

Post-election Reflections: Hungering for a Return to Normal

Story & Sermon by Rev. Dr. Roger Jones
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Prayer by Rev. Lucy Bunch

From what you have shared and what I heard from you, I know that while we share in relief, our reactions to the past week are all over the map, some are jumping for joy, others are still processing the good news, while others are still feeling uncertain and even possibly fearful of what is to come. Many of us are simply exhausted by four years of stress and worry. Let us hold all those thoughts and feeling with a loving touch and an open heart as we share a time of prayer.

Holy spirit of love, bless us all with your healing presence. Help us to let go of the fear and stress that we have been holding for a long time. Let us rest now for a time, being present with this moment in our country.

Spirit of life – which rejuvenates and encourages us – send us the fresh winds of possibility to blow away our worries, and restore our spirits.

Spirit of forgiveness, as the days unfold, may we come to a deeper understanding of those who made a different choice on election day, an understanding that can liberate us from our own fears and negative thoughts.

Spirit of gratitude, remind us of all that is good and right in our lives and in our world. Help us to never lose sight of the gifts that we have received.

Mother earth, ground us in your strength. Remind us of the long arc of time, and the power of your healing energy. Be with us as the days unfold and remind us of the power of life and creation – the interconnected power that holds and sustains us all.

With gratitude and humility we pray for a path to healing and justice for all.

Blessed be.

A Story for All Ages from Rep. John R. Lewis

Good morning! If we were meeting in the sanctuary today, I'd hug every one of you. And someday again, I will. Today I have a story for all ages to read this morning, and it's a real story from the real life of John Robert Lewis. He was a member of the United States Congress, a Representative from Georgia. Here's his picture.



He passed away several months ago at the age of 80. As a teenager and a young man, John Lewis was a Civil Rights activist. Along with others, he marched in protests in his home state of Alabama to demand voting rights. He went to a big march in Washington DC and gave a speech to the whole nation. Here's a picture of him as a boy.



The last book John Lewis wrote is called Walking with the Wind. He tells a story from a time when he was only 4 years old.

These are his words:

On this particular afternoon—it was a Saturday, I’m almost certain--about fifteen of us children were outside my aunt Seneva’s house, playing in her dirt yard.

The sky began clouding over, the wind started picking up, lightning flashed far off in the distance, and suddenly I wasn’t thinking about playing anymore; I was terrified...

Aunt Seneva was the only adult around, and as the sky blackened and the wind grew stronger, she herded us all inside.



Her house was not the biggest place around, and it seemed even smaller with so many children squeezed inside. Small and surprisingly quiet. All of the shouting and laughter that had been going on earlier, outside, had stopped. The wind was howling now, and the house was starting to shake. We were scared. Even Aunt Seneva was scared.

And then it got worse. Now the house was beginning to sway. The wood plank flooring beneath us began to bend. And then, a corner of the room started lifting up.

I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. None of us could. This storm was actually pulling the house toward the sky. With us inside it.

That was when Aunt Seneva told us to clasp hands. Line up and hold hands, she said, and we did as we were told. Then she had us walk as a group toward the corner of the room that was rising. From the kitchen to the front of the house we walked, the wind screaming outside, sheets of rain beating on the tin roof. Then we walked back in the other direction, as another end of the house began to lift.

And so it went, back and forth, fifteen children walking with the wind, holding that trembling house down with the weight of our small bodies.



More than half a century has passed since that day, and it has struck me more than once over those many years that our society is not unlike the children in that house, rocked again and again by the winds of one storm or another, the walls around us seeming at times as if they might fly apart.

It seemed that way at the height of the civil rights movement, when America itself felt as if it might burst at the seams—so much tension, so many storms. But the people of conscience never left the house. They never ran away. They stayed, they came together and they did the best they could, clapping hands and moving toward the corner of the house that was the weakest.

And then another corner would lift, and we would go there.

And eventually, inevitably, the storm would settle, and the house would still stand.

But we knew another storm would come, and we would have to do it all over again. And we did.

And we still do, all of us. You and I. Children holding hands, walking with the wind.

That is America to me—not just the movement for civil rights but the endless struggle to respond with decency, dignity, and a sense of [kinship] to all the challenges that face us as a nation, as a whole.

Source: John Lewis, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), xvi-xvii.

knows what opportunities or challenges you can rise to meet in the years ahead!

I want to thank all the people who volunteered so much of your time to make this outcome a reality—making phone calls, writing post cards and text messages and letters to encourage people around the country to register and exercise their right to vote.

The late John Lewis, a U.S. Representative and civil rights leader, said: “The vote is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have.” In the story I read earlier from Rep. John Lewis, he recalled from his childhood how 15 children held hands inside a fragile wooden house to save it from a windstorm. He said this image could represent this country’s history. He said:

“[We are] rocked again and again by the winds of one storm or another, the walls around us seeming at times as if they might fly apart. . . . so much tension, so many storms. But the people of conscience never left the house. They never ran away. They stayed, they came together, and they did the best they could, clasping hands and moving toward the corner of the house that was the weakest.”

Thank you for being people of conscience and people of generosity and action. Thank you, and congratulations.

In addition to the joy and satisfaction at this election’s outcome, there’s also relief that we have a *clear* outcome. No matter which candidate you may have wanted to win the general election or who you wanted to win a primary election, the uncertainty and worry of the past year have been hard on everybody. The stress of the last four years have taken a toll on the wellbeing of millions of people. This includes dedicated civil servants, so beleaguered. It’s also taken a toll on dedicated journalists, who have been bearing witness to viciousness and lies, and being vilified for doing their Constitutional duty for all of us. And it’s taken a toll on people in the most vulnerable circumstances and those from the most marginalized identities.

