

*“A Call to Action”**Isaiah 65.17-25**The Rev. Hal Chorpenning, Plymouth Congregational UCC**Fort Collins, Colorado**November 13, 2016*

For virtually all of us, the presidential election results on Tuesday night came as a shock, and for many of us, it came as a disappointment. I think it is especially stunning for young adults who may have voted in their first election; to put that in perspective 18-year-old voters were born in 1998. Some of us remember other election shockers or disappointments, but the only presidents these youngest voters can remember are Barack Obama and George W. Bush. And those of us who have been around the block once or twice know that while the presidency is incredibly important, other things make a difference, too.

All is not lost, and if you don't believe me, take a look at the beautiful, blue Colorado sky and take a deep breath. (I have taken more than a few deep breaths this week.) And as we remember the our veterans this weekend, remember also that this congregation has endured two World Wars, as well as wars in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Remember that our denomination has survived a revolution and a Civil War as well. We will thrive in the coming years, because we will have a renewed sense of why we are here and why we are needed. We will help our nation as a whole by being a prophetic voice, a beacon for justice, and sometimes a thorn in the flesh.

Today's lectionary text is from the very last part of the prophecy of Isaiah. You'll remember that it was written after the a portion of the people of Judah had been taken captive and exiled in Babylon, and they had returned to Jerusalem after several generations...and a generation is a whole lot longer than four years. Isaiah is writing after the repatriation, and they return to a city that lays largely in ruins. The Temple has been destroyed and has yet to be rebuilt, and the reality of reconstruction is sinking in. It is literally a monumental task, but the elders have seen and known worse...and God enables them to have hope with a beautiful vision of a glorious new creation in which the wolf and the lamb shall feed together (and not the one on the other).

None of the faithful think they are going to rebuild the city and the Temple alone...they know they will be empowered by God to bring the vision into reality. They have a cause, a reason for being.

I wonder if some of our folks at Plymouth feel like they are entering something like a period of exile, not so much because the candidate you may or may not have supported did or did not win, but because of the threats in the campaign that were directed towards Muslims, towards Mexican immigrants, towards women, towards people of color, towards LGBT folks, towards people with disabilities, towards the integrity of God's planet. We will need to wait and see how much of that was campaign rhetoric and how much will actually be transformed into policy.

None of us knows what the future holds, but one thing I can tell you: the witness of this congregation and of others like it will be take on an even more important role in

the life of our community and nation in the next four years. We will have an opportunity to step in and step up.

If the rights of any of us in the LGBT community are threatened, do you think Plymouth will speak up? I **know** that we will speak up!

If promised budget cuts threaten those in our community who suffer from food insecurity, do you think this congregation will step up and act? I **know** that we will step up and act!

If our government proposes to engage in mass deportation of undocumented aliens, do you think people at Plymouth will fold our hands politely or do you think we will stand in solidarity? I **know** that we will stand in solidarity!

If our neighbors at the Islamic Center of Fort Collins face discrimination, do you think people from Plymouth will stand with them, and even in front of them? I **know** we will! As many of you know, I reached out this week to Shakir Muhammed, the acting imam, to let him know of our solidarity, and he wrote back a touching message of thanks. “We will be well,” he writes, “and all Americans will right the ship together. And good will still come to us all and to the nation.” Isn’t it a blessing to know that we are not alone as people of faith?

Some of you may have seen people wearing a safety pin, which symbolizes that the person wearing it will stand in solidarity someone who may feel unsafe — whether they are Muslim, female, a person with a disability, LGBT, a person of color, an immigrant — and will not allow them to be bullied by another. If you would like to have one to wear, and if you are willing to step in and step up, I bought 400 safety pins yesterday at Target, and one of our deacons will give one to you if you wish as you leave the sanctuary.

We will need to become even better bridge-builders in the next four years. We will need to build bridges of understanding by listening deeply to those who may disagree with us, and to do so with compassion. We will need to build bridges of cooperation with other congregations across the UCC and with other denominations to create new forces for advocacy. And we will to reinforce the bridges that link us to the divine, listening deeply for the still-speaking voice of God, who calls us beyond our complacency into deeper ways of engagement.

Part of the genius of church is this: We are not going to do any of this alone, because we have a built-in community of people who want to be co-creators with God: people who are willing to sacrifice their time, their money, and even their lives to stand for the justice that the prophets proclaimed. We know what it means to be called to act and to work hand-in-hand with each other and with God.

And for us, whose reason for being the church **is** our relationship with God, our genius goes beyond action as well. John O’Donohue, whose beautiful words grace the entrance to our Memorial Garden, wrote: “The world is not decided by action alone. It is decided more by consciousness and spirit; they are the secret sources of all action and behavior. The spirit of a time is an incredibly subtle, yet hugely powerful force. And it is comprised of the mentality and spirit of all individuals together. Therefore, the way you look at things is not simply a private matter. Your outlook actually and concretely affects what goes on. When you give in to helplessness, you collude with despair and add to it.

When you take back your power and choose to see the possibilities for healing and transformation, your creativity awakens and flows to become an active force of renewal and encouragement in the world. In this way... you can become a powerful agent of transformation.”

Plymouth, listen and hear God’s call to action. May we together continue to be a force for healing and transformation in God’s world and in our community and nation.

May it be so. Amen.

© 2016 Hal Chorpensing, all rights reserved. Please contact hal@plymouthucc.org for permission to reprint.