

**When It Gets Real**  
**Rev. Wendy Jones**  
**Preached at UU Congregation of the Grand Valley**  
**1/29/17**

“Somebody once told me the definition of hell:

*‘On your last day on earth, the person you became will meet the person you could have become.’—Anonymous*

If you are here visiting today looking for sanctuary or a safe place, or like minded people. You are welcome here. We open our arms to you and offer you a sense of sanctuary in these walls.

One of my Unitarian Universalist minister colleagues on Facebook today offered words about speaking when we are raw because we haven’t had time to think things through. He said, “just name it.”

So I am going to name it.

I am raw today. I am shaken to the core from what I saw yesterday. If I had any hope that the man who is in the white house might be willing to change it was answered for me yesterday. I can no longer take a “wait and see” approach. People are already being affected. Families are already being torn apart. In case any of you did not have your TV’s on yesterday or are not privy to the recent developments,

“President Trump signed a sweeping executive order to suspend the arrival of refugees for at least 120 days and impose tough new controls on travelers from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen for the next three months. Since then, travelers from those countries have been stopped from boarding US-bound planes, triggering angry protests and detentions at airports. Some who were already in the air when Trump signed the executive order were detained on arrival, The New York Times reported.”

This is a church. This is a faith community. I am a minister.

How do I bring the faith part into the room today? How do I reframe this from a “higher” spiritual perspective? That is my question.

I’m kind of getting tired of having to stand up here and explain that I don’t yet have things figured out. I’m tired of having to say, I had a nice simple, safe sermon prepared that I threw out the window at 6:00 a.m. this morning, because my conscience will not let me remain silent today.

As I was thinking about what to say today, the image of bumping into Peg on Wednesday night so very briefly, and seeing the fear and the anger from this

woman whom I love, cherish and look to for wisdom came to my head and I knew that I could not remain silent and not address what is happening.

Yes. This is real. This is very real. And oh how I wish it wasn't.

I would so much rather be talking to you today about the joy of thinking through the vision for this faith community and how we are about to start our campaign drive and how it's fun to think about who we want to be and how we want to be in the world and how it can be stressful to decided whether our funds should go to the Music department or the Religious Education department and how much do we want to spend on snow removal vs. asking people to simply shovel the walks. That is the simplistic superficial stuff I want to talk to you about today.

(In an inspiring and uplifting way of course.)

But instead, I have to stand up here and tell you that the place is here, the time is now.

We are watching our country slide into an authoritarian regime and this time next year will be wayyy too late if the country and the citizens do not do something NOW! Immediately.

I will be honest. I really hope that I am being a fear monger, because that would mean that I am wrong. That would mean that what I watched yesterday in airports across this country are not really a big deal. But I am scared.

Yesterday terrified me. Terrified me.

It goes to the core of who I have always imagined myself to be as an American. We have always been taught that we are the best. We are the kindest. We are the most loving, the most open and a beacon of hope for the world.

Today I have to look to Canada for that moral guidance. Maybe while we are figuring our issues out Canada our dear friends to the North will take the mantle and be that safe haven while we Americans are in the process of waking up from our sleep induced, apathetic nightmare of a generation of privilege and complacency.

In response to our president's executive order to ban refugees & immigrants including people with green cards, the Prime Minister of Canada tweeted out this. (Because we are now a world that does its foreign policy through tweets.)

["To those fleeing persecution, terror & war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength #WelcomeToCanada," Trudeau posted on Twitter.](#)

One of our Republican senators was interviewed on CNN yesterday and he said in essence, “Let’s wait and see, there is a learning curve it has only been a week.”

Wait and see?????? Learning curve??????

I would like him to look into the eyes of the Iraqi woman who was turned away yesterday after having been being vetted for two years! Her husband was an Iraqi translator for us. He saved our men and women’s lives and this politician has the gall to say, “let’s wait and see????”

NO. NO! This is not what America is about. It is our President’s job to do his homework and understand the dynamics and ramifications of his decisions, and if he doesn’t understand it, then it is the job of the people around him to teach him, and if they are simply “yes men” then it is the job of the Republican congress to wake up, realize that this is NOT politics as usual and do their jobs and stop this mad man!

