



NEIGHBORHOOD UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

All Will Be Well

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On the cusp of the election, today we come together for a time of singing, meditation and poetry. This is our time to center down into our shared values and transcendent purpose, to find refuge in our sangha, our community, for restoration and for healing.

The poet Alicia Ostriker writes in her poem *Ghazal, America the Beautiful*:

I said One Nation Invisible until corrected
maybe I was right about America

The political is largely the realm of the visible—the public sphere – the polis, the town square for civic engagement and dialogue. Throughout the election cycle, it's become almost daily public conversation to discuss our shock as civil discourse visibly plummets to more base levels than imaginable, and the accompanying actions become more and more dangerous and inhumane.

On Tuesday, we will become political actors by making our values visible at the ballot box. After Tuesday we will be left with a vote for a new direction for our nation, with the lingering aftershocks of a visibly deeply divided and entrenched electorate.

Author Courtney E. Martin sums this up well in her blog for Krista Tippett's *On Being* entitled: "A Country That Must Be Made New." She writes:

The question, I realize, isn't "What are we going to do if he is elected?" The question is, "What are we going to do?" Period. This election has exposed the country in all of its broken places. An embittered working class left behind economically and spiritually. A media ecosystem that feeds off of controversy and leaves us all starving for informational and moral sustenance. An electoral process driven not by preparedness but by performance and money. A citizenry writhing fitfully as it faces its own internalized and institutionalized racism and sexism. We are broken. And let's be real. We have always been broken — partly because we haven't healed our history or fixed our systems, but partly because the beauty of our diversity is inevitably coupled with schisms. But our brokenness has never been so visible, so painful, so gaping.

As Courtney Martin says so well, a light has been shined on the most sinister parts of American society, parts that have always been there, just under the surface. The shadow side of America has moved into the full daylight of public view. This week's most deplorable example: the arson of the Hopewell Baptist Church, home to a black worshipping community for 111 years, with a graffiti "Vote Trump" further desecrating the ruined sanctuary.

But our national brokenness has indeed been this visible before, and some would argue, it has always been this visible. In August of 1967, just a few months before he was assassinated, Martin Luther King gave a rousing and prophetic speech at the National Conference for New Politics entitled “The Three Evils of Society.” The nation was knee deep in war and the idealism of the Civil Rights movement had given way to the cynicism of stalled progress and resistance to the more radical methods of Black empowerment.

We are now experiencing the coming to the surface of a triple prong sickness that has been lurking within our body politic from its very beginning. That is the sickness of racism, excessive materialism, and militarism.

King called these three problems the “plague of western civilization.”

In America, we are still living with such a sickness. Behind the visible—the talking heads, social media and the outward violence and desecration are the quieter but potent effects—the invisible cumulative burdens of the sickness surfacing amongst America’s citizenry.

Here are some of the symptoms I see:

- Escapism: “If this election doesn’t go my way, I’m moving to Canada, for real.”
- Hopelessness and helplessness, anger and frustration
- Lashing out
- Fear and distrust
- Negative coping mechanisms, increased drinking, drugs and other addictive behavior.
- Feeling as if life isn’t worth living

These are common and largely invisible symptoms of mental, physical and spiritual sickness that burden our mind, body and soul, turning the sickness of the world within on ourselves. As we know, our nation’s health care system is still one of the most prominent political problems; one of many “broken systems” which fails to prioritize the ongoing health needs of the most vulnerable. Our nation’s sickness is not only spiritual and moral, but also structural.

Author Ann Cvetkovich writes about mental illness as a manifestation of the sickness Martin Luther King diagnosed nearly 50 years ago. In her book *Depression: A Public Feeling*, she takes on mental illness, bringing it out of the realm of the private and invisible and into public dialogue. Chronicling her own struggles with mental illness as an activist and an academic, she writes,

“What if depression, in the Americas, at least, could be traced to histories of colonialism, genocide, slavery, legal exclusion, and everyday segregation and isolation that haunt all of our lives, rather than to be biochemical imbalances?”

Los Angeles artist Johanna Hedva has lived her whole adult life with chronic mental and physical illnesses. Hedva has coined what she calls “Sick Woman theory,” which she applies not just to women but to those whose health and wellbeing has been impacted by the effects of injustice. She writes:

The Sick Woman is a straight man with depression who's been medicated (managed) since early adolescence and now struggles to work the 60 hours per week that his job demands.

The Sick Woman is a homeless person, especially one with any kind of disease and no access to treatment, and whose only access to mental-health care is a 72-hour hold in the county hospital.

The Sick Woman is a veteran suffering from PTSD on the months-long waiting list to see a doctor at the VA.

To Hedva, in deeply unwell times, we all are suffering from systematic sickness, and those who are vulnerable are suffering the most. For these "sick woman" times, we need the spiritual strength and resilience to focus on not only fixing what is broken in our government systems, but offering care and spiritual healing to create a more sustainable future of our planet and all of humankind.

All will be well, all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.

These words were written by Christian Mystic Julian of Norwich living during a time of another kind of plague—the Black Plague, or the Black Death, which devastated nearly half of her home village of Norwich, England. In her visions, she imagined a uniting love transcending all fear, a deeper wellness in spite of the world's great suffering.

No matter what happens Tuesday, may we follow in the steps of the mystics and the healers, proclaiming that all will be well.

Even in the brokenness of our world, a collective wellness beckons to us as a calling of collective care. In the darkest of times, let our compassion be more fully kindled and our purpose more deeply clarified: to bind up the broken, to transcend our differences and to work toward the common good. And in this purpose, let us discover welling up within us renewed joy—a joy which sings America back together again.

Go out into the world in peace
Have courage
Hold on to what is good
Return to no person evil for evil
Strengthen the fainthearted
Support the weak
Honor all beings