

SMALL GROUP SESSION

“FINDING A FOOTING IN A SHARPLY DIVIDED NATION”

First Universalist Church UU, Auburn, Maine, Rev. Glenn H. Turner, Nov. 2016

OPENING WORDS & CHALICE LIGHTING

All God's critters got a place in the choir
Some sing low, some sing higher
Some sing out loud on the telephone wire
And some just clap their hands, or paws or anything they got now

Listen to the top where the little bird sings
The melody with the high voice ringing
The hoot owl hollers over everything
And the jaybird disagrees

Singing in the nighttime, singing in the day
The little duck quacks and he's on his way
The 'possum don't have much to say
And the porcupine talks to herself

Everybody here is a part of the plan
We all get to play in the great critter band
From the eagle in the sky to the whale in the sea
It's one great symphony

All God's critters got a place in the choir
Some sing low, some sing higher
Some sing out loud on the telephone wire
And some just clap their hands, or paws or anything they got now

Bill Staines

Our gathering today comes after a bitter election, a hotly contested election, in which the question was whether

all God's critters do have a place in the choir, or what place they have in the choir, or if they belong in the choir at all.

Some who felt excluded are now definitely in, some who felt they were becoming included are deeply fearful they are going to be out, it is a time when the hoot owl hollers over everything and the jaybird disagrees. We come to ponder, once again, what unites us and what we might do to heal a sharply divided nation.

SILENT REFLECTION

CHECK-IN: (40-50 minutes)

FOCUS: "FINDING A FOOTING IN A SHARPLY DIVIDED NATION"

Speaking personally, as I tried to sleep after the election, I could not help perseverating on the various groups in our country who were suddenly far more vulnerable than they had been: black, Latinos, undocumented immigrants, Native Americans, gays, lesbians, transsexuals, women - just to name a few. And by the next morning it had begun: swastikas, beatings, bullying, school children demeaning with angry taunts their darker skinned classmates. I felt sick and angry.

Expressing my worst fears, John Pavlovitz says it's not about politics.

"It's about overt racism and hostility toward minorities.

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."

What next?

These thoughts from an evangelical leader named Daly who intends to reach out to the gay and lesbian community;

"Discussions that used to die among friends now become unbridled castigating of other people. I'm hopeful that this election is a blip. We're now at a point where we cannot say that civility is a shared value, and I don't see how we can keep our democracy together without being able to talk to each other."

Clarissa Pinkola Estes wrote: "Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach. Any small, calm thing that one soul can do to help another soul, to assist some portion of this poor suffering world, will help immensely. It is not given to us to know which acts or by whom, will cause the critical mass to tip toward an enduring good."

DISCUSSION:

1. What did YOU feel after the election?
2. What do you fear? What do you hope?
3. Fight or Flight: Barricades or Bomb Shelters?
4. How will we or are we dealing with family and friends with whom we disagree?
5. Are our divisions too deep to bridge?
6. America the Beautiful: what must we protect, preserve, and strive for to make it so?

LIKES AND WISHES

CLOSING WORDS:

Practicing the Dharma in Uncertain Times

When times are uncertain, difficult, fearful, full of change,
they become the perfect place to deepen the practice of awakening.

After viewing the elections...whatever your point of view,
Take time to quiet the mind and tend to the heart.
Then go out and look at the sky.

Remember vastness, there are seasons to all things,
gain and loss, praise and blame, expansion and contraction.
Learn from the trees.
Practice equanimity and steadiness.

Remember the timeless Dharma amidst it all.
Think of the best of human goodness.
Let yourself become a beacon of integrity, with your thoughts, words and deeds.
Integrity in speech and action, virtue and non harming bring blessings.

Remember the Noble truths, no matter the politics or the season:
Greed, hatred and ignorance cause suffering. Let them go.
Love, generosity and wisdom bring the end of suffering. Foster them.

Remember the Buddha's counsel,
"Hatred never ends by hatred but by love alone is healed.
This is the ancient and eternal law."

The human heart has freedom in itself to choose love, dignity and respect.
In every circumstance, embody respect and cultivate compassion for all.