

In the Moment—One Pilgrim's Attempt to Be Present

By Amy Sander Montanez, D. Min.

Election panic

The screaming woke me out of a deep sleep. I looked at the clock on the bedside table. 2:24 a.m. More yelling and screaming ensued as I put my glasses on and sat up in the bed. I may have to call the police, I thought, wondering if this was a case of domestic violence going on in the hotel room adjoining ours. I began to listen to the fight more carefully.

“She’s not ready!!! Are you kidding me? Can you actually tell me truthfully that you think she’s %^\$# ready?”

“And you think Obama is %^\$# ready? Who are you kidding? Do your homework, man.”

And it continued, at least four people yelling and

screaming about the candidates for national election. I knocked on the wall, thinking a little reminder that the hotel walls were thin and I could hear everything being said would help. It didn't. I called the front desk, and seconds later heard the phone in the next room ring. That didn't quiet things down either. A knock on the door by security seemed to settle things down, and just before 3 am I closed my eyes again, hoping for a more peaceful end of the night.



Wow. I cannot remember a time in my adult life that people were so impassioned about a political decision. It is as if this whole election and the accompanying economic downturn has tapped into the psyche of a nation that is truly frightened, a nation that knows something is deeply wrong and

wants the powers that exist to fix it. The amount of emails that are forwarded, the number of articles written, and even the airing of a primetime edition of Saturday Night Live (thanks for the levity, SNL) indicates the energy and passion that exists around these elections. We are desperate for something/someone to fix things.

This, of course, won't happen. What is wrong most deeply cannot be fixed by our elected officials, any of them, or by a government. Perhaps we agree with one platform more than another, and that, of course, is the beauty of the democratic system. Perhaps one party or the other will have a better plan for taxes, for healthcare, for Social Security, for education, for whatever you and I are most concerned about. But a platform, and even wonderful ideas, will not fix anything that is deeply wrong. The only thing that can fix our deeply troubled nation, our deeply troubled planet, is a change of heart in the individuals and communities that make up our nation and planet.

A change of heart. A humbling. President of Furman University, David E. Shi, in his charge to the graduates at the 2008 Commencement spoke these powerful words.

“The humility embedded in our imperfection should prompt us, at least occasionally, to reassess our dogmas, harness our arrogance and slow our keystroke rush to judgment. Liberally educated people are those who have learned to practice tolerance and self-criticism and embody civility and humility.”

Practicing tolerance, self-criticism, civility and humility would certainly raise our level of consciousness. In practicing these virtues we might realize that we are intimately in relationship with the rest of the world. We might realize that we are not entitled to a certain lifestyle or a certain level of safety. Language like “I have a right to...” or “we have a right to...” will only keep us living as victims. Perhaps we will finally realize that there is not an endless supply of water, oil, food, money, or anything else that we think we have a right to. We really cannot afford to continue to point the finger at the “other party” and blame them for the condition we are now in. We are all in this together and we got here together. There is enough culpability to go around. Being in a power struggle will keep us stuck exactly where we are. We must all be humbled.

What we can do, no matter which candidate wins, is change ourselves. It is the ultimate task. We can change the way we live. We can make more responsible choices for ourselves and our children. We can prioritize the value of living in better relationship with ourselves, our local communities, and the world. We can deeply examine what we really believe. We can ask ourselves, “What is real?” and live in the presence of that truth rather than living in the illusion of what we wish were real. I find myself asking this question of my clients and spiritual directees frequently. “What is real?” Once that can be named, then the next question is “How do I want to be in relationship to what is real?”

Certainly I know how I will cast my ballot. But more importantly, I know that I need to continue to repent from ways of believing and behaving that are not in line with what is real and be changed myself. I need to turn my life, all of it, over to God’s reality. This prayer helps me continue to do that.

“Almighty and Eternal God, So draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so use our imaginations, so control our wills that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated unto you.”

*And then use us we pray as you will, and always
to your glory and the welfare of your people.
Through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen.” BCP p. 832*

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