

Nov. 13, 2016
Psalm 46
First Parish UCC, Brunswick, ME
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Ministry of Arts

INTRO to SCRIPTURE

We come together reminded that it is in God – not our families, not our political parties, not our country but God - that we live and move and have our being. So, let us hear again the words of the Psalmist proclaiming that God is our refuge and our strength.

SERMON

A few weeks ago, I decided our theme today would be how the arts give expression to the spiritual journey. Thank you to Alan Mast for his painting on the front of the bulletin. Alan and Kristi Hatrick, who is the director of a local non-profit called Arts are Elementary (which works with children in the schools) will share reflections with us in the *Spirit Matters* session after church today. I hope you will join us.

With the events of this week – Tuesday's election and Friday's observance of Veteran's Day, I've been reflecting on how the arts help us to deal with our emotions in tumultuous times – how they help us express our fears, our hopes, and our puzzlements.

Friday was Veterans Day. It is the day when we honor those who have served our country in the military. It is the day when some veterans, as they have told me, particularly remember the people who

didn't come home with them. I've been struck by recently by how much art has become a component of programs supporting veterans.

One such program is the veterans mask project. You can google it. People who have struggled to find the words to describe what has happened to them have been encouraged to give expression to their experience through face masks they create. Many veterans give testimony that even though they were initially skeptical they have found the experience transforming and healing.

It reminds me of Joy Johnson who through her "Embrace a Vet" program right here in the midcoast offered experiences with the arts. She invited me to a Native American healing circle which was a weaving of vocal and visual arts. We are grateful for her compassionate and creative outreach.

Tuesday was election day. Last week I pondered what people in the far future will think about us looking back. One thing they are likely to notice is just how divided we are as a nation and a state. Not only were the presidential votes evenly divided but also our state referendum questions were close – some too close to call initially.

The pictures, banners and chants during the election and since show just how much we use art to express ourselves.

One email I received this week contained an image that clearly depicted the intersection between art and the spiritual journey for me this week. It contained the image of the M.C. Escher print entitled "Day and Night." As you may remember Escher was fascinated by tessellations, in which images repeat across the page. In "Day and Night" there are birds – black birds flying in one direction, white birds flying in the other direction. It depends on which birds you look at what you see. It's a powerful artistic depiction of what has happened in this election. Each group of "birds" believe the other is headed in the wrong direction. And yet each of those birds is shaped and formed by the other birds. There is no bird of either color in and of itself.

Next to this image were these words from Parker Palmer, a contemporary spirituality educator in the Quaker tradition.

The spiritual life is lived in a balance of paradoxes, and the humility that enables us to hear the truth of others must stand in creative tension with the faith that empowers us to speak our own.

On Tuesday, one group we heard loud and clear was those who feel economically abandoned and who indeed have reason to feel that way. As many of you know, I grew up in Waldoboro which is just about 45 minutes north of here on Rt. 1. When I was a child there were three small manufacturing plants in my hometown where people could work, and support their families. They are all gone.

In the globalization of our economy, in search of cheaper goods, the monied and educated elite left behind the middle-class laborer. Those left behind were told to

invest in education, which some people and their children did only to find themselves saddled with crippling debt. Where is the justice in that?

On the other hand, we also heard from those who envision a multicultural, multiracial, and multi-religious country and world. Recognizing that everyone on this continent is an immigrant or a descendant of immigrants – even if the ancestors came thousands of years ago they came from somewhere else- this group spoke against the exclusionary language that has been so prominent in this campaign. Where is the kindness?

These are not just political arguments. They have real consequences right close to home. One young child in our congregation has recently been taunted by other children on the playground for being an "immigrant" and had to ask the parents what that is about. The way grown-ups talk teaches children what is acceptable language and behavior.

I have had parents this week struggling with how to talk to their children about the kind of language that has been part of this election. I reminded them that just because a person is a presidential candidate, or even president-elect, does not automatically make their behavior acceptable. Children, in particular, need help learning to discern acceptable and unacceptable behavior, especially in powerful people.

This is a time to remind ourselves of our covenant.

- do justice
- love kindness
- walk humbly with our God.

Being grounded in God, who is our refuge and our strength, is a commitment in which we can deepen our lives together in the coming months and years. It calls us to care both about the local and the global.

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