

## *Now Everything Counts and Everyone Counts*

December 4, 2016

When Ronald Reagan was president, I lived in Boston, Massachusetts.

President Reagan, as you may recall, was obsessed with defeating the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Several years before Reagan became president, the Sandinistas seized power in Nicaragua by leading a popular revolt against the much hated US-backed dictator, Anastasio Somoza.

Soon after Reagan became president, the US organized a rebel army in Nicaragua called the contras, comprised largely of former members of Somoza's military force. The US sent advisors to direct the contras, and armed them so they could launch a war against the Sandinistas. Mostly, the contras attacked rural farms to kill the Sandinistas' civilian supporters.

In one of his speeches at the time, President Reagan explained to the American public that the Nicaraguan contras were the moral equivalent of our nation's founding fathers.

"What?" I screamed as I watched on TV. "The contras are the moral equivalent of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson? No way!" I couldn't believe it. This made my blood boil.

The next day I made a banner. On the top of the banner I wrote, The Contras. On the bottom of the banner I wrote, Our Founding Fathers. And in the middle, between The Contras and Our Founding Fathers, I put the does not equal sign.

Then, with several friends in tow, I marched myself down to Boston's Public Garden, one of the big parks in downtown Boston. And I climbed up the big statue of George Washington, the one where he's sitting on his majestic horse; it wasn't easy, believe me. Holding tightly to the bronze leg of our founding father's horse, I unfurled my banner.

While I was up there, my friends on the ground distributed leaflets to people passing by, one page screeds I had written opposing Reagan's war against the Nicaraguan people.

After perching precariously and uncomfortably on the statue for about an hour, after my cramped hand could no longer grasp the horse's cold metal leg, I climbed down off the statue. Luckily, the Boston Park Police, who'd been trying to persuade me to get down before the real Boston cops showed up, didn't detain me.

I did, however, get arrested on several other occasions. On a protest march going over the Mass Ave. Bridge, the dreaded MBTA cops nabbed me. Doing civil disobedience at the Federal Building at Government Center. Sitting down in the middle of Commonwealth Ave. with a bunch of homeless people to protest the closure of a homeless shelter.

I was really into protesting back then, when I was younger living in Boston. I not only marched in every protest I could, I helped organize some and spoke at a few. I not only handed out leaflets, I wrote many of the leaflets that other people handed out. The FBI came to my house one afternoon to check up on me. I refused to talk to them, but it kind of made me feel good in a strange way that they'd come.

Protesting in public gave my life meaning. It gave me an outlet for expressing the deep passion I felt about certain issues. An outlet for the anger I felt over certain injustices. It brought me into solidarity with other people. It was empowering. And I think it made a difference. Public protest is part of the complex equation that brings about change.

I'm not really into that kind of protest any more. I'm no longer inclined to climb a statue with a banner, lock arms with others to block a building, or sit down in the middle of the street to stop traffic. It's not that I think that kind of protest is no longer needed, it's just that I'm not particularly inclined to do it right now.

But who knows, the inclination may arise within me again at some point in the next four years. I do plan on participating in one of the Inauguration Day protest marches here in Austin. At Coordinating Council the other night, we talked about getting a church banner for such occasions. Who knows what the next four years will bring, and what kind of passion, concern, or anger will get stirred up within me.

I do get the impression, though, that many of us in this church are not all that inclined to climb a statue, lock arms with others in civil disobedience, or sit down in the middle of the road. I don't think many of us in this church can get too excited about marching down Congress Ave. yelling, "hey hey, ho ho, you know who has got to go!" Many of us, though I'm hoping not all of us, are of an age or temperament where we're not inclined to do that, even if there was a time we did do that and were really into it.

Last week, *The Guardian* published an essay by the author Barbara Kingsolver. Her essay is called, "Trump Changed Everything, Now Everything Counts." One thing I liked about her essay is she seemed to write for those of us who're not inclined to participate in public protest, but who're struggling with the question, how then shall I respond to Donald Trump, and to the whole political apparatus he's installing in Washington D.C.? If I'm not inclined to march with a banner or do civil disobedience, what can I do?

Kingsolver begins her essay by identifying what's at stake.

