

**Sunday, November 13, 2016**

**“We Are Called to be Transformers”**

**Rev Laura Shennum**

### **Words of Wisdom**

**From J.R.R. Tolkien, Lord of the Rings:**

FRODO: I can't do this, Sam.

SAM: I know. It's all wrong. By rights we shouldn't even be here. But we are. It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo. The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end. Because how could the end be happy. How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened. But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass.

A new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you. That meant something. Even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now. Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back only they didn't. Because they were holding on to something.

FRODO: What are we holding on to, Sam?

SAM: That there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo. And it's worth fighting for.

### **The Low Road a poem by Marge Piercy**

What can they do  
to you? Whatever they want.  
They can set you up, they can  
bust you, they can break  
your fingers, they can  
burn your brain with electricity,  
blur you with drugs till you  
can't walk, can't remember, they can  
take your child, wall up  
your lover. They can do anything  
you can't blame them  
from doing. How can you stop  
them? Alone, you can fight,  
you can refuse, you can  
take what revenge you can  
but they roll over you.

But two people fighting  
back to back can cut through  
a mob, a snake-dancing file  
can break a cordon, an army  
can meet an army.

Two people can keep each other  
sane, can give support, conviction,  
love, massage, hope, sex.  
Three people are a delegation,  
a committee, a wedge. With four  
you can play bridge and start  
an organisation. With six  
you can rent a whole house,  
eat pie for dinner with no  
seconds, and hold a fund-raising party.  
A dozen make a demonstration.  
A hundred fill a hall.  
A thousand have solidarity and your own newsletter;  
ten thousand, power and your own paper;  
a hundred thousand, your own media;  
ten million, your own country.

It goes on one at a time,  
it starts when you care  
to act, it starts when you do  
it again after they said no,  
it starts when you say We  
and know who you mean, and each  
day you mean one more.

### **Sermon – Rev Laura**

There is a quote by Albert Schweitzer in our hymnal. It says the following:  
“At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.”

This past week, there were several moments when the spark of my light flickered and threatened to go out. I could not imagine how I was supposed to minister to a country that just elected to president a person who has promoted hate, violence, and discrimination throughout his campaign. I felt everything I have preached, believed in, and literally breathed about love and compassion was false.

I knew Wednesday morning when I came into the office I was not going to be able to sit at a computer and work. So, I did the only thing I felt I could, I put on my clergy collar; my “love the hell of the word” t-shirt; and my rainbow chalice pin...I created space. I pulled out tables and chairs, set them out under our big tree across the parking lot, and set out things people might need (candles, love rocks, prayers, chocolate, oranges, anything I could find that could offer some bit of hope.) And I waited. It did not take long until people started arriving. The first two people were from the larger Wenatchee community and needed to know there was a place in this valley where love still existed. Stop and think about that a moment. A place where love still existed.

People continued to stop by or call throughout the day from the church or from the community. Each one helped add a spark to my light that day.

I want to make this clear...my disappointment and sadness is not because of a different political ideology. I see value in the diversity of our political system. This is about legitimizing and giving permission for people to spew hate, to make threats, and to be violent. This is about saying to our children it is okay to bully ; it is okay for my daughters to be groped; it is okay for the KKK to have a celebration parade. It is okay to let fear and hate rule.

Well, I refuse to let that happen...because I am no longer sad or disappointed, I am angry and ready for action. My momma bear has come alive and she is strong. And I refuse to give into the fear.

Because as Rev Nate Walker in his book, "Cultivating Empathy: The Worth and Dignity of Every Person – Without Exception" writes:

When our imagination is fueled by fear, "we fail to see one another's humanity...We fail to cultivate empathy and compassion, and our imagination becomes imprisoned by discriminatory thoughts...Otherness is a root of violence. We can and must reflect upon this truth: Violent cycles begin when fear and bigotry plague the imagination..."

There are legitimate reasons for people to be afraid, to be angry, and to be heartbroken.

For instance, Diane Groody who is a member of this church and is currently teaching in Bellingham, shared this story with me:

*I am working as a counselor in several schools in Bellingham. In the weeks before the election, the Latino kids were expressing fear about the possibility of themselves and/or their relatives facing deportation (if Trump was elected), as some of them do not have up-to-date immigration status or a path to get such status. The counselors were doing their best to reassure them.*

*Once the results were out on Wednesday morning, we had reports of Anglo kids cruelly asking the Latino kids (most of whom are citizens) if they, "Had their bags packed?" This was very upsetting to the Latino kids, who are dealing with a lot of uncertainty. The schools here work so hard at being inclusive, with lots of "Safe Zone for LGBTQ", "Black Lives Matter" and "Educators for Undocumented" signs posted all around. We also had a group of Middle School boys corner a Sikh boy, pushing and trying to tear his head covering off. Kids were calling other kids, "Losers"... It was as if an underbelly of a bully culture had been exposed and empowered within the safe, calm, inclusive school culture.*

