

OPENING WORDS

We live within a great circle – a circle of time, a circle of seasons, an ever-expanding circle of community that encompasses all that is here on this planet and all that exists in the farthest reaches of the cosmos. To honor this circle, I invite the powers of the four directions: The East – Spring, sunrise, the place of inspiration and new beginnings, and the home of Eagle; The South – Summer, midday, the place of childhood, the place of innocence and trust, and the home of little mouse; The West – Fall, sunset, the place of adolescence; the place of the darkness and looking within, and the home of bear; and The North – Winter, night, the place of adulthood and bringing our gifts into community, the home of the ancestors and those yet to be born, and the home of snowy owl. Lastly, I turn to the Sun, the giver of warmth and light to our planet, and Mother Earth from which all life is born. I invite all these powers to hold us in sacred time and space as we gather.

WORDS FOR REFLECTION

There is enough for everyone's need, not for everyone's greed. Gandhi

SERMON

EMBRACING THE NEW NORMAL

I believe most would agree that 2020 and the early days of 2021 have been most difficult. These are some of my recollections:

- An awakening to racial injustice following the deaths of black men and women by police officers and a legal system's uneven application of the rule of law;
- A realization that white privilege has protected us and put all people of color in danger;
- A growing divide between the haves and have nots and a continued shrinking of the middle class;
- A world-wide pandemic with lockdowns, isolation, interrupted life patterns and the deaths of many;
- A growing debate about individual freedom and community safety and persistent efforts to denigrate science;

- Our government's callousness toward the daily loss of life and its unwillingness to address loss of income, homelessness, hunger, and the collapse of small businesses;
- The continued destruction of Mother Earth and her precious resources;
- Devastating wild fires, melting of polar ice, dizzying increase in hurricanes, destructive storms, and earthquakes and the resulting negative impact to humans and the Mother Earth;
- Constant reminders that power corrupts and that bullies prey on the weakest further magnifying the corruption of power.

I must admit it would be easy to become cynical, to recoil in fear, to be angry, to sink into helplessness and to point a finger of blame. Then I must remind myself that I live in a democracy. A democracy is not for the faint of heart. Our democracy was the first of its kind in the modern world and it was grounded in "We the People." Its citizens, not its rulers, were/are primary. As citizens we have certain inalienable rights and we have certain responsibilities as keepers of this democracy. And we must remember that a democracy is not a fixed thing but ever evolving. It is a reflection of our maturity and our immaturity, a reflection of our willingness to be responsible citizens and irresponsible members, a reflection of our ability to be compassionate and inclusive and exclusive and self-serving. A democracy is a reflection of us – all of our strengths and all of our warts. Each of us is a reflection of what it means to be members of a democracy.

Thus cynicism, fear, anger, helplessness, and blame are nothing more than actions for escaping our responsibilities as citizens. What do I mean when I say this? Well, it takes me to the families with whom I counsel. Those families struggling with teens who want many freedoms but are afraid to accept the responsibilities of those freedoms and run to mom or dad to fix the tight spots in which they find themselves. And I reflect on some of the adults who have come my way – adults who are adults chronologically but are still adolescents emotionally and psychically. They, too, come wanting something to be their way without taking any responsibility for moving things forward in a healthy way. A democracy invites us to be adults not only in our years but also emotionally and psychically. Growing responsibly into our maturity is an ongoing task for each of us.

When reflecting on these challenging times in our nation, I wonder what it requires of each of us to be a fully functioning adult today and arrive at these core questions.

- What are we to learn as a nation?

- What have I learned about myself during this time of chaos and destabilization?
- What can I change within me that might contribute to a more perfect union – a democracy of compassion, healing, and justice?

These are not easy questions for they demand of each of us a kind of truth-telling about who we are as a people and a willingness to point the finger at one's self to determine how each of us has contributed to what has gone on in these years.

So, to begin:

What are we as a nation to learn?

I know that most are awaiting the opportunity to return to “normal.” That thinking is dangerous for the Old Normal is what got us here. The Old Normal:

- Elected a leader willing to build upon pre-existing fears to build his own ego and bank account;
- Turned a blind eye to the ever-present injustices visited upon people of color as well as the indigenous peoples of this country while we enjoyed the privileges of being white;
- Continued to treat women as second-class citizens;
- Encouraged the ongoing rape of Mother Earth and her precious resources so that we could have bigger and better treasures and unlimited travel;
- Encouraged the few to aggrandize greater and greater wealth while leaving those at the other end of the economic continuum to decide which, if any, is more important – food, shelter, or health;
- Continued to victimize those in the LGBTQ community;
- Celebrated the young and glitzy while sidelining those who have experience and wisdom, the latter being much-needed commodities in this world;
- Kept in servitude those who served us through the pandemic – the healthcare workers, food service workers at all levels, and the first responders.

