

After 25 years serving this church, I'm finally a minister in a blue state again.

Choir's doing the wave. That is that I came here from Massachusetts.

I'm not even sure what this means, to tell you the truth. See, I wrote today's sermon over a week ago. In the margins, there were lots of caveats. As I read back through it, I realized I was expecting today to be just like every Sunday after elections in Texas, where we progressives felt like we were crazy, disappointed, and that the hope business has been made tougher again. You see, for many years I've felt like I've been an underground miner leading a group through dark caves with one light whose name was hope or resistance or good fight. And mostly, we were just finding ourselves deeper and deeper in the caves. And today, we walk to the opening into the light of the clear blue morning. A brand new day, right, Desiree?

Today, progressives have a different idea about this state that we live in. For those watching from other states, I don't even know if you can understand the way this feels to us. We've been fighting for democracy. We've been hoping that women would get the rights that they lost back. We've been hoping that our elected leaders would stop demonizing LGBTQIA folks. We've been like a small minority of progressive people on an island, and that all could change.

I mean, I've been living through this for 25 years. Some of you have been living longer through it. I remember the Zoom call I was on with the clinic staff after Roe went away. I had founded that chaplaincy group, and we were trying to comfort the staff, and one of the nurses said, "This is my livelihood. This is my life. The life I give to help women in need." And we watched as the clinic closed and staff lost their jobs and moved away and changed careers.

These years have had real impact on real lives. And I don't know that Texas will change all that now, but a week ago, there wasn't any glimmer of hope that that would be true. Our leaders, a

week ago, cozied up to money and fundamentalist religious groups and did things to ensure the public schools were closing with vouchers, took students away from public education. Elected officials pulled up rainbow crosswalks, made lives of people who were trans in danger, moved away to blue states. Families left. Families moved from here, from our church, because of what was going on in this state. And all that changed this week.

So, my sermon, which was much more pessimistic last week, took a turn of emotion that I could hardly identify standing up here with regards to what this ministry is and what it's going to be.

And I just want to say that, while some people here might say the church should refrain from this kind of political talk, I want to say to you just look around. So many people in this room worked so hard to put our religious values up against the religious values of a distorted Christianity that has been in rule in this state. Yes.

And that distortion of Christianity is well-documented, and it's been in the actions of our Texas legislature when they put Bible passages in school curriculums and commandments on school walls and attacked people who expressed their differences and prioritized white culture over others and revisionist histories and the removal of monuments and the erasure of equity initiatives. The white Christian nationalism that has been so strong here and has moved into the national power structure, which once were the people who were hooded and lynching people in our streets in this city 100 or so years ago, took a violent moral high ground. And so, yes, the political victories that this week showed us for progressive religious people means that I am preaching that we are taking back some of that moral high ground. And that's what this is about.

Today is a kind of victory against the hateful divisive politics that has raged in our state since Ann Richards and Barbara Jordan and others were in charge. And it is a victory against hateful Christian nationalism. Governor Ann Richards, who, by the way, sat in these pews in the 1950s before her political career, sat here and listened to the preacher preach, Reverend Rabel, and raised her little girl, Cecile Richards, the late Cecile, who went on, many of us knew her, ran Planned Parenthood nationally. Cecile ran around the playground here. Ann said to Texans so long ago when she was governor ... She said, "We're not going to have the America that we want until we elect leaders who are going to tell the truth, not most days, but every day."

It's Texans like Ann and Cecile Richards and you and me and so many who have turned this state toward a truth-telling equity initiative, reclaiming some of that moral high ground that honors all people. And that is what we celebrate. And it's been hard going.

My colleague in Atlanta texted me on Wednesday. I read this text through the tears that were coming through Wednesday morning. I fell asleep early Tuesday night, so I didn't even know what happened until Wednesday morning. I'm going to go to bed at 9:30 and a wake up at 5:00 in the morning kind of person.

Through the tears, my colleague in Atlanta wrote me a text. She said, "Thank you for all you do in Texas. Long story short, decades of your organizing work and liberal leadership in Dallas has paid off. Thank you." And when she says your, I know this means our. She means all the people in this congregation who have stood up in movements of resistance against what's been going on. She means all the people who went to the voting booth caring about the stranger, hurting as they

watched violence committed by our government in our streets, worried that they might not be able to afford the next bag of groceries. She meant people who put their values in front of their self-interests. She means all of you who wrote postcards to people to get out to vote, knocked on doors and gave money and sustained a religious organization like this that has been the center of religious resistance for a long time in this city.

