

CHURCH SERVICE

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WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? A GUIDE FOR THRIVING

I do not know your experience, but November's election brought me to my knees. Going to bed with hope the night before, I awoke to find the election was long over. Shocked! Waves of disbelief, fear, anger, rage, and shutdown. It took me some time before I could begin to gain some perspective. What seems important as time passes is not what happened or even why it happened but to wonder what you and I can learn from this experience that will aid us in the days, months, and years ahead. This took me to two questions: What illusions have I been carrying about this country and my place in it that no longer serve me?

What must I do that will help me to meet the suffering that I anticipate – human suffering here and abroad and the suffering of the Earth and all her beings?

You will note that I used the word “thriving” in today's title and not the word “surviving.” Yes, structures will collapse, and chaos will reign; but to move forward, I do not want to limit myself or others merely to surviving. I want to think and act in ways that will grow me as a being of this planet. And I want the same for you. I am certain that we can only do this in community, in our reaching out to others to find common ground.

ILLUSIONS

I realize I have been living with an idealized version of America's democracy as taught to me in elementary school. I wonder if that is

so for you as well? The fight for freedom from British tyranny, the writing of the Star-Spangled Banner, Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War, the Statue of Liberty, the fight for freedom around the world – these and many other stories stirred my emotions as they were meant to do, programmed me into being citizen of this country, and helped blind me to the reality of this country’s manifestation of democracy.

The truth is that this nation falls far short of the ideals of democracy. As a nation, we are but teenagers in making the true meaning of democracy a reality in this country. When I can step back to see this, I can disengage from the parochial emotional attachments that were created when I was a child. It is both interesting and humbling to see how I have been carrying this unconscious attachment to childhood learning. In the more reasoned picture that emerges for me now, I can say I am first a being of the Universe, then a citizen of the World, then a citizen of a nation, and then a member of a family. My perspective has been turned upside down. To thrive, I do not want to be limited by my previous parochialism putting the United States first among nations.

I ask, “What illusions are you carrying? What beliefs about this country, about belonging no longer serve you? This is an important question to take with you as we all move forward into what lies ahead. We will be challenged repeatedly to look at our illusions about ourselves, our country, our leaders, and others.

THRIVING

I want to devote the remainder of my time to the question: “What must I do to that will help me to meet the suffering that I anticipate as an oligarchy is established? My idea is to make a list for self care as I anticipate an uncertain future. The list is a reminder to me of

what I can do to keep myself centered, to avoid despair, and to continue to grow myself forward. I offer this gift to you. There are 10 points with a brief comment about each. There is no order. I invite you to choose those that will be most helpful to you. Perhaps there is a way that your church can share them in written form with you if you are interested. Look at these as touchstones as together, we move forward into an uncertain future with an intention to thrive.

- 1. Re-connect with the Natural World.** We are of the Earth and we share it with all the beings on it, above it, and in it. The Natural World has much to teach us about living together in balance and without evil and greed. And it knows how to go into the darkness to find the ray of light that will show the way.
- 2. Make Time for Joy and Beauty.** The meanness in the world and our own inability to see oneself in another saps our strength, saps our hope, saps our courage and saps our very humanity. We will be lost if we allow this to happen. Persistently look for beauty every day – it is everywhere if we choose to see it – a smile, a Bach cantata, a sunrise or sunset, a snowfall, Monet's Water Lilies, a kind comment, a child's face. Where do you find beauty that reminds you that there is much joy to counterbalance the meanness around us?
- 3. Limit Your Social Media.** Social media feeds our worst predilections – judgment, comparisons, humiliation, shame - our baser emotions. Why engage in this? What does it contribute? Are there other ways to meet and know others? What did you do before social media? What does it say about us as human beings to be so addicted? Our addiction to social media separates us from everyday human interactions. It does not serve us. Though breaking the habit is difficult,

success may change your outlook. Begin with small steps or go cold turkey.

- 4. Diversify Your News Sources.** Over the span of these last few years, I have become aware of the biases within the fourth establishment. Prime examples are the limited and biased reporting on the Middle East and owners controlling what and how issues are covered. No longer do I wish to be caught up in news hype to sell products. Now I limit my access to the news and have looked for sources beyond the mainstream that offer more balanced coverage and may even present two-sides to an issue.
- 5. Connect with Like-Minded People.** First, we need to find people like us who are looking towards the future and comfortable with change. If, as structures fall and chaos is upon us and we isolate ourselves and feel like victims, we will be overwhelmed, depressed, and helpless. We must find our “tribe.” As challenging as it might be to break away from our independence and our do-it-alone mentality, risking reaching out to others and working together to build community will save us not weaken us. For many of us, this is a new challenge but do it we must. Make yourself do it. Trust your ability to grow this new dimension of yourself.
- 6. Expand Your Circle.** Once we have found our tribe and built our connections with others, we can then expand our circle by reaching out to others who are suffering and looking for ways to connect, to engage in conversations, to let go of old illusions, to create new beliefs and new actions that serve thriving and not just surviving. Our strength lies in connecting in ever larger circles of support and common ground.

- 7. Remember Who You Are.** It is easy to become lost in the chaos and suffering that I anticipate lie ahead. I have made a list of the 15 qualities that I value in myself. I have posted the list in my home, have put it on my phone, and have committed myself to checking it, if not daily, then a few times a week. Why? I want not to fall into the victim space which does not serve me while empowering others who might not have my best interests at heart. It is easy to forget who I am when I give my power away to others, thus I need to remember my resilience, my creativity, my courage, my compassion, and so forth. What are the qualities you honor in yourself? And how do you remember them when you are stressed and lost?
- 8. Use Your Imagination.** Playfulness and creativity are skills we had when we were young. It is time to return to them. Being able to think outside the box will be critical when all around you is changing. Journal what is happening, how you are feeling, and ideas for coping. Be an artist, be a storyteller, put words together in a new way, draw or paint a feeling and see where that leads you. You will be surprised by where your imagination will take you. Our willingness and ability to free ourselves from our structured thinking will be needed on the road ahead.
- 9. Be at Peace with Not Knowing.** As structures fall and that which we have trusted disappears, it will be easy to lose our center and flail around. Each of us prefers to be in control but, in reality, each of us only has control of oneself. It is important to remember that, to know how to re-center the self and to trust one's ability to respond to the new and unknown in thoughtful and creative ways. After all, in one's

lifetime, each of us has had countless opportunities for entering the new without knowing what lay ahead. You. We can do this. Celebrate the freedom that not knowing gives us.

10. Encounter the Darkness. Darkness lies ahead. Do not run away from it, run towards it. Let it drive your sensitivity to suffering and let it drive your moral imagination and compassion. Life is born in the darkness. It connects us to all that is life. The lightness cannot exist without our experiencing and knowing all of life – not just the good parts. It is this country's unwillingness to confront our actions towards people of color here and around the world which brings us to where we are today. Embrace the darkness and let it lead you to your moral foundation and your compassion for all that lives on this planet.

This is what I have to share with you today. The journey ahead is not easy. It has never been easy. The questions to consider are: What illusions am I carrying about this country and my place in it that no longer serve me? What must I do to care for myself, my friends and family, our Mother Earth and how will I put that into action? Will I be a victim or a thriver? Will I join with others in growing myself, my community, our planet? I hope to see you on the path ahead. Thank you.