

October 19, 2014

I'm going to be out of town on Election day,
I have an annual minister's study group in Southern Illinois.
So I went in Thursday morning to vote.
Filled out my ballot, page one, turned the page, filled it out,
looked at it, and thought, um. Wait a minute.
Something's not right.
Went up the counter, and said, um, we've got a problem.
You're missing an election.

Maybe you saw this in the paper Friday,
how the election error: the missing Forest Preserve Commissioner race,
was caught by a voter who asked about?
That was me.
I have a friend running for the office, and I was excited to vote for her,
but she wasn't on my ballot.
Now, this problem is going to be solved.
I'm going to have to go back in next week and try again.

But, you know, that wasn't the only problem with the ballot.
It was the only one I could complain about in the office, and have them fix,
but it wasn't the only problem with the ballot.

Some races, only one person was running.
The district is so gerrymandered that there's no point of a challenge.
Even when there were three candidates,
we all know that other folks [d black] tried to get on the ballot,

but that's pretty hard to do in Illinois.

There's a measure to increase the minimum wage,
but it won't actually do anything, it's just advisory.

But the biggest problem with the ballot isn't on it,
it's not a missing election, or a missing name.

It's that it all feels so futile.

Like we're limiting the damage, but we're not making progress.

That the game is rigged,
that the players are bought and sold.

That even when good people take office,
there's not much they seem to be able to do.

We get distracted by this and that,
and we yell at each other,

but I want to know,

where on the ballot do we mourn the death of Michael Brown, killed in Ferguson, MO,
or John Crawford, killed in the aisles of the Walmart in suburban Ohio,
or the hundreds of other young men and women shot dead, unarmed, by police?

Where on the ballot do I honor, as Afaa Michael Weaver put it,

"these feet that marched and ran and got cut off, these hearts

torn out of chests by nameless thieves,"
where do I do that?

Where do we, as a nation, confess and make amends for hundreds of years of genocide, theft, and
violence towards people of color, in our own lands and in others?

Where on the ballot to the people of Bangladesh, or the south pacific,
get to vote?

Since our refusal to be serious about climate change will put their country underwater,
shouldn't they get a say?

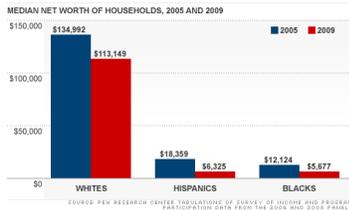
Where on the ballot do we get to say,
this economic system isn't working for us?

Where do we say, a higher minimum wage might be fine, but that won't address the worldwide
plutocracy that seems to have taken over?

Where on the ballot do we get to say
look at this chart?

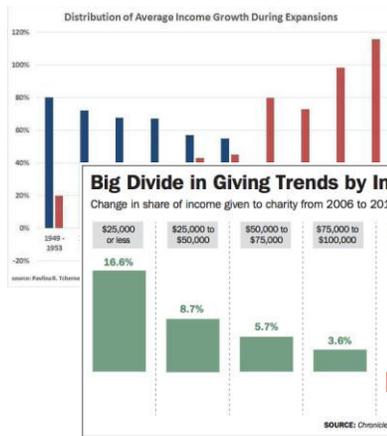
This one:

This one that shows the changes in net worth in the great recession, but even more shows the effects of slavery, Jim Crow, housing and employment discrimination. Where on the ballot do we get to say, this is unconscionable?



by
Where on the ballot to we get to say, every politician, every American, should read this essay, Ta-Nashi Coats, The Case for Reparations - you should too - which explains why that chart is the way it is, that it isn't an accident.

Where on the ballot do we vote that something needs to be done about this,



because our conscience will not rest until it is?
Where on the ballot do we get to talk about dramatic income inequality?
How this so-called recovery isn't, for most folks?
About this chart?

That shows how for 90% of Americans, actual income growth is down - that it's only up for the top 10%, and though some might be having a "recovery" most of us sure as hell aren't?

Where do we get to vote about that?

And do we get to vote about this?

How even as the most wealthy are making more and more money, they are giving less to charity, while everybody else is giving more — even though they're making less?

Can we vote about that?

Because I know a lot of non-profit leaders and church leaders

and folks in need of social services who'd like to talk about that.

Who'd like to have a vote about that.

I could go on.

I'm just getting warmed up, really.

But suffice it to say, the missing forest preserve race wasn't the only thing missing from the ballot.

Suffice it to say, our politics, our economic system, our civic life,
stands in desperate need of renewal.

We need to renew our common life together,
to recenter our conversations on what is most essential,
to stand up for human dignity for everyone,
for opportunity for everyone,
for justice and fairness and what's right.

We need to renew our common life together,
and it isn't going to happen by filling out a ballot -
though you should still go and do that,
because if you don't do at least that, it's just gonna get worse.

But a ballot by itself isn't going to cut it,
not for the work of renewal that is before us,
for that we need something more, something powerful,
we need faith.

A commitment to higher values.

A hope that things can get better, and a determination to be part of the solution.

Knowledge that the struggle takes time,
but that the arc of history does bend, when we help, towards justice.

We need hope, and we need courage.

And we should know that our hope, our courage, is justified. It is.

It's been a long, a long time coming.

But a change is gonna come.

This hope, this aspiration, this belief,
a change is gonna come,
even if it's been a long time coming,
this hope is at the core of American progressive religious thinking.
It is our most essential attitude; our hope and courage is justified.
yes, we can,
si, sue puede,
we can make the world better,
we can improve things,
we can change things,
with hard work, struggle, persistence, honesty, and most of all, love,
with love, we can change things for the better.