*Many of the teachers were heart-broken and crying before school on Wednesday. Many staff dressed in black and they saw the situation as a crisis to be discussed in the classroom, but had been told by the administration that they can't discuss politics at school, and should just hold class as usual. It was very hard for them to contain their disappointment and anxiety, as well as disregard the emotions of the students.*

This congregation had a Acts of Kindness campaign from Dec 2015 through Sept 2016, which was based on the work of a dear friend of mine, Ferial Pearson. She created in her schools in Nebraska a program called the Secret Kindness Agents. She has been honored with multiple awards in teaching, supporting LGBTQ, and caused ripples throughout our country of kindness. She is also an African Muslim, who received her U.S. citizenship in time to vote in this election. Here is part of a post she shared after the election (please note this has references to molestation, rape, and violence; these are her experiences and could cause a trigger in others. I share with her permission and to express the realness of the situation):

*This outcome feels like the time I was molested for years and no one stopped the monster. He's still out there, a math and piano teacher. He is represented by the Molester Elect.*

*This outcome feels like the time I was raped and the few people I told didn't believe me. He's a husband and a father and is living the good life. He is represented by the Rapist Elect.*

*This outcome feels like those times in my past jobs when my colleagues and I were abused and discriminated against by supervisors and people watched, but didn't say anything, except to apologize to us in private. Those supervisors continue to supervise and go unchallenged in their narcissism, bigotry, and privilege. The private apologies, while sweet, changed nothing. They are represented by the Bigot Elect.*

*This outcome feels like the times I worked so hard and was so qualified and still was condescended to, and passed over, and ignored. Like when I was called a "little go-getter" by a white woman after a keynote address. Like when the police officer wouldn't believe I live in my house in my neighborhood; the house I sacrificed tons to own. Like when I've been called a "breeder" in the LGBTQIA community and told queers like me don't exist. Like when I get "randomly selected" 100% of the time for humiliating public hair and body searches by TSA Agents, once even with the suggestion of being separated from my kids for a private search and interrogation. This is represented by the Sexist Elect. The Racist Elect. The Xenophobe Elect.*

*This outcome feels like the times I have spoken up against what was happening and was invited to leave. At work. On boards. On social media. In the community. This is represented by the Whites Only Club Elect.*

*This outcome feels like the time I was called a nigger in the parking lot of my daughter's school, a wetback outside my son's, and a rag head by an alumnus of the school they will both attend shortly. And the times my children come home and tell me of the pain they experience at school from the bullies who target them because of their foreign names, their Muslim immigrant mom, their "cheap" clothes and bikes, their lack of Christian faith, their soft hearts and lack of coarse language. The times I find out about the awful things people say behind my back, the attempted defamation of my character in my personal and professional world. The hate mail in my inbox and the anonymous cowardly attacks on course evaluations. This is represented by the Bully Elect.*

The fear is real and it is legitimate. It is legitimate for people in this room and in our community. To think none of us will be affected by the hate causing the fear is not understanding our 7<sup>th</sup> principle. The interdependent web we are a part of does not just ripple with goodness and love; it can ripple with fear and hate. We need to take the possibility of what those ripples can do seriously.

This does not mean we need to be fueled by fear and hate, because as Nate Walker reminded us that will only cause us to create more bigotry, more hate, more others. Instead, we need to take the fuel of the fear and hate and let it power the love and compassion we can show the world. We need to transform the hate and fear we encounter both in ourselves and in the world into love and compassion. That's why I said my momma bear is alive and fierce. We each need to tap into whatever wildness that lives inside us that calls us to protect what we love.

This is not a time for us to turn to apathy. We cannot call ourselves UUs and sit back to see what will happen. We need to be co-creators with other human beings, with God, with nature, to create a world of goodness, equity, and beauty.

This means we need to understand all the voices involved. This is where it gets even more difficult. Because we have to understand those who are causing the hate and fear. We can no longer just refuse to engage. As one of our members, Dylan Spradlin, has shared “hurt people hurt people.” If someone is spewing hate and fear, then it is because they have been hurt or violated or damaged or forgotten.

I offer these words by Rabbi Michael Lerner from New York Times article he wrote titled, “Stop Shaming Trump Supporters:”

*It turns out that shaming the supporters of Donald J. Trump is not a good political strategy. Though job loss and economic stagnation played a role in his victory, so did shame. As the principal investigator on a study of the middle class for the National Institute of Mental Health, I found that working people's stress is often intensified by shame at their failure to “make it” in what they are taught is a meritocratic American economy.*

*The right has been very successful at persuading working people that they are vulnerable not because they themselves have failed, but because of the selfishness of some other villain (African-Americans, feminists, immigrants, Muslims, Jews, liberals, progressives; the list keeps growing). Instead of challenging this ideology of shame, the left has buttressed it by blaming white people as a whole for slavery, genocide of the Native Americans and a host of other sins, as though whiteness itself was something about which people ought to be ashamed. The rage many white working-class people feel in response is rooted in the sense that once again, as has happened to them throughout their lives, they are being misunderstood.*

