

This has been a difficult and emotional week.

Many of the people who voted for Donald Trump as our next President did so for good reasons, perhaps because they wanted change, or because they are lifelong Republicans and couldn't imagine voting for a Democrat. Or because they just couldn't bring themselves to vote for Hillary Clinton for a whole variety of reasons. Voting for Trump does not make them racist or hateful or even angry.

Yet the reality we have to face is that a man who has demeaned women, Muslims and immigrants and who has declared climate change to be a hoax, is going to be our next President. A man whose values are profoundly different from those of the gospel. For many of us, his election has shaken us to our very core. We have felt the world as we know it suddenly dying. Some people have likened the election to 9/11 in its shattering effect.

The great cultural icon, Leonard Cohen, also died this week. He was a man of many faiths – an ordained Buddhist priest, Jewish born and with a deep understanding of Christianity, he incorporated his profound and unique vision of the mystery of God into many of his songs. I started this sermon with “You want it Darker”, the title track of his last album which came out only a matter of weeks ago.

It is a disturbing song, but one which spoke to me this week as I struggled to make sense of the unexpected change in my understanding of this country's values. Most of the song is very black and deeply sad as it portrays the darkness of human nature and our portrayal of God in our own image as one who wants it darker. Trump's rhetoric of hatred has raised up for us the specter of the dark side of human nature, the side that most of us don't want to deal with. Thinking that God wants it darker, Cohen says, “We kill the flame.”

Interspersed with this dark view of humanity and the God we create, come lines from the Jewish mourners kaddish, “Magnified, sanctified,

be thy holy name” and then he transitions seamlessly into the Christian narrative with “Vilified, crucified, in the human frame”. Despite the darkness of human nature and the way we often choose to crucify love and compassion, God’s holy name will still be glorified. This is our hope as Christians; however dark it gets, God is still working among us and through us for the good and the flourishing of the whole planet. God is still redeeming the world even when it seems that we want it darker.

And then at the end of the song comes a different voice singing the refrain in Hebrew, *Hineni, hineni*. These are the words that Abraham spoke when God called to him as he raised his knife to sacrifice his son Isaac, “*Hineni*, Here I am.” If the gospel of Luke had been written in Hebrew, this is probably what Mary would have said, “*Hineni*, I am ready Lord.” In the times of darkness when humanity seems determined to revert to its darkest, most hateful and violent self, our prayer is “*Hineni*, Here I am Lord.”

Abraham lived at the end of the time of child sacrifice. He thought God required him to sacrifice his son. He thought God wanted it darker, but just as he takes his knife he hears God calling, and replies, *Hineni*. His response changed the story. In our dark times, let our response also be *Hineni*, let us also be ready to hear God’s prompting to change the ending of the story.

We don’t know what’s going to happen. We are in a time of flux. The pundits will talk all day long. That’s their job. But we don’t have to listen all day long. It is not our job. Ours is to continue to build the reign of God. Our job is to co-create beauty with God. Our job is to create fairness, social justice, compassion, forgiveness and healing wherever we go. *Hineni*, I am ready my Lord.

In today’s Gospel Jesus reminds his followers that nothing is permanent. This description of the destruction of the temple seems to be a prophecy that came true a little under forty years later after a prolonged Jewish revolt against the Roman occupiers. There is little point in us taking it

literally for today. But we get the gist. Seriously bad stuff is going to happen.

It seems to me that seriously bad stuff is already happening, and has been for a long time. The planet is getting hotter. Droughts are increasing in some places and torrential rain in others. The sea is rising, threatening to wipe out whole island nations. The war in Syria seems unlikely to ever end. There are more refugees today than at any time since the Second World War. Militant Islam is determined to make its mark with violence. Xenophobia – the fear of foreigners, and misogyny are on the rise. And the people of America have been, on the whole, apathetic.

It's difficult to remember the poor, the orphans and widows, when you are living the good life.

Quaker Parker Palmer writes,

“The good news — I hope — is that more of us can now empathize with our fellow citizens who've been wounded by a culture of cruelty. If people like me can admit our own new-found alienation, we might find the courage to join in the struggle for justice with those who have long been denied it.

People like me also need to empathize with folks who've been devastated by the loss of jobs, homes, and entire communities. Despite my personal history of actively caring about those on the margins — which led me to become a community organizer early in my adult life — I've been short on compassion for that subset of Trump supporters during this campaign. I've bypassed their rightful complaints in my rush to criticize their embrace of bogus solutions proposed by people who care only about their votes, not about their fates.¹

¹ <http://www.onbeing.org/blog/parker-palmer-our-november-surprise-i-predicted-the-winner/9033>

Jesus says that in the seriously bad times, we will have opportunities to testify. So this is a time of opportunity for us, not a time of defeat.

My hope is that this shocking Presidential election will help us to light a fire; a fire of compassion and a fire for social justice and love of the earth. My hope is that each of us will commit and re-commit ourselves to living the reign of God. My hope is that now we realize that our world is darker than we knew, we will be ready to hear God's promptings and will find places that we can work for the light.

HIneni, HIneni, I am ready Lord.

I end, as I began, with the words of Leonard Cohen.