

“Out of the darkness”

Election 2008: “that we may all be one” (John 17:21)

November 9, 2008

Text: Amos 5:18-24, Matthew 25:1-13

I.

Well, the madness, the craziness, and the hype of *election 2008* are over. And, at last, there’s good news. Everybody won. Everybody won because America won. For those who voted, there were no losers on election Tuesday, only victors.

After endless lines and at times fretful waiting (some people waited more than eight hours), a national election was held with record numbers of Americans casting votes. The lines were a wonderful diversity of ethnicity, religion, and age—you name it.

Personally, I drove an older Italian couple to the polls. They spoke no English; we communicated in Spanish. And although her health was poor, they were determined to vote.

Across the country, people of all stripes were casting ballots for their candidate (millions for the first time), promoting their cause through countless hours of volunteering. And wrapped around it all was the fresh air of HOPE. Hope is what America is about.

In Grant Park in Chicago—named after Civil War hero, Ulysses S. Grant (how appropriate for this occasion), who was also the 18th President of the United States—as the results came pouring in, snapshots of hope were everywhere.

A rainbow of people were crying—tears of inexpressible joy ... rising up, no doubt, out of years of struggle, but also out of a stunning disbelief. Did this really happen? Are we really experiencing what we seem to be experiencing? A young black man—our new President-elect—with his African-American wife and his gorgeous little girls ... standing before us ... waving as our adulation is showered upon them. Surreal!

II.

There were no losers on Tuesday night; only a nation of winners and an international community of admirers. This is America at our best. We campaign hard, we go to the polls and vote, and then we move on.

We Americans have a tremendous capacity to imagine and to endure and to pull ourselves up. During the Revolutionary War, when Washington’s men were freezing at Valley Forge, **Tom Paine** told his fellow Americans: ***We have it in our power to begin the world over again.*** And so we do; and this past Tuesday, we tapped into the power

once again.

For *out of the darkness*, a new day is born. A day when we can imagine, more than ever before, a post-racial America, an America with a new resolve to be redeemed of our awful sin of slavery.

The reality of slavery in America has forever stained the spirit of our nation.

1. It has kept us from realizing the highest ideals of our *Constitution* and from faithfully living out our most *sacred writings* in the Holy Bible.
2. But now, although glimpses of racism still exist, we wake up this morning a little more evolved and whole lot more redeemed.

As the spirit hovers over our planet, God is on the move; and the high hope of our American spirit reminds us once again that *the night cannot forever hold back the dawn*.

III.

In surfing the Internet on November 5th, the day after the election, I was struck by an article written by **Peggy Wallace Kennedy**.

Peggy Wallace's father was former Alabama Governor, **George Wallace**, the ardent segregationist of the 50's and 60's, a man who for years symbolized the ugliness of racism in America. It was Governors like him and others who stood defiantly in support of a culture of segregation, repression, violence and blatant denial of basic human rights.

Her article spoke about how she had been to the cemetery to visit the graves of her deceased parents—both, actually, former Governors of Alabama. An admirer of her parents had run up to her, with lofty words about her parents.

And the article pointed out how the woman had probably NOT noticed the **Barack Obama** sticker on her bumper. And then Peggy Wallace explained ...

Four years ago, the young Illinois senator who spoke at the Democratic National Convention mesmerized me. I hoped even then that he would one day be my president.

She went on to point out now, in her father's later years, a transformation had taken place in his spirit ... to where she wondered ... if he were alive today, would he have marked an X in the box next to Obama's name? He well might have, she mused.

IV.

Out of the darkness, HOPE rises up. A unifying spirit fills the morning air. The voice of

the prophet cannot be held back.

From Third Isaiah:

*Arise and shine; for your light has come,
And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*

*For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples;
But the Lord will rise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.*

*Nations shall come to your light,
And kings to the brightness of your dawn.*

And now, in the glow of election Tuesday, the voice of the international community sounds out. Around the planet, exhilaration and hope are rekindled ... as a new spirit with a new openness to diversity has won the day.

Arise and shine; for your light has come, says the prophet. *And nations shall come to your light.*

It's already happening.

V.

A couple of things, here, friends.

First, the world needs a strong America—an America with informed, enlightened leadership; and that means leadership that *gets it*. To *get it*, America has to listen and be humble; and we have to care with a compassionate spirit. We live in a global world, a world that is every day shrinking and increasingly interdependent ...

