

OPPORTUNITY
Randall Tremba
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Christ the King/Reign of Love
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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THE GATES OF HOPE
Victoria Safford

Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of Hope—
Not the prudent gates of Optimism,
Which are somewhat narrower.
Not the stalwart, boring gates of Common Sense;
Nor the strident gates of Self-Righteousness,
Which creak on shrill and angry hinges
(People cannot hear us there; they cannot pass through)
Nor the cheerful, flimsy garden gate of
“Everything is gonna’ be all right.”

But a different, sometimes lonely place,
The place of truth-telling,
About your own soul first of all and its condition.
The place of resistance and defiance,
The piece of ground from which you see the world
Both as it is and as it could be
As it will be;
The place from which you glimpse not only struggle,
But the joy of the struggle.

And we stand there, beckoning and calling,
Telling people what we are seeing
Asking people what they see.

Psalm 46

The Beloved is our refuge and our strength, a loving Presence in times of trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea.

Come, behold the works of the Beloved, how love reigns even in humanity’s desolation. For the Beloved makes wars to cease, breaking through the barriers of fear, shattering the greedy and oppressors, and refining hearts of iron!

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As I made my way around the parish this past week, I met more than a few members still reeling in shock, sorrow, and even depression in the wake of the election. And for some it was getting worse, not better.

I mean, even if they sang *Be still and know that I am God* a million times, they’d still be shaking. Even if the angel of the Lord appeared and said: *Fear not; be not afraid*, they’d still be afraid. And I can hear them saying right now, I’m sorry, but today’s Psalm is not helping. *The Beloved is our refuge and our strength, a loving Presence in times of trouble.*

Nope, not working for me.

I also met some of our members pleased and relieved with the election results. Those weren't my feelings. But since I know them to be good and honorable people, and since I don't know everything, and since I often prejudge and stereotype people, I asked why they felt pleased and relieved.

I got an earful. And, I'm pretty sure I got a glimpse of the world through their eyes.

That's what happens when, as this morning's reading puts it, *we plant ourselves at the gates of hope, telling people what we are seeing and asking them what they see.*

And so I asked.

Nobody can see the future. We can guess but we can't know. Only the ignorant and arrogant pretend to. But we do know this: right now, right in this present moment, our nation faces a crisis. And crisis, in case you didn't know, spells both danger and opportunity.

And one opportunity is to listen and see the world as others see it. Empathy is a great virtue. It's an aspect of compassion.

As it turns out, some of us—along with about 50 million others—saw “hope and change” where I had seen vulgarity, divisiveness and destruction. They didn't change my view; but the broadened my horizon.

In a broken world, no one sees clearly. That's why love requires not only kindness, justice and humility but a willingness to listen carefully and deeply to others who see the world differently than us.

In case we've forgotten, the promise of “hope and change” is powerful. It gets a grip on people despite evidence and reasons. Hope and optimism is not the same thing. Optimism is based on evidence, trends, statistics; hope comes from a different place.

As I listened to these happy folk, I remembered that eight years ago 70 million Americans were inspired by Senator Obama's promise of “hope and change.” Many of those 70 million overlooked his inexperience and voted against their own racial biases and partisan loyalties to elect America's first black president.

Hope and optimism is not the same thing. Optimism is based on evidence, trends, statistics; hope comes from a different place. And it's not exactly rational.

Then as now expectations soared to messianic heights. And, not surprisingly, many were disappointed and, I'm guessing, many will be disappointed again. We all have expectations in one direction or the other.

As the Buddha put it: *only the one who has no expectations is never disappointed.*

*Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of Hope—
Not the prudent gates of Optimism,
Nor the cheerful, flimsy garden gate of
“Everything is gonna' be all right.”*

Hope does not ignore dark clouds. Now and then the mountains tremble and collapse. The world we thought unshakeable is shaken to the foundation.

At such times, it's good to take a deep breath and a long perspective. It's a good time to let the natural world teach us a few lessons.

Turbulence and turmoil keep this planet alive. Without hurricanes, tsunamis, monsoons, earthquakes and raging forest fires this planet would be cold dead. Life on planet earth is turbulent. It just is.

If you've lived long enough and paid attention you also know that personal and political worlds shake, rattle and collapse. Worlds collapse all the time. We mustn't take it personally as though we alone suffer devastation.

As Jesus put it and as poets and philosophers before and after Jesus have put it: destruction can be the prelude to a new creation, sometimes something more beautiful and wholesome than what stood before arises.

Crisis spells danger and opportunity. Both are true at this moment.

I wish the President-elect success. May he be a winner yet again and win back the many he has wounded and terrified. But in wishing him success I do not wish success for those deplorable things said in jest or said sincerely, those multiple threats to our fellow Americans.

Yes, this is a time of danger. But it is also a time of opportunity.

No matter your candidate or party, we can be hopeful; we can be creative; we can collaborate with others to work for the common good; we can do little things with great love. We can share with others who have little; stand with those who are afraid; walk with those who are weary.

No matter your candidate or party, we can work together to mend divisions, tear down walls of hostility, build up the economy; protect women and girls, Muslims and immigrants, and ensure that all Americans, not just some, can feel great about our country again.

No, I'm not a starry-eyed optimist. I just happen to believe in the amazing power of Christ's love.

Yes it will be a struggle. Yes there's anger in that struggle. But joy can be found in that struggle as well. Who knows, those you regard a stranger or just strange may soon be called a neighbor.

Today is a good day to plant ourselves at the Gates of Hope.