

A Triumvirate Approaches
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Sermon Description:

Three days loom: All Souls Day (11/2), Election Day (11/3), and the Morning After (11/4). While a triumvirate is a political entity ruled by three authoritative individuals and is associated with ancient Rome, one could identify our democracy as a triumvirate of the legislative, judicial, and executive branches. But in political arrangements rarely do the 3 authorities exercise power equally and rare still are they perceived as equal. The same can be said of the three days immediately at hand. This sermon will investigate the link between all three as our culture and the world move into a new era.

SERMON

Isaiah 40: 1-5

1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.

3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see *it* together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.

One of the reasons I use the Jewish prophetic tradition, the Old Testament to Christians, is that for a book that is so out of date, it can be so relevant. It chronicles pandemics and the search for physical and mental health, civil unrest and inequities, foreign threats, and anxiety and uncertainty and what could be more contemporary than that? The prophet Isaiah, whose career working for the government of Judah we might say, lasted from 740-700 B.C.E., “during one of the most turbulent periods” in that kingdom’s history. Threats from within and without during all this period, such that scholars “continue to debate whether Isaiah was primarily a prophet of judgment or of hope.” One can choose to read him either way. Jewish followers of Jesus picked up his words and we’ll hear them next month, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord...” That can herald the coming of hellfire judgment or the joy of humankind’s hopefulness. But today the prophet of judgment or hope confronts us out of his turbulence 2700 years ago in a galaxy far, far away. Wherein lieth hope?

Tomorrow is All Souls Day which, whether any Unitarian Universalist community or individual recognizes or celebrates, is a foundational theological day in our tradition. We celebrate All Souls Day which, around 1000 ACE, offering the reform of the All Saints Day of the 300’s exclusivity in celebrating only particular individuals whom the church elevated for what the church thought was their virtuous life. All Souls Day, not All Saints Day, later in the 1600’s combined Aztec, Mesoamerican, and Spanish Christianity to become The Day of the Dead, El Dia de los Muertos. All Souls is not only the name of some of our churches, but the claim at the

heart of universalism, that the Love of God cannot be confined by the human bias to some souls. God's affections are larger than ours and no one is severed from the Love of God.

Tuesday is, of course, Election Day, and while Election Day sermons are a time-honored part of our Unitarian tradition, this will not be one. The issues are clear. The choices are clear. Vote, because it is the political act of choice, and consent is the heart of Unitarianism, regardless of whether it's given to build back better or make America great.

My concern is the third day, the morning after. And the day after that and that. Presidents come and go, as do members of Congress, and as surely as to some All Saints Day gave way to All Souls Day. Even Supreme Court Justices and their rulings come and go as have 2700 years. It doesn't mean that consequences go away. But we do. When our forebearer Theodore Parker preached his sermon in 1841, *The Transient and Permanent in Christianity*, the inquiry was everlasting. What lasts?

It's the question of the morning after. What lasts? It's known among Biblical scholars that the prophets whom we read in Scripture weren't the only ones declaring what will be, by reading destiny in what was going on. They were just the ones who got it right! The legions of false prophets fell upon the ash heap of history. Pollsters claim to tell us what will be by reading destiny in what is going on. Economic forecasters claim to tell us what will be by reading destiny in what is. But, don't fooled by false prophets! The question of "What lasts?" remains.

The challenges will remain. COVID will still be rampant and multiplying until we take measures to control it. There will still be Boys declaring themselves Proud, just as before there were Christians declaring themselves Moral and a Majority. And in the morning after, pollsters who were wrong will still be employed, as pollsters who were right will be extolled.

On Wednesday there will be white Karens and Kevins and people, maybe now of all colors who will record and post their actions. Our prisons will still be patrolled by private companies, still house more African Americans than white Americans, and still house more Hispanics than Whites relative to the total population. There will still be sheriffs who speak at racist rallies passing for second amendment assemblies. And Unitarian Universalists will remain "one of the most liberal churches in the country," and 80% white and "one of the least diverse denominations in the country." Systemic racism will not disappear the morning after.

