

First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany, NY
“Our UU Prophetic Message”

Rev. Samuel A. Trumbore January 22, 2017

Call to Celebration

Sad. So sad.

Isn't that how many liberals and progressives are feeling right now?

One might be tempted to feel pathetic and discouraged right now, as this new administration takes office. One might be tempted to crawl under a rock or find a cave to hibernate in for the next four years.

I want to say right now, that is not me and I hope that is not this congregation. Am I right?

Were any of you at the Albany Women's March yesterday? 7,000 people showed up! How about millions of people gathering around the world? Half a million in Washington.

I'm feeling passionate right now. Passionate about being part of the loyal opposition who fights and looks for every opportunity to stop and reverse the changes I expect to see coming.

Not from a place of hate ... but from a place of courage and conviction.

The new administration is talking about changes that go against our core values. I hope you'll join me in speaking for and fighting passionately for those values.

And not just to go through the motions while we get mowed down by the opposition.

I want us to win.

I want our values to prevail over lesser ones that are unworthy of our nation. And we will prevail because we will be wiser and more skillful in how we use our power. We will prevail because we will pay attention, we will learn and we will be persuasive. We will change hearts and minds and win our opponents over to our way of thinking.

So let us not be pathetic this morning but be passionate as we join together in the celebration of life.

Spoken Meditation

I feel called to prayer this morning. I feel called to pray a prayer for this new President. So if God pays attention to Unitarian Universalist prayers by a minister and many in our congregation who may not believe in him (as a him especially) Hear the prayer I would have offered on Friday.

I invite you to turn inward ...

Loving God who we know in the experience of love and joy,
in the experience of heart-break and suffering, and
in the experience of praise and exaltation,

I invite your presence here and now as we pray,

Whether with your grace or in spite of it,
Donald J. Trump is now the 45th President of the United States of America.

We pray for him this morning that his heart, mind and will
be open to your love and guidance.

We pray that he seeks thy grace and guidance intentionally
on a regular basis as he faces the challenges ahead.

May you teach him the value of humbling his will before yours
so he can begin to sense your movement in his gut,

And learn to separate it from his appetites and his aversions.

We know that this new President is accustomed to speaking his mind
and doing what he thinks is right.

Teach him to expand that sense of the right beyond his self-interest
to include those who are marginalized
by the world and by people like him.

Show him how to listen attentively to his opponents
that he may recognize the wisdom and truth in their arguments.
May he hold his party affiliation lightly
and keep in mind the needs of all the American people.

May he listen to the voices and arguments of scientists
who can present him with overwhelming evidence
of the dangers humans present to the planet
and respond wisely to the urgent need for change.

May he be patient and attentive to the complexities
of international relationships seeking resolutions and agreements
which benefit all parties.

May he keep the nuclear codes safely in the briefcase
and thus stave off World War Three.

May he learn to value justice for all people
as highly as winning for America.

May he protect individual freedoms and human rights
a vital source and foundation of American greatness.

And finally, may he realize that there are greater and higher powers
 than his own mind, his own will and his own gut.
 May he find the ability to humble himself before you
 and serve thy will that transcends the will of all of us.

Readings

Getting to know our new President:

From a debate before the Texas primary: My theme is make America great again. We don't win anymore. We don't win with trade, we don't win with the military. We can't even knock out ISIS. We don't win in any capacity with healthcare. We're going to make a great country again. We're going to start winning again.

From “Donald Trump’s Contract with the American Voter”

On the first day of my term of office, my administration will immediately pursue the following:

- lift the restrictions on the production of \$50 trillion dollars’ worth of job-producing American energy reserves, including shale, oil, natural gas and clean coal ... allow vital energy infrastructure projects, like the Keystone Pipeline, to move forward.
- cancel billions in payments to U.N. climate change programs
- cancel all federal funding to sanctuary cities (like Albany)
- begin removing the more than two million criminal illegal immigrants from the country and cancel visas to foreign countries that won’t take them back.
- suspend immigration from terror-prone regions where vetting cannot safely occur. All vetting of people coming into our country will be considered “extreme vetting.”
- Fully-funds the construction of a wall on our southern border with the full understanding that the country of Mexico will be reimbursing the United States for the full cost of such wall;
- Redirects education dollars to give parents the right to send their kid to the public, private, charter, magnet, religious or home school of their choice.
- Fully repeals Obamacare and replaces it with Health Savings Accounts, the ability to purchase health insurance across state lines and lets states manage Medicaid funds.
- Rebuilds our military by eliminating the defense sequester and expanding military investment;

Business advice from Trump: If you want to be a success, you have to get used to frequently hearing the word no and ignoring it. As a child, when your mother told you no, your father told you no, the teacher told you no, or the coach told you no, if you were a good little boy or girl, you listened to the word "no" and stopped what you were doing. That is why 98% of adults are conditioned to stop when they hear the word "no." Quitters do not get anywhere. You will not be successful if you listen to nos.

