

In This Together

Pastor Liz

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It is easy to look at this past week and label it as one big terrible, horrible, no good, very bad week, but the more honest truth is that there were pockets of this week that were very good and are worth remembering. One week ago today, this sanctuary was full of joy, laughter, bells ringing, and people singing as we celebrated our shared ministry during the installation service. I don't think I'm even a little bit biased when I say that was the best installation service I have ever been to.

And then, five days ago, our church was full in a very different way: over 1,000 voters came to our church to cast their ballot in the election. They were surprised and delighted to be received with warm hospitality in the form of apples and cookies and cider and coffee from a dozen church members. I think our volunteers received over 1,000 heartfelt thank you's on Tuesday.

And finally, on Friday night, I personally had a joyful evening when I was here for the Women in the Arts Festival and got to see folk singer Dar Williams perform. I have been listening to Dar Williams for 15 years and she is something of a rock star in my eyes. I have seen her perform before, but to see her in our own sanctuary – singing right here on this spot – was incredibly special. The pulpit area feels a little more sacred after Friday night. In addition to singing some of my favorite songs, Dar Williams told a story that has been the fuel I needed to reflect on the whole of the week, and that has helped me begin to understand how to process and respond to the other no good, very bad parts of this week.

Dar said that several years ago, before the days of cell phones and the internet, a friend

told her about a woman in Colorado. The friend said, “She has this incredible house that you have to go see. When you're driving by, just stop in. She's always there. You need to go and meet this woman.” And so, the next time she was on the road and in Colorado, Dar heard her friend's voice in the back of her head, and it didn't matter that it was 100 miles out of her way; she decided she had to go. Since the woman was always home Dar didn't call ahead; she just showed up. Of course, when Dar arrived, the woman was not there.

As she cursed herself for listening to her friend, Dar started walking around the property. The house, which she knew had been made by the woman who lived there, was an adobe house. Every wall, every corner, every crevice, was constructed with the woman's own hands. Adobe is an extremely difficult material to work with, especially for something as large as a house, and especially when you are doing it yourself. It takes a lot of muscle and persistence to form the bricks with just the right percentage of earth and water mixed together. It must have taken the woman a really long time to build her house. She must have been incredibly strong, and incredibly determined.

As Dar walked around, taking in all the details, and marveling at the adobe craftsmanship, all she could think was, “What made this woman so angry that she had to build this house?” She knew that kind of strength and determination could only be fueled by deep anger or pain, and she wanted to know what had happened to that woman to make her *that* mad for *that* long.

When Dar reached the front of the house again, she noticed something she had not seen when she first walked up. Next to the front steps, poured in concrete, the woman had written “Love House.” As Dar stood there staring at the sign, she realized that it was not anger that had fueled the construction of the house, it was love. Love gave the woman the strength and persistence she needed to build her adobe house.

This story is our scripture for the week. I know we just read a story from Acts that is

powerful in its own right, but today calls for something different. I figured out too late that the hard sermon isn't the one before the election, it's the one after the election, and Dar's story is what spoke to me this week in the aftermath of the most divisive election in recent history.

Since Wednesday morning, the news has been filled with reports of bigotry and hate crimes. Swastikas spray painted on buildings, slurs shouted at people of color and LGBT folks. In our schools, Latino students have had other students chant “build the wall!” or mime building a wall with their white bodies, blocking their passage in the hallway. In Ann Arbor, a young woman was confronted by a white man who demanded she remove her hijab or he would set her on fire.

Fear is the feeling of the week: fear of a bigotry that has been unmasked in our nation and given permission to be acted on. Fear of what will happen in the coming years – whose lives and freedoms are at stake. Fear because for many of us, a vote for Donald Trump was not about conservative or liberal, republican or Democrat – it was at best complicity and at worse an endorsement for racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, sexism, ableism, and homophobia.

Often we assume that politics is only of interest for adults, we wonder if our kids are even paying attention. This is an election they paid attention to. Many parents found themselves unsure of how to tell their children that Trump had won, knowing it might cause them to feel unsafe and afraid for themselves, for their friends, and for their future. Donna Kaplowitz, who is an East Lansing parent of a high school student, opened her home on Wednesday after school to 50 East Lansing teenagers. For two hours they cried, hugged, and talked through their fears. Some of the things they named were: fear of being black in America, fear their mental health services will be eliminated, fear that as a Muslim half the country hated her, fear of more war, fear that we will lose the battle with climate change. This is not abstract. This is not about their candidate losing an election. This is about these youth being raised to believe that America stood

for diversity and inclusion being afraid that half of the country only believes in inclusion for if you are white, male, straight, Christian, able-bodied, and legal citizen.