The words of judgment? Is turmoil and judgment, what lasts?

Immersed in this existence and residing in turbulence is a struggle to calculate what is ultimately consistent. Modern science has pursued this for over 200 years and caught instead the uncertainty principle, the indeterminacy principle "that the position and velocity of an object cannot both be measured exactly, at the same time, even in theory." The measured velocity of an object, time, and the position of that object, place cannot together be measured exactly. We struggle to measure two things simultaneously.

Like measurements of judgment and hope? When the evidence of things not seen is made seen, it renders both judgment and hope, and not just the former. Our faith affirms that as human beings

can see both because at any given moment you choose the lens that shows a sightline to what you see. You can ask what the moment requires and choose a lens fitted to that moment. I think its bifocals this time: a realism through which to see the nature of human being that does not disregard or ignore the turbulence we can generate for a future we simply and humbly do not know. That's the close-range lens. But raise the eyes a little, and in the far-off there appears a hope, on the far horizon, generated by God's love for all souls. That love becomes real when we take on the discipline of each day moving with intention towards it.

But you know how reluctant people are to wear bifocals. To admit they need an additional lens, even see through a lens at all, and then to have to wear two lens' simultaneously. We Unitarian Universalist incline towards optimism as a lens, disregarding the inequity and turbulence we're capable of. We overestimate human nature, expect love to win out over power, and can find ourselves joyless and hopeless when it doesn't.

Wherein lieth hope? Out of the turbulence of his day, the prophet Isaiah responded and responds: They who dwelleth in darkness, upon *their* head a great light shines.

The morning after's challenge is one of faith. Of the lens you choose, knowing what we know about what we human beings are capable of. Though it was there before, it's just now more explicit and you cannot hide from it. But, that HAS NEVER been all human beings are capable of. The lens is a bifocal, and though we are capable of not wearing masks to protect others and claiming it is my right to risk infecting others, we are also capable of taking every precaution and still becoming sick! While THAT is the human predicament, THAT is not all we are, or ever have been, or ever will be. Faith demands a fuller view. We are, as our forebearer claimed, created in a likeness to God, too. God made human being in God's own image, and if that God loves all souls and beckons us to do likewise, then THAT is also revealing of who we are and what we can become. It's more than recognizing turbulence. It is living in the darkness turbulence generates while moving towards the forgiveness and grace that love contains. Faith, confidence, is about what you choose to see at the edge of the horizon, and moving towards that greater life for all souls. Pronounce judgment on the way we do not uphold the likeness to God in which each is created. But never lose sight of what abides, where the lake waters meet the sky, a love which now is not yet in evidence, and the faith that THAT grace will yet be.

Comfort ye, comfort ye the people, saith your God.

Speak ye, that their iniquity is pardoned, and that they hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all their sins.

Be the voice of those that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the God who loves all souls.

That the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

As the glory of that LOVE is revealed, that all flesh see *it* and reside in *it* together.

BENEDICTION

And now, seeing there is naught to fear, and bearing witness to what can never die, let us go forth in the world in peace.

Be of good courage,
Search all things
And hold fast to that which is good.
Render unto no one evil for evil.
Strengthen the faint-hearted,
Support the weak,
Help the afflicted,
Loving all souls,
Searching for the Most High,
And rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.

Resources:

Isaiah: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/people/main-articles/isaiah>

All Saints and All Souls Day history:

https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/holydays/allsaints_1.shtml

Unitarian Universalism

<https://www.npr.org/2017/06/24/534248664/unitarian-universalists-denounce-white-supremacy-make-leadership-changes#:~:text=GJELTEN%3A%20Today%2C%20the%20Unitarian%20Universalist,of%20the%20members%20are%20white.>

Science

<https://www.britannica.com/science/uncertainty-principle>

“Evidence of things not seen,” see both James Baldwin’s book of the same name, and the full text passage in Hebrews 11:1