Negotiating is an art. There are nuances and finely honed techniques and rules to be aware of. Here are some of them:

- Know what you're doing. Sounds simple, but I've seen a lot of instances where I couldn't believe how much the other side didn't know.
- Remember, it takes a lot of smarts to play dumb. This is a good way to see how much your negotiating partners don't know.
- Keep them a bit off balance. What they don't know won't hurt you, and that may help you down the line. Knowledge is power, so keep as much of it to yourself as possible. Trust your instincts. There are a lot of situations that will not be black and white in negotiating, so go with your gut. Combine this with your homework and you'll be ahead of the game.
- Don't be confined by expectations. There are no exact rules, and sometimes I've changed course in the middle of negotiations when something new has occurred to me.
- Remember that in the best negotiations, everyone wins. This is the ideal situation to strive for. You will also be laying the groundwork for future business deals with people who know what integrity is.

Sermon

This has been quite a weekend with the peaceful transition of power from one administration to another. We also saw an amazing turnout of opposition to this new administration. How different from the excitement we had gathered in Channing Hall watching the Inauguration together as a community eight years ago.

We've experienced the end of the world as we know it. We've had eight years of leadership by a President who shares our Unitarian Universalist values. His mother took him to a UU Sunday school! Whether he was able to achieve the policy changes or not, Obama was with us on values.

Trump is not. Trump does not share many of our core values. And the direction of our nation is at stake. The next four years are calling for us to show up, speak out and act up.

You heard some of what Trump is planning to do in the first hundred days. His contract with the American Voter, his cabinet, leadership picks and themes that arose in the campaign give us a good

idea of how he will govern. They also give us a good idea where our values will clash. I'd like to call out four areas where I expect we will be in conflict that should be familiar by now.

As is common among men of privilege and wealth, Trump hasn't got a lot of compassion for marginalized people. He is primarily concerned with winning and doesn't like to hang around with losers. He is also not deeply concerned about justice and fairness in society believing the deserving people will get ahead and the undeserving people will languish.

So we shouldn't be surprised that he is both a sexist and a racist. Since he is all about winning and success, and white people dominate the world, it follows he would want that to continue and accept support and endorsement by white nationalists like David Duke and the Alt-Right movement. He also sees women as objects for his pleasure and enjoyment. His criticisms of women are based on his assessment of their attractiveness to him rather as ends in themselves.

Unitarian Universalists do not value people this way. Our first principle is the inherent worth and dignity of every person. We do not believe in privileging one race, class, gender, culture, or ability over another. We think all people should have access to power, especially to control their own bodies and determine their own lives. We embrace the concept of universal human rights that include life, liberty, health care, shelter, food, employment and access to education.

As a climate change denier, Trump is uninterested in moving away from fossil fuel production to supply our energy needs. He will not be satisfied till every reserve of coal, oil, gas and shale has been extracted and converted to heat and carbon dioxide. He only sees a 50 trillion dollar stimulus to our economy that will make us rich. Polar bears, glaciers, and sea level rise be damned by natural climate variability. I just hope his home in Florida is one of the first to flooded.

Unitarian Universalists take a holistic approach guided by our seventh principle, the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part. We fully acknowledge the role humans play in climate change and seek any and every way to mitigate it to reduce the suffering of coral reefs as well as humans. The immigration problems we are beginning to see are early indicators of the havoc climate change will wreak on the world. If humans are to dominate the planet, we should do it in a way that supports the flourishing and increasing diversity of all life rather than endangering the ability of the planet to support it.

That planetary thinking is not one of Trump's values. He sees America and our interests first and the rest of the world a distant second. He doesn't seem to care if globalization and world trade deals support the growth and development of the world economy that benefits everyone. His critique is America isn't winning. His slogan, "Make America great again," translates here to make America dominate the world again. Trump is interested in reestablishing the American Empire we enjoyed after World War Two and into the 1960's. He is not aligned with our principle of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all.

The last value clash I'll mention with the Trump administration is health care. He has a secret plan he has yet to roll out about health care that he claims will give health care to all. As health care is a big chunk of our economy, the ones our Unitarian Universalist values direct us to protect are those marginalized in society that we know Trump doesn't have a lot of sympathy for. Our value of justice, equity and compassion in human relations is likely to be compromised. I expect Trump to cut deals with insurance companies that decrease health care to the poor through high deductibles and rationing care through the promotion of medical savings accounts. If you don't have any money, you can't save it to pay for basic care that should be a human right.

Now I don't think there is only bad news in what Trump is proposing to do in his first 100 days. He has made some proposals that do align with our values. Anything that he does to reduce corruption in Washington DC through controls on lobbying and ethics reforms supports our value of democracy. If he really does "drain the swamp" as he claims he will do, I will praise his efforts. He has proposed tax relief for childcare and eldercare which aligns with equity and compassion in human relations. I appreciate his desire to invest in improving infrastructure in our society. I'd love to get a storm water sewer for Albany for example to reduce pollution and basement flooding with sewage. Public life is definitely one of our values. Even if we oppose a good portion of his agenda, we should be wise in supporting what affirms our values.

