weeks

ago, in our service remembering our ancestors, our sisters and brothers, our children, we do not do grief well in this culture. We want quick fixes. We want to avoid the pain. But grief short-circuited comes back to haunt us in our bodies and in our actions.

Jan Christian thought about this when, after 30 years, she reached out to her brother's fellow Marines. Her reaching out and remembering was painful for her and for them. Yet they all grew and healed from the experience of sharing. Grieving and sharing is important for soldiers. It is also important for us.

We will be called to social action in ways yet unknown in the coming months and years. And we will be called to social action in ways that honor our UU values of love and respect. But let us not rush through our grief. Let us honor that much that we hold dear is potentially in jeopardy. Let us honor that pain. And in a few weeks, or a month, or perhaps longer, let us emerge, likely still sad, but ready to live our UU values.

Our soldiers, all of our soldiers, have given up their innocence for the ideals on which this country was founded. Some have given their lives. Many more have given their health. Our politicians, all of us, have often let them down in the reasons for, or conduct of, war or in how we have treated them when they have returned. They have sacrificed. So, too, it is up to us to sacrifice. In the words of Jan Christian, "We owe them our own willingness to sacrifice for peace and justice and for a world in which ideological warfare is obsolete."

May it be so.

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<sup>i</sup> Journalist **Walter Winchell** first popularized it in his defense of **Joseph McCarthy's** anti-communist witch hunt. <http://www.thepublicprofessor.com/america-love-it-or-leave-it/> Accessed 11/11/16