How can we possibly return to this Old Normal? Pandora's Box has been opened and we had better pay attention. I believe this is the most important teaching from these last years. We need a New Normal – a New Normal that incorporates what has been revealed to us with both clarity and gut-wrenching pain in this past year. A New Normal grounded in social, racial, economic, and ecological justice for all including Mother Earth.

There is hope and there is work to be done. In this last election, more women and men of color have been elected to office at all levels of government. We must have

the courage and the ears to listen even when their directness may be uncomfortable for us to hear. And we must be persistent in encouraging our representatives to listen, and to join their efforts at social, racial, economic, and ecological justice. Further, they must speak up to support kinder and more compassionate conversations and act to keep our brothers and sisters safe. Many receive weekly threats of harm and constant verbal and emotional abuse by those who wish to harm out of their own fear of a changing society and an evolving democracy.

We cannot rely upon a New Normal from the top down only. As responsible citizens we need to push from the bottom – the grassroots. We need to look at ourselves, our everyday choices and actions. We need to look at where we do business, what institutions we are supporting, how we contribute to global warming, and the ways we ignore the inequalities in our society. We as individuals must play our part in this ever-evolving democracy.

So, I turn to the second and third questions: What am I learning about myself? What can I change within me that can contribute to creating a nation of compassion, healing, and justice? I share as a way to invite you to do likewise.

- This year of the pandemic has given me ample time to think and assess a few significant questions. What do I value? How do I want to live? Is my work aligned with my values? What businesses do I support? What institutions do I want to support? How do I want to come full circle as I approach the end of my life?
- In August, I found myself asking, “When is enough money, enough money?” That led to significant changes in how I work with my clients and insurance companies. But that question, “When is enough, enough?” has reverberated in many aspects of my life in ways I could not have imagined in August. It is a provocative question with which to play.
- During this pandemic I have watched big technology companies profit while small businesses shuttered their doors. It seemed an obscenity that Amazon’s owner could make trillions of dollars of profit while kneeling on the necks of his employees and driving other businesses out of the marketplace. I am only one person but trust that others will feel similarly. I am boycotting Amazon and have decided that if I cannot find an item elsewhere then I will go without.
- Technology has come to profoundly impact our lives during the pandemic. In the first months I had to move my practice on-line. By July I could not abide it any longer and returned to in-person work with safe precautions. As we move beyond the pandemic, we must weigh carefully where technology will

continue to help and where it will erode human interaction, socialization, and connection. It is all too easy to hide behind a screen for the sake of convenience and avoidance.

- I have saved many gallons of gas during these months. Both my pocketbook and Mother Earth are happier. I have learned how to plan and use my time and car more wisely. Now trips are planned, infrequent, much more productive, and cost-saving.
- I have missed my breakfast and lunch get-togethers with friends and colleagues but have appreciated our creativity in keeping connected via backyard, outdoor, and parking lot meetings without having to rely on Skype, Zoom, and Facetime. I want to continue to be creative in fostering our human connections?
- Being “grounded” from all the rushing around has brought me back to myself. Not only has the time resulted in self-assessment but I have returned to many of the activities that once brought pleasure but had discarded as I filled my life with other things. I want to continue with those things in my life – I want to run less, think more, and act with discernment.
- Black Lives Matter has brought me face-to-face with my white privilege. At first, I found myself reacting with Women’s Lives Matter in support of being a female living in a male-dominated society. I then reflected on how easy it is to react from our safe but unexamined positions. It took a willingness to read, to listen, to reflect to understand the privileges I have had over my lifetime based solely on the whiteness of my skin.
- Lastly, there has been time to reflect on coming full circle. As I move closer to leaving this plane of existence, I have had the time to consider what no longer serves, what I can let go of so that I can make the most of the days and, hopefully, the years that still lie ahead.

I opened this morning with a reflection upon the circle. All things live in a circle. For example, we move from birth to childhood to adolescence to adulthood to elderhood to death and then a new beginning. So too with a democracy. Our democracy is a reflection of its population. We as a population have not attained adulthood psychically nor emotionally thus our democracy remains in its adolescence at best. There is work to be done.

I say again that democracy is not for the faint of heart. Democracy is always in process just as each of us is always in process. So now I turn to you and ask: What have you learned about yourself during these troubled times? How have you matured? How will you show up in this New Normal? Give yourself and all of us the gift of your reflections and your commitment to making the New

Normal one that offers social, racial, economic, and ecological justice for all. It is the gift that will grow our democracy.

CLOSING

In closing I would like to offer two quotes to take with you:

Only that which changes remains. Carl Jung

And so the world watches America – to see if our experiment in democracy can work. To see if we can do what no other nation has ever done. To see if we can actually live up to the meaning of our creed. Barack Obama

In the days and months ahead, I invite each of us to grow into the fullness of our being, to put aside our fears, to accept the challenges of living together in an imperfect democracy, and to living up to the meaning of our creed. Go in Peace. I release the circle.