

How We Win or Lose
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Our worship and community theme this month is Gratitude. As I woke up last Wednesday, I found no gratitude in my soul. What I felt was anger, fear, anxiety, hopelessness, numbness, denial, sorrow. Above all, I felt grief. A deep, aching grief that even now is clenched up in my stomach.

I heard these same emotions from those of you who gathered here Wednesday night. I have heard them everywhere I go. I have seen them splattered across my Facebook page and online every day since the election.

I want to be very clear that my grief is not about partisan politics or political parties. However each of us voted on November 8, we woke up together on November 9 to a blazing moment of clarity in which we see our fractured nation as it truly is: torn by political polarization and wracked by economic alienation.

In the words of North Carolinian Christian minister John Pavlovitz:

Don't believe this is all just sour grapes; the crocodile tears of the losing locker room with the scoreboard going against us at the buzzer. . . This is not about losing an election. This isn't about not winning a contest. This is about two very different ways of seeing the world.

[One candidate] spoke about a diverse America; one where religion or skin color or sexual orientation or place of birth aren't liabilities or deficiencies or moral defects. That campaign was one of inclusion and connection and interdependency. It was about building bridges and breaking ceilings. It was about going high, no matter who goes low.

Our President-elect imagined a very selective America; one that is largely white and straight and Christian, and the voting verified this. . . He ran a campaign of fear and exclusion and isolation—and that's the vision of the world those who voted for him have endorsed.

This is the disconnect and the source of our grief today. It isn't a political defeat that we're lamenting, it's a defeat for Humanity.

We're not angry that the one candidate lost. We're angry because that loss means this country will be less safe, less kind, and less available to a huge segment of its population, and that's just the truth.

Those who have always felt vulnerable are now left more so. Those whose voices have been silenced will be further quieted. Those who always felt marginalized will be pushed further to the periphery. Those who feared they were seen as inferior now have confirmation in actual percentages.

*This grief is not about politics.
This is not about one candidate over the other.*

*It's about overt racism and hostility towards those on the margins: immigrants, people of color, LGBTQ people.
It's about religion being weaponized.*

It's about crassness and vulgarity and disregard for women.

It's about a barricaded, militarized, bully nation.

It's about an unapologetic, open-faced ugliness.

And it is not only that these things have been ratified by our nation that grieve us; all this hatred, fear, racism, bigotry, and intolerance—it's knowing that these things have been approved by our neighbors, our families, our friends, those we work with and go to school with.

***That** is the most horrific thing of all. We now know how close this is to all of us, however much we might have pretended otherwise. And we **did** pretend. Those of us with a variety of privileges **have been**, for the most part, content to live in willful ignorance.*

This is not about a difference of political opinion, as that's far too small to mourn over. It's about a fundamental difference in how we view the worth of all people—not just those who look or talk or think or vote the way we do.

*Grief always laments what might have been, the future we were robbed of, the tomorrow that we won't get to see, and that is what we walk through today. As a nation we had an opportunity to affirm the beauty of our diversity, to choose ideas over soundbytes, to let everyone know they had a place at the table, to be the beacon of goodness and decency we imagine that we are—and we said **no**. This is why we are grieving.*

So, I'm not talking electoral politics today. I'm talking about a deep grief for our nation and the world. And over the last few days, the new national order has been validated. Wednesday night I heard first-person stories from people who came to our vigil here who are witnessing the effects of this validation of hatred. The violence, the name-calling, the threats and the resulting terror.

And I'm seeing these stories on my Facebook page and on online. These are not second- and third-hand my mother's cousin's neighbor's uncle's stories. They are first-person *I saw this* or *This happened to me* stories. And I believe them. They're coming from people that I know and trust.

There is no doubt we are in for some very hard times, as individuals, as communities and as a nation. The evidence of violence and frightening political choices and decisions is already happening. There is no kind of magical thinking or hoping that is going to change that. We cannot be in that kind of denial.

When I first titled this sermon last month, knowing I would be preaching to the election. I thought of *How We Win Or Lose* as meaning what kind of winners or losers might we be? And how do we manage winning or losing in ways that are moral and ethical and helpful?

That's not what I'm speaking to today. Today, I'm understanding *How We Win Or Lose* as what do we do now, as Unitarian Universalists and citizens and human beings, to win **through** this situation without losing what we value the most: Our UU Principles and covenants, our decency, our humanity, our allegiance to the US Constitution. How do we go forward? How do we **WIN** through in this situation?

The first thing we all must do is to take the time to feel our feelings of anxiety, grief, despair, numbness and fear. That's what our vigil on Wednesday was about and it's an ongoing process. This is important and it matters.

It matters because if we try to jump to action without taking care of our feelings, we are not likely to be effective. If we're angry and we haven't sat with that and felt it and owned it, we are likely to take out that anger on those we love and care for. It's important to bring all of our feelings to the surface, acknowledge them, give them room and time to breathe.

That's hard for folks who live a lot in their heads – analyzing, thinking and deciding. I know because I am one of those folks! I always have to work to reach my own feelings, name them, own them and give myself compassion for feeling them, especially when they are hard to feel. We must be profoundly aware of our own feelings.

