

Thomas Jefferson Memorial Church – Unitarian Universalist

Working Together for the Future

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Rosa sat

So Martin could walk

So Obama could run

So our children could fly...

~ jay z...(hiphop star)

Two days before the election, a small group of us met with Pastor Bates of Ebenezer Baptist Church to discuss a play and of course, we talked about the election. He said that he thought on Nov. 4th there would be a Revolution or a Revelation. I know that the exit polls attribute the success of the election on the amazing effort by Obama's organizers to get out the vote and by the fact that 60% of young people voted for Obama, I prefer to believe that it was the hippies. Those of us who are children of the 60's...free love... peace man...civil rights marching revolutionaries... We have kept in our hearts, tucked quietly behind our present day suits and sensible heels, those core beliefs that we can change the world and that the message of hope was a clarion call to trust that change is possible. I think the hippies were the deciding factor.

I believe that the recent election DID send a message that we are a hopeful people. That the message of hope is held up by a man of color is profoundly historical and emotional... and scary. Will he be held responsible for providing miraculous solutions to our current financial global crises, health care, social security, foreign policy, wars, jobs...need I go on? With that responsibility comes the chance to throw blame not for his leadership but for his color. Call me a professional innocent, but better in these times to be led by a message of hope than led by a message of fear and anger. But, I believe we must understand that, as Scott Russell Sanders says in his book, *Hunting for Hope*, "The price of hope...is responsibility."

The moral arc of the universe bends at the elbow of justice.

[Martin Luther King, Jr.](#)

The speeches by both candidates on Tuesday night were very moving. Jesse Jackson's tears remain an image for me of the complex feelings of that moment. An NPR program with Roger Wilkens and Taylor Branch on Thursday, told me that Obama was quoting from Martin Luther King's last speech: I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go to the mountain. And I've looked over, and I've seen the promised land! I may not get there with you, but I want you

to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land.... How sad that my education knew the reference to King but not that it was his last speech and that Obama's message was loaded with so much information when he used it to refer to that time...his acknowledgement of the dangers of his situation.

Electing a man of color to be President, Commander in Chief, Leader of the Free World is only a step in the work for those of us in a liberal church. I want to make sure that the hard work of moving toward that time when "a child is judged by the content of his character and not by the color of his skin" is carried by our church. In that conversation on NPR, Roger Wilkens stated that he thought that race relations are associated with periods of hope in our history because they occur in periods concerned with dreams about freedom.

Do not assume that if you tell the Charlottesville community that you belong to Thomas Jefferson Memorial Church, Unitarian Universalist you will necessarily be regarded as a historical ally in the fight against discrimination. We hold our own checkered history and present considerations.

In the mid 60's we had as our minister, Roy Jones, who was a leader in the UU denomination, marching with Dr. King. In our personal history, however, we considered Roy an outsider who was just trying to stir up trouble. We, after all, were nice. In the mid 60's two sisters donated their house to us and Roy wanted us to put it on the open market so that black folks could buy property in a white neighborhood. Let's remind ourselves of the times and wonder if he asked any black people if they wanted to live in that white neighborhood, nonetheless we had considerable consternation, conversation and arguing about our duties to be "nice" neighbors and not to change the status quo and "just get along." The house was sold, off the market, so that the issue was taken off the table. We, after all, were nice.

History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamor of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people.

[Martin Luther King, Jr.](#)

In the present we need to look at the name of our church, and discuss it. Does the very name make people of color uncomfortable? Although we may want to memorialize a man who wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, it is off-putting that, although he denounced slavery, his financial situation would not allow him to free his own slaves (except for Sally's children) even on his deathbed. If we want to learn the language of welcome, we must understand the metaphors that we use, even in the name of our church or in the visual welcome we make to people of color by putting Tom on a literal pedestal in our hall of welcome.

Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity....[Martin Luther King](#)

So now the hard work begins. For those of us who appear Caucasian, can we acknowledge the inherent privilege those looks bestow and stand up for the times that privilege is denied to those who look different? Are we willing to leave our comfort zone and find ourselves in a multicultural world? Can we invite a right wing Christian to dinner? (I am saying we need to learn to listen.) Can we take some of our multicultural work relationships and create true friendships so that our community spirit reflects our demographics?

Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will.

[Martin Luther King, Jr.](#)

So now the hard work begins. Can we work together? Times are tough and due to be tougher. So much of the leadership which President-elect Obama showed us in his campaign was about his experience in community organizing. Politics should be about approaching the current problems from the community up, not the leadership down. We are the community. Can we acknowledge our fears about our own job, financial security, and health care costs to decide to work together, pull in our belts, do with less, appreciate the simple things, grow a garden, raise chickens, share with our neighbors? Can we live completely within our means?

So now the hard work begins. Democracy is about each person having a voice, and that voice being heard. The election of Barack Obama is only a first step in addressing change on issues of freedom. In an idealized democracy we talk to each other. We understand the meaning behind our votes. We struggle that each vote empowers us to decide about our own life and livelihood and that “we” are everyone. We struggle to assure that the vulnerable are provided for. I remember David Takahashi-Morris’s sermon about the true miracle of the loaves and fishes. It is not a story about the creation of food in the desert but about the miracle of generosity of the spirit when people notice another’s need and their ability to provide.

We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.

[Martin Luther King, Jr.](#)