

Sermon for Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Central Michigan

Rev. Andrew Frantz

Sunday, October 18, 2020

Faith and Action: Voting Rights

This morning message was delivered along with three lay leaders who offered their reflections on voting rights: David Wagstaff, Norma Bailey, and Gisela Moffitt.

The Power of Together

I've been doing some phone banking for the election this fall, and I confess that I really don't like it. David mentioned the challenging nature of this work also. It involves spending one or two hours calling strangers to encourage them to register and vote – but with all the wrong numbers and calls that go straight to voice mail, I only talk to a few actual people.

In previous presidential elections I have done door-knocking, which is also tough work. But what keeps me doing this sort of work, both phone-banking and door-knocking, is the togetherness. There is a sense of common purpose that I remember from the living rooms and garages of election organizers—with donated snacks and yard signs and printed lists of voters to contact and the organizing of car pools to knock on doors in different neighborhoods—there was an energy that united us, a bunch of strangers pulled together for a common purpose.

This is what I felt on two UU the Vote phone banking sessions recently as well. As you probably know by now, UU the Vote is the national Unitarian Universalist effort for voter empowerment, voter registration, and voter turnout. The call I was on was a Zoom call with more than a hundred people, a hundred other Unitarian Universalists. Although the work of phone banking is hard, the presence of all these like-minded people, and ability of the UU the Vote leaders to ground us in spirit and in purpose, made the experience worthwhile. At the end of the phone banking session, one of the leaders read a poem that went something like this:

*you don't need to make all the calls all by yourself
you don't need to send all the reminder texts yourself
you don't need to register all the voters yourself
you just need to do what you can do,
and keep doing it to the best of your ability*

That reminds me also of the poem by Marge Piercy that I shared earlier this morning. She said:

*Spread like the squash plant that overruns the garden.
Keep tangling and interweaving and taking more in, a thicket and bramble wilderness to the outside
but to us interconnected with rabbit runs and burrows and lairs.¹*

Beyond November 3

I'm thinking ahead to the November 3rd election, and I'm making plans for November 4th, 5th, 6th, and beyond. My primary responsibility is the emotional and spiritual support of this congregation, so I plan to make myself available for that. We don't know what's going to happen, but I think we all will be needing some kind of support. My secondary responsibility, as a community leader, is to see how I can be helpful and supportive to the larger Mount Pleasant community.

I've been on some planning calls with other ministers to also talk about the worst-case scenarios for the days after the election: what if there are no clear results for many days? what if the outcome is contested? what if federal troops seize ballots from Michigan polling places, alleging fraud? what if there is unrest in the streets? We all should be making plans for the kind of worst-case scenarios, although they may very well not happen. It is better to be prepared.

But I'm thinking beyond November 3rd in a very different way as well. We, as a people of faith and a people of love and hope, have much bigger goals than either Donald Trump or Joe Biden has articulated or is going to deliver. We are working for the end of white supremacy culture. We are challenging ourselves to re-envision public safety. We are asking for a radical commitment to environmental preservation and healing.

Our goals are about more than one election. They are about more than one nation—this is a world-wide movement for peace and justice. This is about more than one religion: we partner with people of faith, people of no faith, people of good faith wherever they may be. And this is about more than one species – for life on this planet, for Mother Earth herself, not just for humanity.

We are working for the end of racism in institutions and in hearts, for a society and a world where poverty and hunger are eradicated, we are working for a world of inclusion and celebration of all people in their beautiful diversity of gender and sexuality and race and ethnicity. We have big goals.

Our votes on November 3rd matter a great deal for taking a step towards these goals. But whatever happens in this election, my work for love and justice will be far from over, and the people I am working with are the same ones I knocked on doors with 4 years ago, and 8 years ago, and 12 years ago in Ohio; they're the same ones who have been phone banking with me in UU the Vote calls this fall; and they are the same ones who call this congregation their spiritual home.

Let's work together on voting rights and voter turnout for November 3rd, and let's work beyond that for greater love and justice for the whole world with no exceptions. We don't need to do it all by ourself. We just need to keep doing what we can do, not alone but together.

May it be so, as we make it so. Blessed be.

¹ Marge Piercy, "Connections Are Made Slowly." Included as reading #568 in [Singing the Living Tradition](#), 1993. The Unitarian Universalist Association, Beacon Press, Boston.