The fear and anger of this week are very real, and many of us still feel it. That may or may not go away. My hope is that as a community, we will add to those feelings the kind of radical love that contains the kind of strength and perseverance that could build an adobe house. I want our fuel to be love for all people who have been historically on the margins, and whose very lives are at stake in this moment. I want us to build a house for Muslims, immigrants, people of color, queers, trans, gays, lesbians, and women. For anyone who is afraid, I want our love to transform into a house of refuge. I want our love to be made manifest in resistance, in organization, in outreach and in a movement to end white supremacy.

Today is Stewardship Sunday, when as a congregation we make pledges for the coming year – how we will spend our time, our money, our resources, and our talent. In the coming year, I believe that our communities need us to be stronger and more persistent in our love as we have ever been. This is a time to build on our foundation and stretch ourselves out of our places of comfort and into the places where we are most needed. When we think about the programs we want to fund or the ministries we want to grow, we should be able to say how they are a ministry of radical love. I say radical because our ministries should not just serve those of us who are in the pews, but we should be looking towards the margins, to the places where lives and safety are most at stake and asking, “What do you need? How can we stand beside you? How can we best love you?”

I saw Edgewood's radical love in action this week. On Wednesday I watched a few dozen people gather in the chapel to pray, talk, and comfort one another. I watched almost 50 people break bread together that night over dinner, knowing that this is a place where they would find a loving welcome. On Thursday I ran into at least a dozen Edgewood members, ranging in age

from 6 to 60, rallying and marching with MSU students. The MSU demonstration was an incredible example of multi-cultural leadership on part of the organizers and people who showed up, and for many of us was a wonderful example on how to amplify voices that need to be heard. Showing up for our students was an act of love. On Friday, even more Edgewoodians showed up for our Muslim neighbors. After the Islamic Center received a possible threat against them, many spent the afternoon outside of the Islamic Center with signs of support and love, standing alongside other interfaith siblings to send a message that there is no room for hate or Islamophobia in East Lansing.

And then, on Saturday I got two messages – one from Diana wanting to make safety pins available to anyone who would like to wear them as a symbol of safety and support for all people and as a beginning symbol of the work and protection of all people that we are committed to doing. The other was from a member who said, “I want to organize a bus to send church folks to Washington on January 21st for the Million Women March!” That member was Shantana Simmon – find her after worship to tell her you're interested in joining!

This week's election was our call to action. We are being called to build a love house, through strength, persistence, and courage. Last week, as part of the installation service, we heard from our neighbors, Rabbi Amy Bigman from Congregation Shaarey Zedek and Rev. Andrew Pomerville from The Peoples Church. They both reminded us that our community needs Edgewood. Other congregations are looking to us to lead them, to push the limits of their comfort and courage in the name of justice and peace for every single person. They reminded us that radical love is embedded in the history that built our church, and that it remains our challenge and our call today. Not one of us can do it on our own, we need each other – to lean into our strengths, to offer encouragement, and to be persistent with our faith in action.

I don't want to end this sermon with just my voice. I can't do this alone. We need to do

this together, we need to be one people, one Body of Christ. There was a meme that made its rounds on the internet this week, that Rev. Molly Baskette tweaked to UCC-fy it. I invite you to join with me in this litany as our prayer and our promise in the coming days, months, and years.

If you wear a hijab, **I'll sit with you on the train.**

If you're trans, **I'll go to the bathroom with you.**

If you're a person of color, **I'll stand with you if the cops stop you.**

If you're a person with disabilities, **I'll hand you my megaphone.**

If you're an immigrant, **I'll help you find resources.**

If you're a survivor, **I'll believe you.**

If you're a refugee, **I'll make sure you're welcome.**

If you're a veteran, **I'll take up your fight.**

If you're LGBTQ, **I'll remind you that you are beautiful and beloved, just as God made you.**

If you're a woman, **I'll make sure you get home ok.**

If you're tired, **me too.**

If you need a hug, **I've got an infinite supply.**

If you need me, **I'll be with you.**

All I ask is that you be with me, too. **Together, we'll be the strong arm of God.**