This is the story we tell ourselves about who we are,
we lift up those spiritual ancestors of ours:
the abolitionists and the suffragists,
the civil rights leaders and the environmentalists,
the gay rights pioneers and the advocates for the poor.
These, who joined together, and made a difference:
it's been a long time coming,
but a change is gonna come.

We stand on the shoulders of giants.
And this is our source of hope.
In the midst of struggle, we believe in change.
In the power of good people to make things better.
In the inexorable force of justice to overcome oppression.
In the power of life to break through concrete sidewalks and bloom.
This is our source of hope,
and there are times, we should note, there are times,

that our hope feels justified.

There are times we win.

There are times we win.

And sometimes we forget that we did;

we get so wrapped up in the next fight that we don't pause to celebrate.

So before you get too overwhelmed by the struggle,

remember, celebrate, we just won a big one.

I'm talking about marriage equality.

Couples are getting married, after decades together in many cases,

in Arizona, and West Virginia, and Wyoming, and Wisconsin, and Indiana.

The writing's been on the wall on this for at least a decade,

once Massachusetts did it, it felt possible;

when Iowa made it real, you knew it was just a matter of time.

But that was quick, wasn't it?

We forget how quick this change happened,

and Andrew Sullivan reminds us how it happened:

people came out.

They told their stories.

Real life, real people.

That's how it happened,

the moral majority for the dignity of every person's capacity to love and be loved.

I love the way that Andrew Sullivan calls this "the moral majority"

— the new moral majority.

We won. Pat Robertson lost.

And we're not going to gloat, at least not too much. Just a little bit.

Fight's not over, more to do.

Parenting rights aren't equal yet, and Trans* folks are still very vulnerable to discrimination and violence. More work, but let's remember, this is a big win.

Sometimes, our hope is justified.

Sometimes, love wins.

The civic covenant is expanded.

Unfortunately, it seems that racism and greed is a lot harder to defeat than heterosexism.

Racism is engrained into American life in a way that Heterosexism just isn't.

Racism remains persistent, creative, insidious, and interwoven into American civic life.

Because gay and lesbian people turn out to be, well, everywhere,
in each family, eventually, folks had to say, well, I guess they are like us.

But for a lot of white folks, people of color will never be "like us."

Always something other.

And, here's the kicker, here's the essential piece of understanding,
racism is a tool of power and greed, the power of economic elites, and political control;
the very idea of race was created to justify and solidify economic power,
to divide the working classes from each other,
and racism was and is carefully taught,
to maintain the social system; fear, in particular, fear of the young black man,
this fear is cultivated, on purpose, to distract working-class white folks
from the injustice of the social order, to maintain support for systems of control,
as a way to say to poor whites:
don't complain, it could be worse: you could be black.

Fear is the powerful tool of oppression.

Draw a straight line.

From plantation owners who said "fear the slave rebellion!"

to Jim Crow, and mass incarceration, Willie Horton,

to Michael Brown and John Crawford.

Big protests last weekend about that; but what dominates the news? Ebola.

38,000 people die of the flu every year.

But let's all panic about Ebola, that's scary,

that's — oh right, that's from Africa.

It seems very clear to me, as I look out over this country,
where we are, right now, that this unfinished work,
of ending racism, of fighting it, tooth and nail,
whether we find it in our own hearts or in others,
down the block or across the country,

this work must be, is, at the core of what we mean
when we are called to renew our common life.

That our task is this:

to steal back the sun from the greedy Wendigo,
and share it with everyone,
even if that act of transgression turns
those of us who look like white ravens
black.

That's what solidarity looks like.

We must connect the dots between racism, classism, and misogyny,
for they are connected, a three-headed medusa of disenfranchisement,
and this is our work,

to renew our civic life,
to sing and pray and step until peace and justice
and democracy is for everyone.

Until democracy means what we say it means:
that everyone gets to participate in the civic life,
that civic authorities, especially the police,
treat everyone equally, with dignity, even, yes, even,
unarmed black teenagers.

Until that ballot matters, really matters, isn't a sham,
until elections are won by the best ideas, not the highest bidder,
until we deal with the horrific legacy of the past, and the present,
with respect to wealth and power,
until that day, our work for renewal must continue.

We are singing, we are angry, but we will be gentle,
and we are singing for our lives - our lives,
not "theirs", for it is our most fundamental Universalist conviction
that we are each kin unto each other,
each and every one of us, our lives, ours, bound together.

The ancient Hebrew prophets spoke of the responsibility of people of faith to renew the civic life, to do
justice.

They said, God cares for the poor, the immigrant, the orphan, the widow.

The one left out, that's the one that God cares for.

And they said, that's our work,
to care for the ones left out.

To ensure that the kingdom, the nation, the city, the neighborhood,
the world,

is a world that includes each one, for each one is a child of the holy,
each one has dignity.

And those ancient Hebrew prophets said,
it will come;

a change, a long time coming, but it comes,
and we, we help bend the arc.

We do the work of the world, to renew our lives together,
to raise up devastations of old,
to heal the sick and release the prisoner,
to make justice roll down like waters,
to make love the spirit of the world,

to have hope and courage,
this our work, this is our calling, this is what we need to vote for,
not just on paper, but in life, in our hands and hearts,
this is our work.

So I tell you, have hope, have courage,
see clearly, don't give up, engage the world,
renew the world, be the change you wish to see,
sing for our lives, all of them,
take another step, have hope,
have courage,
and let us renew this world, this place,
and let us begin together.
And let us sing.