Our new governor this Wednesday in the wee hours ... I did not hear them. I only heard them the next day, said, "Tonight, Texas, we answered, and we did not whisper. We answered loud enough for every billionaire, every lobbyist, every corrupt politician in Austin to hear Texas belongs to us." Yes.

She said, "The nation will look at Texas and say we won something far more than an election, that they will look at Texas and say that faith in government has been restored. They will look at Texas and see the power of a government that lifts up every single person and never punches them down. We will build up a government more honest, more just, more worthy of the people who call Texas a home, and we will not forget the simple truth that brought us here tonight. Texas belongs to the people of Texas." Those are good words. Those are important words. Those are encouraging words, and they sound a lot like Ann Richards, and they sound a lot like the values of this church because, one way or another, this church shaped those words, either through Ann Richards sitting in these pews listening to Reverend Robert Rabel preach or through our influence in our steadfast stances against discrimination, standing up for the religion of love, even when we felt we were so deep in the caves that we might never emerge. And that's the truth.

And I know also the truth is that you know that there's a lot of work still to be done, that a lot can happen. A lot of trouble is on the horizon, and we know all this because we've been running this marathon for over 100 years. And the question is, what do progressive religious people do with this opening? What will this opening be? What legacy will we build on it? It's legacy that we build this week and the weeks to come. And that's what I want to focus on.

I'll tell you a story. In 1888, a man named Alfred Nobel, he got the kind of surprise that nobody really wants to get. He opened the newspaper, back, for those of you who never held a newspaper, back when we used to ... And he found in the paper, and usually in the back pages, his own obituary. The paper had confused him with his deceased brother, but what really rattled Nobel was how he was described. Rather than celebrating his achievements, the obituary branded him as a tradesman of death for creating dynamite and other weapons-related inventions. The story goes that this moment forced Nobel to confront the legacy that he was leaving behind. Determined to be remembered for something better, he dedicated the rest of his life to advancing human progress and especially peace, eventually founding the Nobel Peace Prize.

Years later, Bertrand Russell observed that vanity is one of the fundamental drivers of human behavior. Little did Bertrand Russell know, we'd have a president who was demanding to have the Nobel Prize while starting wars.

If Bertrand Russell is right, and vanity is the fundamental driver of human behavior, then Alfred Nobel's reaction becomes easy to understand. Most people care, at least to some degree, on how they will be remembered, and few get the chance that he got to glimpse their own legacy before

their life is over in the form of a printed obituary. Yet the desire underneath his revelation is universal. We all hope that our lives will matter, that we will be remembered with some measure of kindness or generosity or compassion or remembered at all.

What is surprising is how rarely we apply that same kind of thinking beyond ourselves. We wonder how history will judge individuals but seldom ask, how will it judge our civilization, our country, our city, and our community? Imagining the verdict of future generations over the actions we take today may be one of the most powerful ways to evaluate the choices we make and the world that we will leave for tomorrow.

Just a reminder, environmentalists and preachers have been saying this for a long time, but it's hard to hear sometimes. We choose the present over the future, which is only good in silent meditation, not so good in legacy or preservation work. We sometimes look a lot more selfish than we wish we did. And that's why today I want to read you this poem from Jane Hirshfield, which I was going to read whether whatever happened on past Tuesday, and it goes like this.

It goes, "Let them not say we did not see it. We saw. Let them not say we did not hear it. We heard. Let them not say they did not taste it. We ate. We trembled. Let them not say it was not spoken, not written. We spoke. We witnessed with voices and hands. Let them not say they did nothing. We did not enough. Let them say, as they must say something, a kerosene beauty. It burned. Let them say we warmed ourselves by it, read by its light, praised, and it burned.

Hirshfield says of this poem it's a poem very much imagining the future looking back on our generation and our time and seeing how it turned out. What did we do? What did we not do? She says, "And it is a prayer. It is a poem hoping to make itself someday incomprehensible, but the writing of the poem was my own way of engaging my own heart, mind, and body, intentions, vow to have this poem not be true. And so, yes, very much a poem of this moment of great uncertainty. We don't know yet how it will all turn out, and I do not want them to say we did not enough."

