

Finding our Voices

[Luke 1:5-25, 57-79](#)

Rev. Heather Leslie Hammer

Lynnewood United Methodist Church

November 20, 2016

On this Thanksgiving Sunday, the first words of our call to worship were "Praise God!" We must say our thanks and praise in response to God's amazing blessings. And that is really why we have come to church this week as we approach our national holiday, isn't it? To give thanks.

But there is more to say. And sometimes it's hard to find our voices. On the evening of November 8th as the election returns were announced, many people were speechless. No one had predicted the outcome. I heard more people say, "I can't believe it," than anything else. Half the country was thrown into deep shock. One pastor compared the feeling to September 11th. As in any time of mourning, many people contacted their loved ones with phone calls, texts, emails, and postings on social media. There wasn't that much to say; the feelings hadn't formed into words yet. Yet there seemed to be a physical need to reach out, to watch television and listen to the commentaries, and to join with people of common persuasion.

The morning after the election, I emailed my Swiss brother and sister and their spouses, where I had been an exchange student in high school. My Swiss sister-in-law, Madeleine, emailed back a quotation from Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist and writer we both appreciate. I paraphrase his quote in English:

"Every situation that one experiences is a call that one must respond to. That's how a situation gets its meaning. Our response gives the situation meaning. The challenge is for us to go on living in order to determine which response we will find. That is our assignment: to choose how to respond to the situation before us."

We all are in the process of determining what our response to the election will be. Some have already responded in protest. Although peaceful protest is one way to raise one's voice, blocking traffic is likely to anger the public rather than bring harmony. Of course, many are pleased with the election of Donald Trump. Whether you voted for the Republican candidate, or the Democratic candidate, or for another party candidate, or whether you did not vote for President, as a nation we have before us a new and potentially dangerous "situation." Half of the country is angry or deeply disappointed. Even those who voted for Donald Trump may be worried about how he will govern. How will we move forward in this tense situation?

I have been thinking about this question. How will I find my voice in response to this new political situation? And how will I challenge you to find your voices?

Because after our first emotions, we need to find a way to make meaning out of the new reality. What does the election mean for us now, moving forward?

Viktor Frankl said: "Ultimately, [one] should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather [one] must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each [person] is questioned by life; ...to life he can only respond by being responsible"

(https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Man%27s_Search_for_Meaning). Later President John F. Kennedy said something similar: "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country" (Inaugural Address, Jan. 28, 1961). We are in a unique situation in our country. What does this situation ask of us?

A blogger posted after the election on Tuesday later in the week: "The sun did come up on Wednesday" (Martha Slavin's blog 11-11-16).

The sun did come up! And we are still alive, and the reality is setting in. I think the speeches in the hours following the reporting of the election results by President-elect Trump, Secretary Clinton, and President Obama were quite gracious. These three set a tone for a peaceful transfer of power. I am grateful for that.

Our task is to find our voices in this period of transition.

Zechariah lost his voice. The story goes that he and Elizabeth had not been able to conceive a child. But at the Temple, the Angel Gabriel told him his wife would become pregnant, and he was to name the child John. Because Zechariah didn't believe the angel, he became mute. He lost his voice and could not speak for the whole nine months of the pregnancy. Then after the baby was born and the couple went to the Temple to name the child, Zechariah still couldn't speak. So he requested something to write on when they asked him what name was to be given the child, and he wrote the name "John" on a tablet. And then he found his voice! Until that moment when he held the baby in his arms and recognized him as a gift from God, Zechariah had been speechless. Then, Zechariah responded to the miracle of birth, and opened his mouth and spoke this hymn of praise. In Latin, it's called the "Benedictus," for *Benedictus Dominus Deus* (Blessed be the Lord God).

"Blessed be the Lord, God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them." And Zechariah spoke to his baby son, John: "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people, by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (1:68, 76-79). And, of course, John is known to us as John the Baptist, who grew up and baptized Jesus in the Jordan River.

Zechariah found his voice! He remembered about God, who had given him a child, and that this child would bring a promise of salvation. And in this hymn, he shared his belief that God would bring about a new dawn and light to those who sit in darkness.

The sun did come up! It came up in the form of hope, in the form of recognition that God will bring light.

And our task is to find our voices to herald that light.

This passage from Luke is like a sandwich. We read the part that is the bread today: Zechariah becoming mute, and Zechariah finding his voice. Mary's song, the Magnificat, is the meat in the middle of the sandwich. We'll read or sing that text in Advent. But here we have Zechariah speechless in disbelief and then in great voice when his belief in God returns to him.

Many people are in disbelief about the election. Many cannot accept the results. (You see that in protest signs: "He's not my president.") But if we look at the situation as the reality that we face—what is our response? Can we find our voices to bring about a new dawn and "light to those who live in darkness"? For just as the people in Jesus' day wanted hope in their political time, we also want a road to peace and harmony in our time, don't we?

What steps will we take to navigate that road?

The great anthropologist, Margaret Mead, said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

There are some things we can do to ease the tensions in this post-election time.

1. We can refrain from name calling. We can speak with respect. And we can ask our political leaders to speak with respect for all people: for women, for minority people, for immigrants, and for people with disabilities. We should lift our voices, using polite language, and ask for equal treatment for all. We, ourselves, can speak with respect, and we can demand respect from our leaders.
2. We can use peaceful channels of communication to work for the common good. We can write letters to the editor and post on social media. We can hold prayer meetings. We can share articles we find on the Internet that foster hope, not hatred. We can work with our interfaith community to stand for respect for all Americans and common decency in how we treat one another. We can protest against hate crimes, bullying, and derogatory remarks. We cannot let bigotry go unnoticed as if it is condoned.
3. We can stand in solidarity with those who want to work for the needs of people on the margins of our society. We can give to causes, like Heifer International in today's offering, or to scholarships for students unable to afford higher education. We can advocate for changes in our communities that bring more low-income housing and more jobs. We can become activists at this church, not just complacently attending, but working together that all people of every ethnicity or sexual orientation will feel welcome. Solidarity casts out fear. We can stand in solidarity that we are the body of Christ—a very diverse body—and that we will advocate for all our neighbors' wellbeing, whoever they are.

Jesus predicted the fall of the Temple. He said, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Luke 21:10). But he also said, "This will give you an opportunity

to testify....I will give you words and a wisdom that no one of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict....By your endurance you will gain your souls" (21:13, 15, 19).

Now more than ever our country needs love and justice and mercy. It needs courage and community. If you find yourself speechless at the foot of the cross, express your pain, but then move to the empty tomb and let your pain rise up as courage. Find your voice that stands for love and respect.

May the peace of Christ that passes understanding fill and guard your heart and mind today.