For other people who feel intensely every moment, owning their feelings clearly is a way to step aside from them so that they are not immobilized. Yes, you are feeling all those feelings so powerfully and you know it. But you will not drown in them or die from them. You are not your feelings alone. You are more than that.

Wherever we fall on this spectrum of feeling, we must be self-aware enough to know what is happening in our hearts, to see it, name it and accept it. Or the risk we take is of being dangerous to others in our feelings. Or of being so overcome by them that we can't do what we need to do.

And there's the question.

What is it that we need to do, now? Especially in this religious community. And also beyond it.

The first thing we all have to do is keep on with the daily necessities of our lives. We have to get up, go to work or school or other commitments. We have to pay the bills, feed the cat, take a shower, take out the trash.

I haven't wanted to do those things much in the last few days. They seem supremely unimportant. But they are not. They are part of how we survive. They are part of how we ground ourselves in the realities and the responsibilities of life. They are grounding, these daily routines.

And, we have to keep doing the same thing here at church, in our beloved religious community. We have to pay the bills and rake the leaves and make the coffee and print the order of service and play and sing the hymns.

And we must keep on here with our commitments and covenants of all kinds. Our commitments to social justice and a better world. Our covenants with one another about what we value and how we are going to live those values and how we will treat one another. We have to keep showing up here in every way.

Because that's where we will WIN.

In the face of all that is happening that is terrible now and will be terrible, we have the amazing opportunity to live our faith as we have never lived it together. And to be nourished by that spiritually as we create the world we want to live in.

We might be tempted to isolate ourselves here in this loving and caring community. To retreat to this and other spaces where we are among those who affirm us. Where we can continue to grieve.

Yes, will continue to experience grief and all that we must feel. But in our grieving and our pain, we cannot hide. We can't hide anywhere, or we would be unfaithful to what we are called to do by our Unitarian Universalist Principles and covenants.

The deepest call of our faith is to create a world of love and justice. To stand beside those who are suffering and fearful now in ways that many of us cannot imagine and have not experienced. To support them against all violence and evil. Our deepest call is not just to relationship with like-minded people in like-minded places. We are called to compassion, love and solidarity in the midst of every kind of difference.

The people who were already suffering? The people whose suffering has never abated under ANY TYPE of political system or administration in this country? They need us now more than ever. AND – they have much to teach us. We need to be with them, in love and support, more than we ever have. Because they are in more danger than ever.

Think of all the people in Omaha who lack a safe place to create meaning for themselves, who are without pastoral resources, who haven't been fortifying themselves with song and wisdom stories. Think of all the people who belong to groups our President-elect has specifically targeted. Who know that hateful rhetoric will manifest in devastating policy aimed at them. Think of all the people who voted for a candidate other than yours, who see the same divisions you see, who have suffered in their own ways and are also asking themselves how we will go forward together.

Our Unitarian Universalist faith *demands* that we be there for ourselves and for all of these others. Our tools are more love and more compassion. We must be willing to live and proclaim our Principles as we never have.

Everything we have done here at 2U is in preparation for these times. Our Covenant of Right Relations? We must live it to the ultimate of our being everywhere and with everyone. Our growing skills in building alliances with others who are different from us in order to make our community and world better? Time to do that on steroids. Creating beloved community within and beyond these walls is messy, gritty, fearsome, and hard. This is the time we have been practicing for.

Because others are depending on us. To support them. And even to put our spirits and our souls, our bodies and our money on the line for them. We can't let anything stand in our way. Not our own grief and fear and anger. Not our imperfections and inadequacies as individuals and as a religious community. Not even all the things we don't know how to do – YET.

As my UU colleague the Reverend Sue Phillips says:

The only faithful response to this moment of extraordinary division is to show ourselves and our communities that another way is possible. The antidote to polarizing fear is love. The antidote to alienating isolation is connection. My friends, we were made for this work. And now we have to actually do it.

It's not going to be easy. AND it needs to be grounded in this community, including all the bill-paying, leaf-raking, and coffee-making parts. Because that's how we live and survive. And all of these things need to be infused with a greater sense of spiritual meaning and service than they ever have. And a greater sense of our growing spiritually into our Principles and Covenants.

Today's Town Hall meeting is still going to be about our Developmental Ministry. Because your excellent goals of Worship, Identity, Welcoming and Structure are all about becoming more skilled at everything we need to do. All the growth that is embedded and seeded in these goals will help us to be better allies to those who need us. It's not one or the other. Action vs growth and development. We to do both, simultaneously, and in ways more smart and more loving and more compassionate than we ever have. The future is not going to be easy. But it can always be filled with love and compassion and spirit-driven purpose and action.

Where I find my hope for our nation and where I do find my **GRATITUDE** is in our Unitarian Universalist faith and in our Unitarian Universalist communities, including THIS. VERY. ONE. I find my hope and my gratitude in you, all of you. And in what we can do together to throw open our doors in every way to spread our love and our justice to everyone and every place that needs it. We can do this. And we **will**. Because we **must**. It is our calling on this Earth.

So may it be. Amen.