This wise and spiritual poet says these words encouraging us to the next thing, not to rest too long here. She says, "I have been given this existence, these years on this Earth, to accept what has come into my life. Wars. Loves. Trust. Betrayal. Kindness. I must take them. I must find a way to live in this world. You can't refuse it. And all along, the difficult is the radiant, the beautiful, the intimacy with which one of us enters the life, all of us, and figures out what is our conversation, what is my responsibility, what must be suffered, what must be changed? How can I meet this in a way which both lets me open my eyes the next day and also, perhaps, if I'm lucky, can be of service?"

So, I'm saying to you, using Hirshfield's poem, let them not say we didn't try to save democracy or let the scoundrels run our country and take our tax money to kill people in other countries or deport our friends or demonize our LGBTQIA family members. Let them not say we let it happen and we celebrated with apathy, thinking more about our investments than our responsibilities, the moral deposits we made in the bank of human culture. Let them not say we gave up on elections, stayed home while the fire burned our civility to the ground, or put our ultimate faith in elected leaders.

This is a little turn in the sermon, but just follow me for a second because this is a story that I always tell on the Sunday after election day, and that is from the book of Samuel. It's a moment in the Bible where the people of Israel want a king to be placed on the throne. There is no king. And they go to Samuel, who's a prophet and a priest, and they say, "Samuel, we want a king."

And Samuel goes, and he talks with God. And God says, "Just remember, when they put the last king on the throne, what happened."

So, Samuel goes back, and he says, "Remember what kings do. They take your children, and they put them to war, and they take your best cattle, and they pretty much ruin things."

And the people say, "No, no, we want a king." And so, Samuel says, "Okay, we'll give you a new king." And the reminder is that even the best elected officials will not truly save us. Of course, the answer in the Bible is that only God will save us. To me, that means that turning to the best and highest values that we can connect with in ourselves connects us with God so that we can combat the ideolatry, the golden calves of money and power, and the temptation to create more enemies. The passage says faith in values must drive us on, and hope and civility must continue to grow.

And to take another turn, I just want to acknowledge how little civility there's been around our country for a little while. It all started in presidential debates and name-calling and giving nicknames to opponents, and you remember those things, right? It kept going. It hasn't stopped until Tuesday. When we proved that that wasn't going to work anymore, when we proved that the moral high ground has a civil center to it, when politicians who promote biblical living and push the 10 Commandments on schools, then go and cheat on their wives and send people to war and promote public executions, we proved that those incongruencies were understood by us all.

One of the wisest things I heard during this campaign from any candidate was from our senator, James Talarico, who hasn't called me yet. I don't know why, but I got some years on that guy in the pulpit. No, he texted me for a lot of money. But I haven't heard back. When he was asked a question about all the attacks that were going on about him, he said, "I think this is an example, what I call the rage economy, where conspiracy theorists can post anything, politicians can post anything, and we all get angry on both sides, and no one's life gets any better." I think he's right, and that's why, no matter who you voted for in this election, whether you won or lost, we still have work to do to reclaim civility and balance in our political system.

Let them not say that the people of First Unitarian and people of faith in Texas forgot that the job now is to rebuild a civil society. Yes.

And let them not say that one election results convince the people at 4015 Normandy Ave that all is well, despite the big deep breath we need.

As a person of faith today, being a person of faith in this church, we understand that this living our lives is not for some false hope in the afterlife but trying to do what Hirshfield said earlier, to accept what has come, to ask what is our conversation, what is my responsibility, what must be suffered, and what must be changed? Let them say we breathed, we held each other, we could

see the marathon of life and said it was good and knew that, yes, there will be pain and suffering as well as celebrations and change, and we will not give in to cynicism and despair.

We will keep moving forward toward the world we want to see. And let them say that we had the tools, that we had each other. When the banter got too strong, that we reset our spirits, that we asked over and over again what this wild and precious life requires of us. And that's the spiritual work we have to do. We claim a part of the greater whole for the dignity and well-being of all people. We rose above division to be people our ancestors wanted us to be. Let them say that we didn't lose sight of any of this.

Let them say we paused. We caught our breath for a week or two or a month or at least through January, but we kept standing up for the truth and for the dignity of all people.

Let them say we thrived with new, honest leaders, celebrated a new day.

Sorry. We never gave up. We never gave up. It's been hard going around here. Let them say that we measured our lives in bread shared. Swords turned into plowshares. Bodies healed, in minds liberated, in songs sung and justice done and laughter in the night and joy in the morning and love through all seasons and gladness of heart and all people coming together in the kingdom coming in glory, in God's name being praised with hallelujahs and in our ongoing faith, faith in the world and what it can become. Let them say that, and let them also say amen.