The big question for us is how do we influence this new President? Those who are casting him as the next Hitler who will convert this nation into a fascist state may be uninterested in talking and more interested in preparing to leave the country or man the barricades. My hope today is we don't go that direction. In fact, I'm very interested in civil debate and resistance. Let us use our words and figure out how to communicate with Trump in a way that he can hear.

We already know Trump isn't a very compassionate person. He doesn't give much money to charity nor does he believe in affirmative action in hiring for his businesses unless he is compelled to do so. He doesn't want to associate with people he considers losers. Appeals to him about the plight of the poor, the widows and the orphans are likely to fall on deaf ears.

We also know that Trump is not motivated by philosophical ideals, strong beliefs or moral frameworks. He rarely refers to those when justifying a policy or making a declaration. He frames everything as who is winning and who is losing. In a sense Trump is a consummate sensual materialist. You see this when he describes his sense of joy, appreciation and satisfaction through being in contact with that which is beautiful. What he seeks to avoid that causes him to be unhappy is being bored. And what is it to be bored but to lack pleasant stimulation.

Browsing through Trump's books, what we find is rather than an idealist, Trump is a hard headed, pragmatist. Everything is about the art of the deal and the skill of negotiation. If winning is what you're after, then cutting good deals is the highest priority. I read for you some of his negotiation methods earlier.

I found the quote about never accepting a no very instructive. If you want to get a good deal, you need to do just that. If you want to get elected President, you're going to hear a lot of no's from a lot of people but persistence can pay off as it did for him. As was true for Bill Clinton I might add.

The last value I'll mention that Trump cherishes is loyalty. When he has had business reversals, he has used them to sort out those people who stuck with him in hard times as well as good ones. The problem with great wealth is discerning who loves you because of your money and who loves you as a person. Sorting that out can be a big challenge deciding where to put your trust.

So knowing all this about Trump is critical when we wish to resist his policies that violate our values. If you know that he will not listen to the word 'no' no matter how many people are surrounding the White House chanting it, no matter how many people write him letters of protest, it might be useful to look at other ways to influence this guy.

And I think there are, based on his values rather than ours.

Let us be grateful that he is a pragmatist rather than an idealist. He is looking for the angle that will get him what he wants and when he is doing that, he'll listen to reason. He appreciates the power of knowledge and the advantage it gives in negotiations. Not abstract, philosophical, idealist arguments but down to earth facts and figures that are well documented. When figuring out what to do about health care, he is going to be listening to all the parties involved as he works out the details ... I hope.

Success and winning can be measured with numbers and personal stories. Trump cares passionately about being seen as a winner and winning for the American people. If we can demonstrate that his policies are causing him and the American people to lose, I fully expect him to pay attention to that information. Especially important if that information comes to him from a neutral or Trump positive news source. If he gets criticized by Breitbart news, you can be sure that will get his attention.

Trump cares deeply about beauty. I expect he would be deeply troubled if the results of his actions are deemed ugly. Especially if they are visually ugly. So if we are trying to persuade him not to mine, drill or frack, pictures of the ugliness of those operations, the environmental destruction, and the death and mutilation of animals and birds might get his attention. That will affect him far more than statistics of increase in parts per million of carbon dioxide.

Finally, Trump appreciates battles with worthy opponents. As he appreciates loyalty, opponents who are dedicated to their cause over many years and consistent in that dedication will land well. The fact that we have been holding our values for many years and have a track record of fighting for our values will count for something when we oppose him.

And finally, Trump wants to cut deals with opponents of integrity that he respects. He likes the win-win solution that expands him rather than contracts his influence. I believe it is possible to get

a deal with him because he is willing to move when he negotiates when he gets new information or a new perspective or that gut moves him to the table.

Now it may be we are all in for a horrible four years of hell and misery. And if Pence was President I'd be quite sure that would be our fate. But I have hope this morning that we've got a chance with Trump if we are smart and learn how to move him.

May we have hope enough to get moving, get to work and keep at it. The meaning and satisfaction we'll find showing up for our values will matter more than whether we win or lose today. Persistence usually pays off. After all, it got Trump elected in the first place.

Declaration of Conscience

At this extraordinary time in our nation's history, we are called to affirm our profound commitment to the fundamental principles of justice, equity and compassion, to truth and core values of American society.

In the face of looming threats to immigrants, Muslims, people of color, and the LGBTQ community and the rise of hate speech, harassment and hate crimes, we affirm our belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

In opposition to any steps to undermine the right of every citizen to vote or to turn back advances in access to health care and reproductive rights, we affirm our commitment to justice and compassion in human relations.

And against actions to weaken or eliminate initiatives to address the threat of climate change – actions that would threaten not only our country but the entire planet – we affirm our unyielding commitment to protect the interdependent web of all existence.

We will oppose any and all unjust government actions to deport, register, discriminate, or despoil.

As people of conscience, we declare our commitment to translate our values into action as we stand on the side of love with the most vulnerable among us.

We welcome and invite all to join in this commitment for justice.

The time is now.

Joint declaration from the Unitarian Universalist Association and

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee