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When God Shouts

Mea culpa and discipleship in the face of an impending Trump presidency.

Nov. 15, 2016

“To sin by silence, when we should protest, makes cowards out of men.”

- Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Like many of you I woke up the morning after the election in a state of shock. For eight years we've been under the leadership of our first African-American president—a man of character, compassion, and vision, and a Nobel Laureate. Our First Lady has been the very embodiment of grace and dignity, and a graduate of Princeton (BA), and Harvard (Juris Doctor). Now, standing on those august shoulders We the People of the United States of America just gave leadership of the free world, and control of its largest thermonuclear arsenal to... *a racist, misogynist, reality TV host...* with a history of sexual assault, and the only POTUS candidate in our history to be openly endorsed by the KKK, a former head of the KGB, and the government of North Korea, the world's most brutally repressive Communist regime. And our new First Lady...? A former men's magazine *nude model* (I hear the Brit's are now referring to it as the "Ogle Office"). For days I've been asking myself how we got to this place.

How could a nation founded on Liberty and Justice for ALL disgrace itself like this...? And in the same week it celebrated Veteran's Day in honor of the men and women who DIED protecting those things?

Now I find myself looking in the mirror and asking, "Really? What exactly did we expect...?"

I'd like to have a nickel for every time I've heard pollsters and "progressives" (more on that label shortly) say they were "stunned" or "shocked" and frankly I'm tired of hearing it. Let's be honest... the only reason we were stunned was because we've been living in a BUBBLE of our own making... and more importantly, one that shut out nearly half our nation and left them in the cold, without a voice we were willing to listen to. For years we skipped happily along our yellow brick road singing sweet ballads of "progress." NAFTA opened trade doors, tech boomed, the Internet brought with it a brave new world, and "diversity" flourished. Economies grew as jobs moved overseas, foreign citizens flooded in to take urban jobs in new industries, etc. etc. etc. I'm not suggesting any of that was *bad per se*. We still have a long ways to go, but we've also come a long ways as well and much economic and social progress has been made. Now I don't have the slightest idea whether NAFTA and similar treaties were good ideas—I'm a physicist and tech guy by training, and in no position to speak to such matters. But given the latter I've clearly benefitted from the shifting landscape, as has my community and many others who've enjoyed the blessings of gentrified urban population centers.

But... while all this manna from heaven was bestowed on some of us, a growing sector of our society was being left behind. As corporations flourished in the new global economy, jobs at home evaporated... a "rust" belt grew... health care and college education became increasingly expensive and for many, out of reach... and before long entire regions and their communities crumbled. By some estimates our productivity (per GDP and other measures) *doubled* over the last 20+ years, but during the same period something like 80-90% of the total wealth we generated ended up in the hands of a few percent of us... and tens of millions of our fellow citizens watched helplessly as the sun set on their children's future.

What did the rest of us do...? Basically, *not a damn thing!*

Yes, we made some token gestures—we gave them a few hundred bucks off taxes here and there, a little bailout money to one or two industries, and of course, our rambling op-ed. But it was little more than fun-pack trick-or-treat candy. We went right on electing leaders who preferred political food-fights and deadlock to working together. A leader with character and vision who actually SAW what was happening rose up in the Democratic Party and rallied behind him a clear majority of support (including many of them). What did we do...? We sat back and watched while the head of the Democratic National Committee, with an agenda of her own, saw to it that the party nomination went instead to a woman who was the poster child of 20+ years of status quo, and... [wait for it] ... *the wife of the man who pushed through the very trade agreements that sent their jobs overseas.*

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Did we listen to them...? Did we hear their despair...? Did we even see their tears, much less walk beside them and do our best to dry them...? No. If we "listened" at all, it was only to reply to them from our ideological play-books. We never really had the slightest interest in *understanding* them. And let's not forget all the fun we had at their expense... they were a never-ending source of fodder for Facebook memes, and for Bill Maher and Comedy Central a gift that kept on giving. Even as our very legitimate concerns about Trump's character and behavior grew, our bubble thickened, until even nationwide pollsters stopped paying attention. They had become invisible.

And surprise, surprise! The chickens came home to roost...

Marginalize millions of our fellow citizens long enough, leave them out in the cold without names, faces, or voices, and sooner or later they WILL find a way to be heard... *even if it means going to the polls and firing a rocket propelled grenade across our land.*

It's been said that God whispers to us in joy, speaks to us in pain, and shouts at us in tragedy. Well, guess what folks... when God shouts it's because we had it coming.

If there's anything I've gotten more sick of over the last week than the word "stunned," it's all the tiring Shakespearean soliloquies about Trump's alleged rise to power on a tide of Confederate flag-waving zealots longing for a return to "racist" and "patriarchal" empire. To be sure, some of it was... Lord knows there's no shortage of misogynists and racists in our ranks (more on that shortly as well)—the man was endorsed by the KKK after all. But beyond that, I call bullshit. I know a LOT of people, family and friends alike, who unlike me voted for Trump. Not one wasn't as revolted by his racism, his treatment of women, and his propensity for emotional and spiritual violence as I was, and had no reservations about voting for him... NOT ONE. And I've seen no credible exit poll data that suggests otherwise for the vast majority of his voter base either.

In 1970 Johnny Cash released a song called "What is Truth?" about my generation's struggles with the shifting winds of culture we grew up in. He sings,

"The old man turned off the radio
Said, 'Where did all of the old songs go
Kids sure play funny music these days
They play it in the strangest ways'
Said, 'it looks to me like they've all gone wild
It was peaceful back when I was a child'

To which he replies,

"Well, man, could it be that the girls and boys
Are trying to be heard above YOUR noise...?"

Today we've come full circle and the shoe is on the other foot. In the end, Trump wasn't elected by "racists" or "patriarchy..." He was elected by people who care as much about their children's future as we do, and saw no other way to be heard above OUR noise. And our God, who loves them as much as He loves us, decided the time had come for the bubble to burst... *and shouted.*

I'm not saying Trump voters aren't culpable for his rise to power. I'm saying that WE are as well... at least as much, if not more. This is on ALL of us folks... this is on ME!

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Speaking of the guy in the mirror, what better a place to start? No problem was ever solved by the mere assignment of blame, and I'm not going to waste any more time doing so. The change doesn't begin with liberals, conservatives, men, women... "Us" or "them." It begins with ME.

So without further ado, here's how I plan on surviving the next four years, and doing what I can to help close Pandora's Box and get us to the other side with a minimum of spilled innocent blood...

1) I'm declaring myself a Citizen... in the truest sense of that word, not the legal one

Though technically I fit them, I've never been very comfortable with labels like "progressive" or "liberal." The former presumes that anyone who disagrees with me (or my vote) is de facto "backward"—an illiterate, drooling, ball-scratching Neanderthal with a splintered club—and the latter, an open-mindedness and tolerance for which I find precious little evidence on my side of the political fence, or (ouch!) in myself. Today I am no longer uncomfortable with these labels... I disavow them altogether. Henceforth, I am a card-carrying *Citizen* and *Human Being* (the paperwork should arrive any day now). According to the latest U.S. Census figures, there are some 324,707,000 others in my camp.

2) I'm going to listen to my fellow citizens to understand them, not just to reply

On election night Far-Right talk show host Glenn Beck was one of NBC's guest commentators. Beck, who like Rush Limbaugh, Michael Savage, Ann Coulter, and others, has a long history of purveying obscurantist agitprop and bizarre conspiracy theories, recently broke rank with his colleagues by announcing that he could no longer morally justify supporting Trump. After reiterating as much he told NBC that he was as stunned by the unfolding vote counts as they were. He seemed pensive and saddened... more so than I've ever seen him be. After reflecting for a moment, he said he now realizes that he's spent years preaching at others without truly listening to them. "I don't think we've listened to each other at all, and I know I've been at fault on this," he said...

"On both sides, the parties have to realize now, 'Boy we need to start reflecting the people and listening to the people.' Because the people are entering a time as we're seeing tonight beyond reason. They're not listening. And when you get into so much fear and so much anger, the mind's mechanism is to just shut down reason and they're not listening to reason—and we have got to find our way to each other."

He went on to say that from now on he's not going to consider his own views until he's listened enough to truly *understand* where others are coming from. "We have to start listening to people," he concluded. "If we don't, we're in trouble." I have to admit, I was blown away... and more importantly, HUMBLED. I've always had a tendency to do this—listen to others not to understand them, but only to know how I was going to reply. I've tried to correct for it, but I now realize I haven't worked hard enough. So, like Glenn Beck, from now on I will not speak, nor offer my views to others until I've done my best to understand theirs first. And if I'm told I haven't, then I will remain silent (that's right... SILENT) until they tell me I have. Those of you who know me best will realize how exceedingly difficult this is going to be for me. Ergo, if you please, I'm going to need a LOT of help... especially from those of you who didn't vote the way I did. [Now, if we can just get folks on the Left like Bill Maher to do the same thing... :-)]

3) I'm going to guard the integrity of my words

It's too easily forgotten that words are sacred. They have the power to heal or wound, to reveal or obfuscate, to bring light or darkness... and what we do with them *matters*. Too many of us are careless with them. We use them as weapons instead of vehicles for truth. We throw them around like rhetorical confetti... without realizing that we're cheapening them in the process. I've seen people branded "racists" because they didn't vote for Obama, or because they're as upset by the arbitrary gunning down of white police officers as they are by the senseless shooting of unarmed black men in hoodies. I've seen people called "homophobes" because they're uncomfortable in transgendered bathrooms. I've been accused of "patriarchy" and "misogyny" for literally no other reason than that I was born male (which BTW, was not by choice). Use words like this whenever someone disagrees with us, and soon they'll be watered down to where they apply to no one... and when a someone who actually IS racist and misogynist rises to power, and begins talking about rounding up non-white Muslims and putting them in internment camps or deporting them to war zones, they won't have the authority they'll so desperately need. I cannot afford to be careless with mine any longer. With the impending storm upon us, they're going to need every ounce of authority and light I'm able to give them.

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4) I will be more intolerant than ever of evil... but not people

It must never be forgotten that being intolerant of evil attitudes and institutions is NOT the same thing as being intolerant of the human souls who knowingly or not, legitimize and empower them. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said,

"I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me."

He said this while speaking out against the Nazi's (who BTW, rose to power under cultural and economic circumstances strikingly similar to ours today). He also said,

"Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness, and pride of power, and with its plea for the weak. Christians are doing too little to make these points clear ... Christendom adjusts itself far too easily to the worship of power. Christians should give more offense, shock the world far more, than they are doing now."

"We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself."

He was eventually martyred for this stance... for praying for his enemies, while driving a spoke into the wheel of injustice. Just as our Lord was crucified for speaking out against the Pharisees—people that I guarantee you He loved. This isn't "hate" or "sour grapes..." it's DISCIPLESHIP.

5) Finally, I'm going to do what I can to take back the Republican and Democratic parties

We must reclaim them from their more extremist, self-centered constituents, and restore them to what they were meant to be... and once *were* before we abdicated responsibility for them. [Some may think me harsh, but to save my life I cannot understand why Debbie Wasserman Schultz only had to step down from her job as head of the DNC. Can someone please explain to me WHY she isn't in prison for vote tampering or treason???]

I can't say if Trump will follow through on most of his campaign "promises" to his voters (mercifully, as of this writing he's reneging on many already). But if he follows through on even a fraction of them, & runs the country the way he's run his businesses, reality shows, & personal life for the last 20 years, we are about to enter an age of unholy meanness, persecution, & injustice unlike any since the McCarthy era. Within 3 days of the election the Southern Poverty Law Center & Anti Defamation League had reported more than 200 hate crimes (SPLC, 2016; ADL, 2016). That's 200+ hate crimes folks... in 3 DAYS! To wit...

- A 12 year old black girl was told, "Now that Trump is president, I'm going to shoot you and all the blacks I can find..."
- In Louisiana 3 white men in a truck yelled at a black woman, "F**k your black life!" & drove away laughing & chanting, "Trump...!"
- In Colorado "Death to Diversity" was painted on a school banner, & reports of white men approaching women & telling them it was now "legal to grab them by the p***y..."
- In Michigan, middle school students were filmed chanting, "Build the wall...!"

Etc. etc. etc... This isn't just "frat talk..." it has real, human consequences. My stepdaughter's best friend is Latino & lives in the Eastern Washington (& very Red) town of Yakima. She & her mother are terrified—afraid to leave their home, or even to speak in public when they have to for groceries. Another friend I grew up with is afraid for her job, & the man who owns the gas station where she works, because he's Muslim. The fact that he's decent & hard-working isn't likely to count for much in this climate.

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Benjamin Franklin once said,

"Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

There are some for whom even this isn't low enough on the bottom-feeder scale... to them, "[making] America great again" means giving up someone ELSE's essential liberty for THEIR temporary safety. Where I come from this sort of thing is referred to as COWARDICE.

For the record, I don't believe any of you condone all this, & I don't give a frog's water-tight asshole how you voted, nor your reasons for doing so. I cherish each & every one of you! And it should go without saying that I have no intention of petulantly "unfriending" anyone on Facebook either. But we *do* need to be honest here. Whether we intended to or not, WE created this mess & it's up to US to clean it up.

You & I have a decision to make...

- Do we stand for Liberty & Justice for ALL... including those who don't share our race, religion, gender, or origin...?
- Or do we spend the next four years pounding spikes into the wrists, feet, & sides of the One who went to the cross for them as well as for us...?

Make no mistake people... You CANNOT shirk the former, publicly or in private, without committing yourself to the latter. No if's, and's, but's, or excuses. Today I stand before all of you, & the world, & commit myself to the former.

Who's with me...?

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