It's hard to guess much from Trump's campaign promises but we know the goals of the legislators now taking charge, plus Trump's VP and those he's tapping to head our government agencies. Losses are coming at us in these areas: freedom of speech and the press; women's reproductive rights; affordable healthcare; security for immigrants and Muslims; racial and LGBTQ civil rights; environmental protection; scientific research and education; international cooperation on limiting climate change; international cooperation on anything; any restraints on who may possess firearms; restraint on the upper-class wealth accumulation that's gutting our middle class; limits on corporate influence over our laws.

She then observes that millions of Americans are "starting to grasp that we can't politely stand by watching families, lands and liberties get slashed beyond repair."

So, if we can't see ourselves climbing a statue or blocking the entrance to Trump Tower, what can we do? She goes on to suggest a number of things that different people can do, beginning with the field in which she works.

"If we're artists, writers, critics, publishers, directors or producers of film or television, we reckon honestly with our role in shaping the American psyche... We consider the alternatives. We join the time-honored tradition of artists resisting government oppression through our work."

"If we're journalists, we push back against every door that closes on freedom of information. We educate our public about objectivity, why it matters, and what it's like to work under a president who aggressively threatens news outlets and reporters."

"If we're consumers of art, literature, film, TV and news, we think about what's true, and what we need. We reward those who are taking risks to provide it."

“If we’re teachers we explicitly help children of all kinds feel safe in our classrooms under a bullying season that’s already opened...Language used by a president may enter this conversation. We say wrong is wrong.”

“If we’re scientists we escalate our conversation about the dangers of suppressing science education and denying climate change. We shed our cautious traditions and explain what people should know.”

“If we’re women suffering from sexual assault or body image disorders, or if we’re their friends, partners or therapists, we acknowledge that the predatory persona of men like Trump is genuinely traumatizing. That revulsion and rage are necessary responses.”

“If our Facebook friends post racial or sexist slurs or celebrate assaults on our rights, we don’t just delete them. We tell them why.”

“If we’re getting up in the morning, we bring our whole selves to work. We talk with co-workers and clients, including Trump supporters, about our common frustrations when we lose our safety nets, see friends deported, lose our clean air and water, and all the harm to follow.”

Finally, “we refuse to disappear.”

None of the actions that Kingsolver identifies are particularly radical or earth-shaking. But I like how she acknowledges that we live in a new time, and that each and every one of us has a responsibility to find our own particular way to respond in the particular context in which we live and work.

Each and every one of us has a responsibility to find our own particular way to promote equity and justice for all people. Basic human respect for all people. Common human decency.

Each and every one of us has a responsibility to find our own particular way to defend and stand in solidarity with the people who are most vulnerable right now.

Each and every one of us has a responsibility to find our own particular way of defending and healing the earth.

And we have a responsibility to do this in all of the places where we live and work, in all of the places where we interact with other people.

In those places where we may have kept our mouths shut in the past, in those places where we may not have had the courage to speak up and act in the past, we must find the courage to speak up and act now. Trump changed everything, now everything counts.

We cannot stand aside politely and cautiously any longer or anywhere. Trump changed everything, now everything counts.

Trump changed everything, now *everyone* counts.

How am I going to count?

That’s the question I’m asking myself now, and will continue asking for at least the next four years? How am I going to count now?

Right now, I’m sharing this message with you, hopefully to inspire you a bit. Next month, I’m going to be a peace-keeper at Muslim Lobby Day at the State Capitol, standing between Muslims exercising their Constitutional right to meet with their state legislators, and the anti-Muslim protestors likely to gather to harass them. Who knows, two months from now I may be climbing a statue with a banner.

Each one of us has the responsibility to ask ourselves, how am I going to count now?

And how are *we* going to count now? As the Congregational Church of Austin, how are *we* going to count now?

In this new time in which we live, what must we say and do now to promote equity and justice, to promote respect and human decency? What must we say and do to defend and stand in solidarity with the people who're most vulnerable? To defend and heal the earth?

I pray that we will continuously ask ourselves that question. And I pray that we will have the faith and courage to say and do what we must. The faith and courage to count, to make a difference.