

The Campaign Speech I'd Like to Hear

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Meditation

Quieting our minds, our sometimes very busy minds...

We seek here a deeper stillness...

An inner stillness...

Stillness among us...

Stillness becoming presence...

Presence... here... now...

Presence for ourselves... presence with and for one another...

Presence becoming caring...

For one another... for all beings...

for life... for this earth we share...

Quiet... still... present... caring...

As we enter the silence together...

Reading – Amos 5:21-24

I hate, I despise your festivals,

And I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

Even though you offer me your burnt offers and grain offerings,

I will not accept them;

And the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals

I will not look upon.

Take away from me the noise of your songs;

I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

But let justice roll down like waters,

And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Sermon

I came across an old cartoon recently in which several official-looking characters are seated around a table examining a text. There is an American flag in the corner of the meeting room. The capitol dome can be seen in the distance through the window. One of the officials is speaking: "Let's change 'brink of chaos' to 'Everything is wonderful.'"

Of course everything is not wonderful right now in our republic or on the planet.

So we yearn for leadership – political, moral, spiritual – that names just how serious these times are and at the same time clearly articulates a vision of how things could be... in the spirit of Bobby Kennedy who said: "There are those that look at things the way they are, and ask *why*? I dream of things that never were, and ask *why not*?"

Yet too many of our leaders and would-be leaders are too often too much like the candidate in another cartoon from some time ago, who in the midst of his political campaign is reviewing a speech with his speechwriters. He says, "It's a good speech – just a couple of points need obfuscation."

Well, the last thing we want are leaders who obfuscate – or as my *American Heritage* puts it – confuse and darken. Rather we need clarity, even when it is painful. And we need inspiration.

But here I speak not from a political stump, but from a religious pulpit – the same pulpit from which Ebenezer Gay preached during the Revolution, from which his successors and my predecessors preached during boom times and bad times, times of peace and times of war. Throughout the sweep of American history preachers have preached from this pulpit and parishioners have listened (...or at least have been in the same room...), have agreed or disagreed, have lived their lives perhaps sometimes inspired by what they heard or thought during worship services in this ancient house.

What *has* the pulpit been for all this time? What are the pews for? What is the Meeting House for? Surely more than decoration...

Particularly in times of trouble and turmoil such as these, in a political season to boot... what's all this for?

Actually I believe our Old Ship covenant says it well (it is printed in your program): We are here, whatever the times, to seek the truth, to grow spiritually and ethically, to care for each other, and to serve life by doing our part to seek justice, peace, and sustainability of the natural systems of life on which we depend.

And though the words of our covenants have changed over the centuries, the same spirit has remained.

Even more simply put, we are here to grow our souls and to serve life.

First, then, to grow our souls: We arrive here each week (as others go to churches, temples, mosques) and put aside for a time and to the extent we can our surface concerns and raw emotions... that we might seek something deeper... a felt sense of who we are as human beings, briefly alive, with our share of joys and sorrows on this small and precious planet, our lives intertwined with one another, with all that lives, with the divine by whatever name we call it... each of us seeking to be happy, seeking happiness for those we love... and when we consider most deeply, wishing for happiness for all who share this journey with us.

Yes, through the music, through the words from this pulpit and from each other, through the silence, through simply being here together... we are reminded that life is precious and that we can grow in kindness, compassion, and love. We can grow our souls.

This surely matters always... and more than ever in times of shared crisis.

Then, second, from this renewed depth of awareness of who we are... we are moved to serve life, each in our own way, to serve life. Doing mostly small things which add to the great thing of a life well-lived, a life in service to live.

To put this in the language of our Jewish and Christian traditions, the church has a prophetic role to play in the world. Knowing who we are and what we are for, we name what we see going on in the larger world around us – whether worrisome, wearisome, or worse – and name how we believe we ought to respond in the spirit of love and justice and peace, growing from the moral and ethical and spiritual grounding of our faith... nurtured here.

In other words, it is an essential part of who we are as a people of faith that we speak out from pulpit and from pew and we help out from our hearts. Requiring not agreement with one another, but expecting respectful engagement in a spiritually and ethically grounded political conversation.

What are pulpit and pew in this old House for?

Growing souls.

Serving life.

All this said – now a few words of a speech that I would hope either major party candidate in this year’s election *could* give, that I would wish they might both be moved to give in some form or another, in any case that *I* would give were I in their place (heaven forbid!). Words which grow from my grounding here, in the values and principles I find and nurture here, in this Meeting House, in the tradition of our Unitarian Universalist faith.