I’m sorry. I cannot remain silent. NOT anymore!

“The question is: How cynical are we willing to be and for how long? How long will Senate Republicans wait until a few of them stand up to the man? Greatness is in the eye of the beholder. American self-respect is what is at stake here, ladies and gentlemen. The only good things to come out of that inauguration were the marches all over the country the day after, millions of people taking to the streets of their own free will, most of them women, packed in tight, lots of pink hats, lots of signage, earnest, vulgar, witty, a few brilliant (“Take your broken heart and make it art”), and all of it rather civil and good-humored. That’s the great America I grew up in. It’s still here.”

*Washington Post*

*Garrison Keillor is an author and radio personality.*

This week before I had even turned the news on yesterday I was reminded of a reading that I came across for my Veteran’s Day service two years ago. The service was about moral injury and this reading was about personal responsibility or the lack there of when we are part of a larger system.

One way that moral injury may happen is through something called moral disengagement.

“Moral disengagement involves avoiding applying an ethical framework to a situation by using four distinct rationalizing techniques. By removing the standards of ethical behavior that they normally hold themselves to, soldiers can engage in unethical and inhumane acts that they would otherwise describe as inexcusable.”

- a. **Reframing** (there’s a higher principle involved),
  - i. “We have to protect the American people.”

- b. Euphemistic Language** (torture becomes enhanced “interrogation techniques”)
  - i. The news becomes “Fake News”
  - ii. The facts become “Alternative Facts”
- c. Comparison** (well look at what they are doing)
  - i. Look at what Obama did, look at what Hillary did
- d. Displacement** (Nazi soldiers were “just following orders”)
  - i. All of the people being detained in the airports
- e. Diffusion:** Multiple people share responsibility
  - i. Quote from Aiden Delgado

Combine moral disengagement with trauma and you have laid the groundwork for moral injury.

These words come from a man named Aiden Delgado, who was a conscientious objector during the Iraq War.

“I had once told Sergeant Toro that I enjoyed working on the trucks of soldiers I liked and respected, knowing that it was making their lives easier. With the knowledge that I’ve gained working in the headquarters, I began to fit the 320<sup>th</sup> Company and our narrow purpose into a larger scheme.

We are one of many companies, not really responsible for anything on our own, but taken together we form a mechanism that keeps the entire prison running. From the guards who stand along the wire to the cooks who feed them to the mechanics who service their equipment I began to see my tiny fragment of war service as part of an enormous glittering structure, comprising thousands of individual soldiers each secure in the knowledge that what they are personally doing isn’t wrong. I look at the truth of the prisoner’s stated experience and then I look at my stated life, and it feels false, right to the core.

The truth is that I believe that the prisoners are being horribly abused inside Abu Ghraib, degraded, falsely imprisoned, even killed, as happened in the November riot.

But, it’s not my fault. I’m just a mechanic fixing the vehicles of the guys who run the prison. It’s not really their fault either, they’re just standing around guarding the prisoners as they were ordered to do from those higher up the chain of command. Well, who the hell is responsible for all this, then? All of us? The generals? I don’t know, me personally? That’s what it feels like. Lying on the ground underneath a Humvee with the mud caked in its tires, I finally look up and perceive my place in the web. I can call myself a conscientious objector and denounce war all I like, but I’m still here, still playing my part like a good soldier.”

We are all part of this. We are all part of either allowing our country to be hijacked from within or standing up and saying, “This is not what we stand for!”

I read Mr. Delgado's words a year or so ago at our Veteran's service. And yet, I was disconnected from the substance because I'm not part of the military so I was able to emotionally distance myself from any sense of personal responsibility.

This quote has had new meaning to me this week. I am an American. I am watching my country be taken over from within. I am now part of the resistance. I will be doing my small part. But will my small part be part of the slow dismantling of the America I was taught to grow and love? Or, will I be part of the resistance?

The idea is that we are cogs in a larger system and it only works if all of the cogs do their part. The question becomes which cogs are we going to be? Are we going to be the cogs in the resistance or are we quietly the cogs that go along to get along?

What have we learned from history? How do we resist?

