

Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum
Congregation Beit Simchat Torah

Post-Election Drash
November 11, 2016

A few words tonight after so many words this week: First, to those who are in our overflow service downstairs, hello. To those who are with us via live-stream, welcome. And to those Jewish members of the Hillary campaign who are watching, I would like anybody here who feels so moved to offer you applause and gratitude. [Long, long standing ovation.] We know you are very much in pain and we are hugging you.

Last week at this time we observed Kristallnacht. November 9, 1938, the night when five years of Nazi propaganda and rhetoric erupted into physical violence. We talked about that just last Friday night, and here we are a week later. Many of us wonder, are on the brink again? I can't even begin to count how many conversations we on the clergy staff at CBST have had with congregants about this. And I imagine many of you in various ways are feeling the same things. Confusion. Shock. Grief. Despair. Anger. Sadness. Grief, grief, grief. Confusion. Shock. Despair. Anger. Grief, grief, grief. Fear. Any other words? [Repeating words called out by congregants:] Panic. Terror. Betrayal. Guilt. Anger. Anger. Disgust. Disappointment. Sadness. Frustration. Fury.

Hopelessness. Confused. Terrifying. Determined. Horrified. Strong. Any other words? Resilient. Hopeful. Optimistic. Mighty. Resistance. Overcome. Patriotic. Organize. Solidarity. United. Community. Hopeful. Powerful. Beautiful. Connected. Love. Courageous. Rise up. We won't actually know historical moment this is until we are able to look back. But we can already see some features pretty clearly.

Now I don't need to list for this community what the stakes are. We're all aware of how much the world can change. We're all aware that we're in a new reality.

Here's a part of what I think. We are on this earth for a purpose. We are on this earth for a purpose and if it wasn't crystal clear before this week, it is now.

I totally support the grief. As Jews we grieve. I totally support the guilt. As Jews we feel guilty. I totally support despair. We feel despair about so many things. In fact, I believe very much in what we know as Jews about how one moves through terrible grief. When someone beloved dies we know they first week you can't even see the world. You can't even imagine anything besides your own grief. And your curl up on the floor and you are just completely at a loss. And in fact it's a year, if its somebody really close to you, before you can put your pants on the right way. It takes a long time.

Grief is very powerful. It is extremely powerful form of trauma. We have all experienced trauma this week. The question is how will we move through the trauma to become active in our

lives again so we don't just become victims of it. That will be our challenge.

You know the story of Noah, which we read last week. In the parsha there is a *mabul*, a flood, that is overtaking the world. Well that's what happening now. There is a *mabul*, there is a flood overtaking our world. And the question is, are we up to the task of building the ark not just so that animals two-by-two can come on-board, but so that we can invite on the ark those with whom we want to rebuild the world. That's what we have to do. Each one of us has to build the ark. And there are many different ways to do it. But we have to understand that we have to build something that will survive. We have to build the ark and invite into it people who are vulnerable, like us, or even more so. We have to imagine that if we have any strength or any privilege that we have to use that strength and use that privilege to be a part of building an ark.

That of course was always true but now we're at a moment of profound crisis and disaster. I am not one who says, "The guy just says a bunch of words. I don't take him literally." There was that great quote: "Oh we take him seriously. We don't take him literally." Words matter. Actions matter. But first my job is to tell you that your grief is real. That the trauma is real and you need to be kind to yourself about it. And somebody yells at you, "How come you're not moving more quickly?" Say, "You know I need to lie on the floor and sob a few more days." That's okay.

It is okay to experience deep grief and its okay to understand at one point you'll emerge and be able to act. Both things can be true. If you can't act yet you need to take care of that grief now. But here's the thing about grief and I know a lot about grief as the rabbi of CBST through AIDS, and 25 years here, and my own personal life. There is no way to force your way through it. You do have to let the feelings happen. But there some things that are helpful. Don't isolate. That does not help grief even though wanting to be alone may be one of the strongest feelings right now. Don't medicate it. Don't imagine that you're going to medicate it in order to ignore it. You actually have to feel it. Reach out and be kind to yourself. Imagine the things that give you strength when you are feeling good and force yourself to do them. See someone, go to a movie, have lunch with a best friend, paint.