Now, in fact *some* of what I am about to say also echoes principles and visions that one or both candidates *have* articulated – but don’t in my opinion say loudly or often enough. You can find some of this buried in their web sites, but too often the daily speeches and sound bites relate to the 24/7 news cycle, and not to the larger issues of most critical importance for all Americans, for all citizens of the world, for life on the planet. So, a few words... not altogether different from words I’ve shared as other elections have neared... a few words grown in the soil of our faith... and you will get my drift:

My fellow Americans, fellow citizens of world, fellow travelers on our small and beautiful planet...

In a few weeks you will vote for the next president of the United States. I hardly have to remind you that we live in perilous times: a time of war and terrorism, a time of financial crisis, a time in which too many in our world are hungry and without adequate shelter, a time above all of climate crisis which threatens to overwhelm all of our other challenges, all our hopes and dreams – *and* it is a time when many for good reason have lost faith in our elected leaders.

I do not have to remind you of any of this.

But I do want to affirm to you that as your president I will do all I can to find ways to help us all – working together, here in these United States and across the globe – to effectively address these and other challenges before us.

Now, it would be disingenuous and misleading for me to tell you that we will *solve* all of these and other problems in four years or eight years. Yet whether or not we will ourselves be privileged to see every result of our efforts, we are obligated to make the effort, obligated to one another, obligated to the earth, obligated to the demands of conscience which links us across dividing lines of varied faiths and beliefs.

For me, it is as simple as this: My brother’s grandchildren, here today, ages one and two, could well live into the next century. I know what kind of world I imagine and want for them. So do you, for the young ones in your lives. And we know too that we have much work before us to create even an approximation of that world.

Yet though we will not solve every problem or successfully meet every challenge in the next several years or even decades, together we *can* allow our dream of the world we would imagine to draw us forward, even as we do the hard work of crafting particular plans and prescriptions, laws and legislation.

To begin with, together we can imagine a world free of nuclear weapons; and we must not be shy in naming that goal as achievable and essential. Indeed, we must affirm in no uncertain terms that is criminal to possess much less to consider using nuclear weapons.

So next, we can and must imagine a world in which international disputes are resolved through the hard work of negotiation and compromise rather than through terror or invasion of one nation by another; and in this spirit there is no shame in calling ourselves world citizens as well as American citizens, no shame in cooperating with other nations within the framework of the United Nations to meet shared goals of peace and global well-being. We live, after all, in one world, a world in which no nation – ours included – should dominate or rule over others.

And we must imagine this one world as a world in which no child, no person, goes to bed hungry or without shelter or medical care.

And we *must* imagine a world no longer warming because of human greenhouse gas emissions, a world powered and fueled in sustainable ways, a world in which we give back to the earth as much or more as we take from the earth, in which more and more of us know that we are sisters and brothers not only with one another, but with tree and flower, bird and beast.

And can we also imagine a world in which our differences – whether of religion or race, of ethnicity or culture, of gender or sexual orientation – are cause for celebration rather than division, for love rather than hate...?

... a world in which all people are free to develop their minds and hearts and spirits fully and without outside restraint?

Finally, can we together imagine a world in which more and more of us know that kindness is at the heart of the good life, not a bigger house or bigger car or more exotic vacation – kindness?

(And *from* the kindness of our hearts, for each of us rooted in our personal and shared faiths, rooted in our ethical grounding... don't you think that if we can find \$700 billion dollars to bail out Wall Street, we ought to be able to find the relatively few billions to, for example, wipe out malaria, end poverty and hunger, and create an Apollo scale global initiative to deal with global warming and other environmental challenges – to “green the bailout” as activist Van Jones has put it?)

Now, *is* it the role of government to create the world I've invited us to imagine? Of course not. But if together we can share a dream, a vision for the world as we would want it to be, then government can be the citizens' partner in helping to shape the world towards this dream of peace, justice, and sustainability.

Blessings on you all. Blessings on all life. Blessings on the earth.

Well, do you think we'll hear that speech? We actually *do* hear bits and pieces within the carefully spun rhetoric, sometimes genuinely uplifting and inspiring.

For after all, don't most of us, Republican and Democrat, liberal and conservative, yearn for such a world, a world beyond fear and want? And though we will only imperfectly move toward such a world, both our religion (certainly our Unitarian Universalist faith) and our

politics (certainly the politics of American democracy) assume that there *are* problems we can solve, challenges we can meet, and a better world we can create.

In this spirit, each of us will soon judge who best might lead us in these directions we wish to go.

And each of us, whatever the result of this election, yes perhaps the most important election of our generation, can resolve once again to continue to do our part to meet the challenges, to create the better world – to be kind, to be peaceful, to “let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream”... to heal the earth... at least to live our lives in this direction.

I understand the weariness and the worry we may feel these days. But though we can rest – and this place is surely, as I’ve said, a place for deep spiritual rest, moral reflection, ethical grounding – we must also not turn back from the prophetic paths of peace and justice, kindness and love.

Isn’t this how we want to live?

May we support one another on the way.

So may it be.