Well, if we wait until the entire country has woken up it is already too late.

My hope is in the idea that once Americans wake up to the idea that the wheel only turns if every cog is playing its part, we will be able to reclaim ourselves and our country. We are already seeing this happen. This Facebook post came from employees from the National Park Service.

["#Altnationalparkservice](#)

[Hello, we wanted to take a moment to let you know who we are. We're a growing coalition of 52 National Park Service employees from nine different National Parks. We formed to ensure the protection of the environment for future generations to come. We were forced into a media blackout, hiring freeze, policy changes, and possible reduction in funding. We are here to stand up and speak out against the current administration. We all refuse to be silenced while we watch everything we love crumble. Join the movement at \[www.altnps.org\]\(http://www.altnps.org\) - Arches, Everglades, Shenandoah, Yosemite, Badlands, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Blue Ridge Parkway, and Great Smoky Mountains National Park."](#)

The resistance starts now. And it needs to start loudly. Going along to get along doesn't work.

We need to not be silenced with financial concerns. "What if we lose our non-profit?" If it costs us our non-profit status to speak against our government then so be it.

Boston is willing to lose millions in federal funding. New York City is facing a loss of almost a billion dollars. It only works if all of the COGS in the wheel do their job!

Last night we saw this when the New York City Cab Drivers union went on strike refusing to pick up people from JFK airport. Their statement in part was:

“Today, drivers are joining the protest at JFK Airport in support of all those who are currently being detained at the airport because of Trump’s unconstitutional executive order. Drivers stand in solidarity with refugees coming to America in search of peace and safety and with those who are simply trying to return to their homes here in America after traveling abroad. We stand in solidarity with all of our peace-loving neighbors against this inhumane, cruel, and unconstitutional act of pure bigotry.” NYTWA STATEMENT ON MUSLIM BAN (<http://jalopnik.com/dont-be-afraid-how-new-york-citys-taxi-drivers-stood-u-1791753110>)

The Universities are getting involved also. This statement came from the University of Michigan.

*“The University of Michigan welcomes and supports students without regard to their immigration status. We will continue to admit students in a manner consistent with our non-discrimination policy. Once students are admitted, the university is committed to fostering an environment in which each student can flourish.*

- The university complies with federal requirements associated with managing its international programs. Otherwise, the university does not share sensitive information like immigration status.*
- Campus police do not inquire about or record immigration status when performing their duties.*
- In accordance with federal law, the enforcement of immigration law rests with Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection. Campus police will not partner with federal, state, or other local law enforcement agencies to enforce federal immigration law except when required to do so by law.*
- The university maintains a strong commitment to the privacy of student records for all students, consistent with state and federal laws. We do not provide information on immigration status to anyone except when required by law.*
  - The university offers in-state tuition to undocumented students who meet certain conditions.”*

In addition, we need the Saturday Night Live comedians who won’t be silenced.

The media needs to do its part too.

Jake Tapper from CNN had a simple response to Steve Bannon telling the media to “shut up and listen.” He tweeted, “No.”

We can all use our voices in different ways. What is it that Unitarian Universalists can do in this day and age?

We can be the ones raising the banners saying “Muslim Lives Matter, Immigrants Welcome Here!” There aren’t enough signs. We can be a safe haven. We can open our doors to the Hispanic Affairs Project. We can connect with other religious communities. We can stand united.

In the next few weeks we will be kicking off our annual stewardship campaign. This is the process through which we determine our budget for the next year.

It is based on who we want to be; what we want to accomplish and how we want to interact in the world.

I will say that the Unitarian Universalist voice is needed in this public square, now more than any time in the recent past.

We must be the faith community that people can look to and say, “I know the Unitarian Universalist’s will stand with me. I know the Unitarian Universalist’s will speak up on my behalf. I know that when I walk into this building I will be safe. I will be heard. I will be cared for. The Unitarian Universalist’s are people who live their principles. They will acknowledge my inherent dignity and worth. They will welcome my spiritual truth.”

And, I know that we can do this. This is what America is. This is America’s chance to say we watched, we learned. We will not go gently into that dark night. No, not without a fight!

We won’t be silent.