*The right's ability to portray liberals as elitists is further strengthened by the phobia toward religion that prevails in the left. Many religious people are drawn by the teachings of their tradition to humane values and caring about the oppressed. Yet they often find that liberal culture is hostile to religion of any sort, believing it is irrational and filled with hate. People on the left rarely open themselves to the possibility that there could be a spiritual crisis in society that plays a role in the lives of many who feel misunderstood and denigrated by the fancy intellectuals and radical activists.*

*The left needs to stop ignoring people's inner pain and fear. The racism, sexism and xenophobia used by Mr. Trump to advance his candidacy does not reveal an inherent malice in the majority of Americans.*

This is where I find hope...people who voted, voted for change, not for hate.

This means we have work to do to ensure the hate does not become dominant.

Instead we need to love the hell out of the world, literally.

As my colleague Rev Joanna Fontaine Crawford envisions this love, she states:

*To love the hell out of the world means to love it extravagantly, wastefully, with an overpouring abandon and fervor that sometimes surprises even yourself. That love flows out of you, sometimes slow and steady, sometimes in a torrent, sometimes filled with joy, sometimes with fierceness, or anger, or a heartbreaking pain that makes you say, "No, no, I can't take this anymore. I can't do anymore. It's too much ... too much."*

*But it's too late. You've opened up your own heart, your own mind, body, and strength, and yes, it is too much. But there's also so much love that comes crashing down on you, gifts from the Heavens in the form of the smiles and cares from others, a giggle burbling up from a toddler's fat little belly, the soft, sweet smell of star jasmine catching you unaware, not knowing where it came from ... but it's here. And you're here.*

*And just to live, just to exist, swells your heart with enough gratitude and love that you must release it or burst. And so you love, love the hell out of the world again.*

*Without scale, without ratio, without carefully allotting how much you will give versus how much you will receive. You love because you must. And it's the air you breathe in, the water you swim in, it's the rushing in and out of creativity, of self-expression; it's seeing the amazing, amazing, amazing gifts of the people all around you. It is loving with awe, with reverence and irreverence, seeing the miracle in a lump of dirt, in a shy hello, in forgiveness, in standing in the shadow and watching the joy someone else experiences without you, and yet feeling connected through time and space with all who have been and all who are to be.*

*To love the hell out of the world means to see with our hearts, fragile and unprotected. To accept that life is shattering and excruciating. To see the hell in a world, in a group, in a person, in a tear. To know that it is the experience of both the oppressor and the oppressed, as we are both.*

*To wade in to it, armored for battle but leaving our heart completely exposed because that is what we follow, it is our night goggles in a dark world of smoke, falling beams, and faint cries from over ... there.*

*We love emphatically, actively, with our hands and feet; pushing the wreckage aside, reaching down, stretching until we fear our arms can go no further, but they do, we touch fingers with others, then grab on for dear life, pulling them out to safety, then going back in to remove the hell itself, before it traps someone else. We round a corner only to find hands waiting for us, to pull us to safety, to warmth, for we are both the savior and the saved.*

*The hell is all around, and we work, in great passionate swoops and in slow, plodding routines, to put that extravagant love into action and remove all the bits of it from the world. Misery, ill health, disease, viciousness of greed in the face of want, voices that shout hate or whisper meanness, soul-eating addiction, humiliation, despair, injustice that curls up nastily, poisoning the spirit of giver and receiver ... we do not flee. Bone-chillingly afraid we may be, but we step forward. We are the only form love will take and the work is ours to do.*

*Our job, our mission, is to take all of that love, all that overflowing, passionate, undying agape and train it on the hell that exists in this world.*

*We are Unitarian Universalists -- from one source, to one destiny -- here to love the hell out of the world.*

We can do this we can be the transformers we are called to be at this time. We can do this, we have it in us. We are called to transform hate into love and fear into peace. We will have to be creative in how we respond, how we transform, and how we love. Here are some of the ways I have imagined of responding and I invite you to join me in whatever way you feel comfortable:

(See link on website)

These lists are available in your order of service. I have chalk available for you to take. I have safety pins available for you to take. However, please read the sheet of paper along with the safety pins to ensure you know what you are pledging to do by wearing the safety pin.

We need to be on the forefront of creating places where love still exists and where people can feel safe. We need to channel that inner wildness to protect the world we love and the people in it. Because as Sam reminds Frodo, "There is some good in this world and it's worth fighting for." Amen.

**Benediction:** Rev Laura

As Wayne Arnason reminds us: "Take courage friends. The way is often hard, the path is never clear, and the stakes are very high. Take courage. For deep down, there is another truth: you are not alone."

Love Be with You