

On November 8th the political and social world of the United States was rocked by the inconceivable victory (to many here), of Donald Trump. In the days following there was numbness, disbelief and grief by many. A couple weeks ago I spoke from this pulpit about honoring our grief. Others celebrated. Now we wait.

How do we wait? Two thousand years ago the Jews waited with hope and expectation. They had been promised a Messiah. In the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Old Testament, the book of Isaiah 9:6 reads:

For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Again from the Hebrew Bible, this time from the book of Deuteronomy 18:15

<sup>15</sup> The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet<sup>[a]</sup> like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet.

What exactly that messiah would be or accomplish was subject to debate, subject to individual expectations. Like so much of the Bible, the writing is ambiguous, sometimes contradictory. Would he be a counselor, or a prophet, or a ruler who would drive out the occupying Romans. Would he be a Prince of Peace? Many had in mind someone like Moses, like David or Solomon. Talk of a God-person came only after Jesus' crucifixion.

Hope and expectation is the way supporters of Donald Trump are now waiting. My wife, just saw a FaceBook post: "Looking forward to a great 4 years." Of course,

what they are hoping for varies widely. For some, it will be the repeal of Roe v. Wade. For some, it is the building of a wall. For some, it is that Trump will solve the problem of loss of white hegemony in this country. For some, Trump will create jobs. For many, perhaps most, it is that they were listened to in the campaign and they are tired of being ignored by an educated and ruling class that knows best. Their expectation is probably that Trump will continue to listen to them. Of course, Trump will likely be a disappointment to many who voted for him. Just as Obama was before him. And Bush before him.

Another way that we may wait is with dejection, sure that the worst is coming. This is the attitude of many people I have heard recently, people who did not vote for Donald Trump. Our attitude may be passive. There is nothing we can do, so why bother trying. This is not how most of us are waiting for the coming administration. We may be disappointed, even dejected, but we are actively looking for ways to combat the threats we see coming. The threats we see read much the same as the hopes of the supporters. Threats to immigrants. Threats to minorities. Threats to justice. Threats to the environment.

We immerse ourselves in the news, bemoaning every piece that reinforces our belief that the end of the world as we know it is at hand. Our democracy is threatened. We have so little time to turn around the global climate crisis. Our anxiety levels ratchet up. We feel that we have to act immediately. There is so little time.

That the world would end soon was an attitude prevalent during the time in which Jesus lived. And those who believed it were right, in some ways. But it was a self-fulfilling prophecy.

About 30 years after Jesus was crucified, militant Jews mounted an armed insurrection against the Roman occupation. This was a bad idea. Some early victories gave them hope. It took a few years for this revolt in a far off corner of the Roman empire to get the attention of Rome. Once it did, the Roman army sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple. That was in the year 70 of the Common Era. The temple has never been rebuilt. One of the holiest of sites in Islam, the Dome of the Rock, was built hundreds of years later on the site of the temple, and is an ongoing source of tension between Judaism and Islam. In the absence of a Temple, the way Judaism was practiced shifted radically over the next hundred or so years.

There is are other ways in which we can wait.

Earlier we heard from Annie Gonzales Milliken, former intern at my longtime church in Davis, who writes of being called to active, hopeful waiting, of waiting like Mary. Waiting, knowing we are each sacred, another way of saying our first principle of the inherent worth and dignity of every person. She speaks of protesting, preaching, praying. Active, but with hope. But Annie also speaks of thinking carefully about the judgments we make and hear, about dialoguing with those we don't understand, about standing with those "who are bringing divinity into this world, even if they are not doing it exactly the way [we'd] like."

There is yet another way of waiting, one which Annie speaks of before moving into action and protest. Mary and Joseph waited with hope, according to the Bible story. They waited with prayer. They waited to be filled.

The Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu wrote of this in Chapter 11 of the Tao Te Ching.

Thirty spokes radiate, united into a wheel

by the stillness at the hub around which they serve.

A bowl of clay cups an empty space

waiting to be filled, and thereby it serves.

The empty areas enclosed by walls, the openings into space  
of windows and doors, make a house habitable.

Motion, stillness, solidity, emptiness,  
existence, not-existence, all serve.

A person should be at times an empty vessel  
waiting to be filled,

Still at the very core of one's being  
as the hub of a wheel is still.

Emptiness is not without meaning or purpose. In the most recent edition of *Quest*, the magazine of the UU Church of the Larger Fellowship, Shellie Page, minister of the UU Church in Ogden, Utah, asks that we consider the possibility that waiting itself is a spiritual practice, full of potential for growth and insight.<sup>1</sup> Yes, she admits, waiting can be painful and filled with anxiety as we hope for the best but anticipate the worst. "But this is a season of sacred waiting," she says.

Page quotes another UU, minister and theologian Tom Owen-Towle, who offers three words for waiting. Perceptive, conceptive and receptive. Owen-Towle asks that we use perception to see what might be, not what has been. We conceive new ways of being, dreaming outside the box. Finally, we allow ourselves to be receptive to the gifts that may emerge from our newfound patience with waiting.

Another UU minister, Ken Sawyer, spoke of waiting in his sermon, "And In the Stillness, A Light."<sup>ii</sup> Sawyer quotes Carlyle in saying "Out of silence, comes thy strength."

"Out of silence, comes thy strength." Or alternately, "Still at the very core of one's being, as the hub of a wheel is still."

Sawyer concludes with these words:

"[The author] Tillie Olsen has a whole book called *Silences*, although she has in mind a somewhat different, more specific sort-literary silences, times when those who could write did not-and these silences are mostly negative ones, times of frustration. But among the rest of her silences, she names "foreground silences," which appear in the lives of some writers, times before things finally happen, the preparatory silence, the achievement of an "undistracted center of being," she says, presumably quoting "Valery." Best of all, she quotes Melville, who speaks of "the calm, the coolness, the silent grass growing mood in which a man ought always to compose." It is a mood rarely available to us, but it is a mood much needed-not only to compose novels and poems, but to be in that shepherd place where out of the silence may again come our strength, and where hope, when it shines, will arrest our attention and rekindle our hearts and set our feet moving toward that impossible, sacred, ever-recurring manger of new birth and promise."<sup>iii</sup>

How do you wait?

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<sup>i</sup> Shelley Page, *Sacred Waiting*. Quest, V. LXXI, No 11, Dec. 2016. [www.clfuu.org](http://www.clfuu.org)

<sup>ii</sup><https://www.questformeaning.org/oldsite/clf.uua.org/international/sawyer/Sawyer.And%20in%20the%20Stillness,%20a%20Light.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.