- a world where excessive nationalism and impulses of empire have no place.
- And a world, too, where the winds of religious fanaticism must be calmed and eradicated—be they Islamic extremism or the narrow and exclusivist Christian right—right here in America.

An America with a President Obama will *get this*. And why would this be? (And this is the second point.) Because look at Barack Obama.

- He's half black, he's half white.
- As a child, he lived in Indonesia for four years—the most populous Islamic country on the planet.
- While he was never a Muslim himself, he has relatives who are.

This is why his election is so important. CHECK IT OUT!

1. President-elect Obama has a sister, Maya Soetoro-Ng (same mother, different father). She's a 36-year old teacher who describes herself as *half white, half Asian ...a hybrid*. She is Buddhist, married to a Chinese Canadian, the mother of a two-year old, and a woman who is so routinely identified as a Latina that she learned Spanish.
2. Our new President-elect has a grandmother living in a hut on the shores of Lake Victoria in Kenya and any number of relatives native to that African nation as well.

In other words, he has a sensitivity to diversity that will help him lead us in ways that are almost unimaginable.

Could God have designed a better candidate to lead our great nation in these times? President-elect Obama can't help his gifts of diversity. Again, he was born with them—these inborn sensitivities that reach around the globe. More than ever, we need that in our leader.

We've got two wars to untangle amidst the ongoing menace of Al Qaeda and the Taliban. There are 1.1 billion Muslims on this earth and we've got to find ways of working with them to permanently eradicate these violent elements.

The path before us must emphasize diplomacy. It must emphasize an empowering of regional governments in pursuit of solutions.

VI.

Arise and shine, says the prophet, for your light has come. And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. And nations shall come to your light.

This is not a rejection of one candidate or another. It is not a debunking of one political party or another. It is a resounding affirmation that ***this is our time***—time for our nation with our new, multi-cultural and multi-racial President, to embrace the world and to show the way.

- For we **MUST** find ways of coming together ... and we will.
- We **MUST** find ways of uncovering the common good in our spirit ... and we will.
- We **MUST** find ways of saving the planet together, of avoiding catastrophic war together ... and we will.
- We **MUST** find ways of sharing the pie (the resources of the planet) ... and we will.
- And we **MUST** find ways of restoring and strengthening our global economy ... and we will.

Out of the darkness, The words from the **Apostle Paul** from **Galatians 3** sound out:

*There is no longer Jew or Greek ... there is no longer slave or free ...
There is no longer male and female ... for all of you are ONE in Christ Jesus.*

Out of the darkness, the light of a new day is born. It is the light of an unyielding HOPE that cannot be held back. The life-blood of hope is a humble spirit, a spirit that sees the BIG PICTURE and the inter-relatedness of things.

VII.

Jesus' question for us in the parable from **Matthew 25** is a simple question: ***Are we wise or foolish?***

The foolish are short-sighted, self-absorbed and seldom see the BIG PICTURE. They seldom have what they need when the need it ... and again and again, failure knocks on their door. In the parable, their lamps were burning, but their flasks of oil were empty. They weren't prepared.

The wise, on the other hand, plan ahead, think ahead and anticipate possible consequences. For them, HOPE is not luck or some random coming together of events. HOPE is the blending of faith, imagination and resolve. Their flasks were full. They were prepared for whatever the future brought.

Friends, it is this HOPE that is sweeping across our land; for as a nation, ***out of the darkness***, with all that is on our plate in these times, we are on the edge of finding our way.

The spirit of a new unity is in the air. You can feel it. You can see it. You can almost reach out and touch it. Black people, white people, brown people, yellow people, red people—all the hues of the rainbow.

Looking at each other now, we see each other a little differently. And now, the closing words of our pledge ring even more true; that we are ... ***one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all.*** O what a day!

1. In a small town in Pennsylvania, a young woman name Allison echoed the thoughts of millions: ***It's the best day of my life.***
2. In Arlington, Texas, Kenyan born Rebecca picked up her American-born, three year old son and said to him—realizing he would probably not understand: ***no more excuses, okay! You can be anything you want to be.***
3. In New York, middle aged Amy struck a chord that many of us felt: ***Thank you, Barack Obama for awakening the AMERICA in all of us.***

And so, *out of the darkness*, new light is come. Hang on America. I know that times are tough. And they may get worse in the months ahead. But our lamps are burning and our flasks are full of oil. And little by little, our prayers are being answered:

Let justice roll down like waters ... and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream, said the prophet Amos.

For indeed ... *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all people are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.*

May God bless our nation as we seek to find our way in the days before us.

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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