

“What’s Next?”
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The careful reader might have noticed that the title for this sermon shown in your order of service, “What’s Next?”, is different from the title previously advertized, “Toward a More Perfect Union.” That title, “Toward a More Perfect Union,” you probably recognized – I hope you did – as a phrase from the Preamble to the Constitution. After Tuesday, I just couldn’t go there. We seemed to have turned around and headed in the opposite direction. So some of you are expecting a repeat of the sermon I offered to you last January 10, which also bore the title “What’s Next?”, which was on the topic of what, if anything, comes next, when we die. No, I’m not doing that one again, but maybe death is the appropriate metaphor for what happened on Tuesday.

Let me pause here to remind you – and, especially, to remind myself – that all are welcome here, regardless of theological or political persuasion. We do not have to think alike to love alike. I do not assume that we all voted the same way on Tuesday. This is a safe place for everyone. I have not, from the pulpit, advocated in favor of any candidate or political party, though I have said, occasionally, if you want to know whom I support, read my bumper.

But I can now reveal – this may not surprise you – that I was a volunteer for Hilary. In the weeks before the election I made phone calls – mostly to answering machines, at best – and on this past Monday and Tuesday I spent a few hours each day walking around unfamiliar neighborhoods, ringing doorbells of the houses indicated on the printout, and, nine out of ten times, leaving stickers on the door when no one answered – stickers reminding them to vote and giving a phone to call if they didn’t know where their polling place was.

The Tuesday printout, I was told, listed registered voters who were Hillary supporters, but they were voters who we were not confident would actually go and vote. We were to ask them not only if they intended to vote, if they hadn’t already, but what their plan was for voting. Research had indicated, that voters with a concrete plan for voting were more likely actually to vote than voters who simply said they would vote.

Occasionally someone was actually at home. I had a few very pleasant conversations. I remember especially talking to the aunt of the person listed on the printout. She was there taking care of her niece’s two very young children, the older of whom was much more interested in Pilgrims and Indians than in who the next president would be.

I also met, early in the afternoon of election day, the person I hold responsible for the outcome of the election. The printout gave the age of the voters, and he was well into his 80's. I asked him if he had voted yet, and he said that he had not. He told me further that he would not vote – he didn’t like either candidate. He was unwilling to consider who might be the lesser of evils and vote for that person. It’s his fault. And the fault of others like him.

If God is dead, everything is permitted. That, if I remember accurately what I read in my freshman European literature class, was the thesis of a character in a Dostoevski novel. And if we consider God to be our ultimate concern, or our highest principles, I fear that God may now be dead for me.

Our first Unitarian Universalist principle affirms the dignity and worth of every person. Our fifth principle, which follows quite logically from the first, commits us to the use of the democratic process, both in our congregations and in society at large. But look at what the people have done! I'm beginning to think that a philosopher king – or queen – would be better. We had a foreshadowing of Tuesday's result in Brexit, the British vote to leave the European union, and in the unanimous jury verdict to acquit the Bundy group for their armed takeover of a federal facility in Oregon.

Still, my prayer is, that we may be "One nation, under God," that is, under our highest principles, "with liberty and justice for all."

Where do we go from here? What I propose is that we follow the example of the Unitarian Universalist Association. We are now in the midst of a campaign leading up to the election of the next president of the UUA, at next June's General Assembly in New Orleans – and I hope that several of you will be there; Kerry and I plan to attend. Since the last presidential election a new step has been added to the process. A committee now has the responsibility of nominating candidates for the presidency. Others can run by petition.

I recommend that our political parties do something comparable. A nominating committee, or search committee, would recruit the people they believe would be the best possible presidents and screen out those aspirants whom they consider less qualified, or totally unqualified. Others could run by petition, but they would lack that official endorsement. Who would be on this committee? you might ask. I haven't figured that out yet.

Along with this reform, I would shorten the campaign season for the party nominations from the current two or three years to not more than about ten to twelve weeks and provide public financing of campaigns.

Also, it's time to eliminate the electoral college and have the popular election of the president. It is not relevant that in this year's election the candidate second in electoral votes was first in the popular vote. Campaigns are based on the actual electoral system, not on alternative systems. The electoral college violates the one person, one vote principle by giving some of the electors based on the composition of the United States Senate, thus over representing states like Wyoming and under representing states like California. The electoral college system gives voters in swing states, like Pennsylvania, a greater voice than voters in predictable states, like Mississippi or California. Is that fair? I don't think so. And it could be worse, two states elect all but two of their electors by congressional district. If Pennsylvania adopted that system, with our gerrymandered districts, we would no longer be a swing state.

What if nobody gets a majority of the votes? Under the present system, if no candidate receives a majority in the electoral college, the election is kicked up to the House of Representatives, with one state, one vote. Fortunately, we haven't had to do it that way since 1825. With popular vote election we could elect the president by plurality, but I would suggest instead using the instant runoff method, with voters ranking the candidates. If your candidate comes in last, your second place candidate gets your vote. This would assure that the winner has majority support and, as a bonus, would give minor parties a better chance of gaining a foothold in our political system.

To make this popular vote system work fairly, we would have to have uniform nationwide standards and procedures. It would not be fair, for example, for one state to allow those in prison to vote while another doesn't, or for one state to have early voting while another has only same day voting, from 9 to 5.

You may have noticed that the order of service says that we'll not only consider what to do next as a nation, following Tuesday's election, but also what we should do next as individuals and as a congregation.

I'd like to hear what you have to say on those questions, but first let's sing another hymn.