Sermon – Nov. 8, 2020 – Rev. Dr. Roger Jones

What a long, rough week it has been! At least for me. Maybe *you* ’ve been doing okay. Starting on Wednesday morning, I was worried about such a close vote in the presidential election and the uncertainty of the outcome. I worried what harm or damage Donald Trump might do to avoid accepting a loss and to hang on to power. Also, when I realized that 70 million voters could still support a President so openly dishonest, cruel, selfish and criminal—that idea made me feel queasy, disoriented, and sad. When I saw the United States Senate election results, which leave his hypocritical enablers in power, I felt grief, denial, despair, and agitation. And I felt weary, just plain tired. I heard from church members and faraway friends how much anxiety all of that was causing you. Some felt physically sick. Some were disillusioned, some were angry.

Saturday was different! Yesterday morning two more states announced election returns which put former Vice President Joe Biden and Senator Kamala Harris over the victory line. The news came to me first by text message from some of you, adorned with emoticons of smiles, flowers, praying hands, and lots of bold red hearts. People near and far messaged me. “Tears of relief and prayers of thanks,” one said. Others wrote: “Good news!” “Hooray!” “What a relief!” “Thank God.” “Happy days are here again!” “Time to rebuild.” And, from an old friend back east, “Good riddance.”

For those of us who voted for this outcome, and worked hard for it and prayed for it, it is good to celebrate, feel joy and satisfaction. We can celebrate that our country will have its first woman vice president, a century after women achieved voting rights across the country. We will have our first African American Vice President and our first one of South Asian descent. Children alive now and those yet to come will know such an achievement is possible. Joe Biden will be the oldest president in history. By his achievement, every middle-aged person will know that the best is yet to come! Who

The effect of our sustained worry and uncertainty in these times has truly been traumatic, both personal and shared among us in families and communities. So it's not surprising that I've been hearing of a deep longing for peace and normalcy. There's a spoken hunger for a sense of civility to be restored, and end to division. We wish for a return to decency, and a sense of harmony, a feeling of reassurance about our country and our common life. Like many others, I have been longing for a return to normalcy, or at least what feels normal to me.

Yet such a longing is a temptation which could keep us from seeing the work that remains for us to do, keep us from doing work which lies before us. What I mean is this: what I remember as normal times in this country (and perhaps what *you* think of as normal times too) were times when a lot of people were suffering, unjustly. To me as a white person/ and as a male, a return to normalcy would seem civilized and peaceful. Yet in those times that were normal to me, many other people lived in fear, not in peace.

It used to be normal for women to have no opportunities for advancement or income that weren't dependent on their husbands' power. It was normal for them to have no legal status and no protection from an abusive spouse. Things like that seemed normal to many people... until women started agitating for freedom, equality, and safety. In many parts of the country it used to seem normal for African Americans to be restricted on where they could live or work, to face barriers to voting, and to be oppressed by a racialized system of criminal justice and systemic police brutality. In our dominant culture of whiteness, things like that have been taking place under the veneer of normalcy for way too much time.

So let's not long for normalcy anymore. Let's long for doing better. Let's commit ourselves to starting again...grounded and sustained by a renewed vision, by courage, and by love. Let's not go back to normal; let's go far beyond it. Yesterday morning on the Cable News Network, when he was asked for his thoughts on the election results, commentator Van Jones spoke through his tears. He said this: "It's easier to be a dad today. It's easier to tell your kids: character matters. It matters.

Telling the truth matters." Jones, who is black, explained that people of color, Muslim Americans, and immigrants have been suffering from the racial hostility that has been unleashed into the open, the hatred which has been made acceptable in the Trump years. Wiping tears from his eyes, Van Jones said: "This is a big deal for us, to be able to get some peace. And have a chance for a re-set." I like the sound of that idea—a re-set for this country, more than a return to a way that feels normal. Normal wasn't enough and won't be enough. But a re-set allows us to go far beyond normal.

It won't be easy; it won't feel comfortable a lot of the time. However, as Unitarian Universalists, we can sustain ourselves and find satisfaction in staying true to our principles. Our UU Principles affirm human dignity and freedom, mutual dependence and mutual responsibility, and the power of love. Putting our principles into practice is never easy, no matter who might hold the presidency, the Senate or the House of Representatives. Much work lies before us. More discomfort and struggle lie before us. I have a suggestion for how we could think about the work that lies ahead of us.

Perhaps we could consider *the struggle itself* to be normal. We could think of our aspirations for justice and equity as normal. We could regard our goal of world community, our practice of compassion, and our work for a full and flourishing democracy to be normal. By understanding our aspirations as normal, with generosity and shared effort as normal, and with courage and love as normal, no matter the discomfort we feel, no matter the storms that knock us about, we can *always* return to normal. So may we strive to live. Amen.

Hymns: "Come, Come, Whoever You Are," "How Can I Keep from Singing?" "I Am Willing."

Solos: *Piano played by Irina:* G. Gershwin, Piano Preludes #2, #1; L. Bernstein, "Somewhere There's a Place for Us," H. Arlen, "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." *Cello played by Kenji:* J.S. Bach, Gigue for cello from the Peasant Cantata.

Closing

In the days to come, I hope you take good care of yourselves, physically and spiritually. If staying abreast of the media coverage burdens your soul, lighten up on it. Go outside. Get some exercise, get some rest, try some breathing, sit in meditation, or say your prayers. If you feel worried or hopeful, disappointed or joyful, reach out and know you will be heard and loved. Keep in touch and keep the faith.