Here's what I believe: Our souls have to be strong in order for us to be in the streets. We can't be there unless we've done our own personal work to figure out to deal with these profoundly horrible feelings of loss of despair and betrayal. However, you know this about me: We have to be able to carry multiple truths at once. And there will be moments when it will be a roller coaster; that's what its been like for me this week. A roller coaster. There are moments where something else crashes on me and I'm aware of yet another level of grief. Here are a few things to remember: Hillary won the popular vote of this country. This is the second time a Democratic candidate has lost because of the Electoral College. We started to do something when Gore lost and then we lost it.

We have to focus on the things that will make a difference. Second, there were some electoral victories throughout the country that included women. There were a bunch of glass ceilings that were shattered, in no small measure because of Hillary. We have four new women senators. Four new women senators! The first Latina senator! We've had other victories as well. GLSEN put out a map of what the electoral college vote would like if it had just been 18-34-year-olds voting. And Hillary would have gotten 504 electoral votes. The future looks different.

There are some other victories that we had. Look at us here in this room today. Look at the power we have when start to come together. There are not going to be any easy answers. There has to be a focus not just on now but on a strategy for a future. We have to build foundations. We have to get deeply involved in communities all around us. We have to get politically active and engage in community organizations in ways that we might not have before.

And, people, 50 percent of Americans did not vote in this election. What are we going to do about that? We have to see it as our responsibility to encourage and strengthen institutions of this country. To understand that our vision for America which so many of us feel was betrayed, is shared by the majority of America, as seen in the popular vote.

We have find a way to make sure a defeat does not amount to our destruction. How do we understand that a terrible setback does not destroy us? How do we build and ark so that there is

room for all of us on it to survive this flood and come out strengthened, with a sense of vision? That's going to be our challenge. How do we build that ark? What are the institutions that have to be strengthened? What are the relationships that have to be deepened? What are the changes that have to take place in our personal lives and in the lives of our communities?

I take what's happening now absolutely seriously on face value. Do not be lulled by anything that look like normalization or civility on the surface. Do not, do not imagine that any attempts to paper over what we know was said. Why would we do that? We would only do that to medicate ourselves.

We need to take care of each other. You need somebody to say, “You know what? I’ll take over for a couple of days. You cry; here's my shoulder. Then I’ll cry on yours.”

So what are we going to try and do here at CBST as we begin this new reality? First of all we're going to develop a lot of educational programs here. How do you identify what fascism is actually like? What are the things to happen we fascism emerges? I don't want to use that word loosely. I want to really understand it. I want to understand the history; I want to understand the politics. And guess what — we happen to have members of our community that know this stuff. We're going to start bringing in people and programs to educate ourselves better about what fascism looks like and what have

been the successful resistance movements to it. We don't have to reinvent the wheel. We've been here before.

So the first thing we're going to do is educate ourselves. We're going to bring in the geniuses in our congregation to teach us. We're here in New York City, so we'll bring in everyone.

Second, we're going to make sure that our prayer and our religious lives feed us. We need to be fed. We need to find strength with each other. We need to sing. We need to pray. We need to be joyous. We need to celebrate Shabbat, we need to have dinners together. We need to have Tu B'shvat seders together. We need to bake rainbow challah down in the kitchen together. We need to make sure that we continue building a full and meaningful and joyous life. That is an important form of resistance.

Third, we have to figure out the political activism that will make sense. It's going to take some thinking and strategizing. Just because we don't have the answers right now does not mean the answers don't exist. But it does mean that we have to engage with the political process and think about ways that we can actually be effective politically. Not just making noise. I love making noise. I love being a street activist but we also have to think about it strategically. I don't have the answer. But that's just a part of what we're going to be doing. We're going to do it as a community here and we're going to do it our various communities in the world.

The fourth thing is we're going to make connections. Today, our clergy went to a mosque to reach out. We're going stand with people and reach out personally. We're going to reach out to our Muslim brothers and sisters and say, "We are together." Let's use the opportunity to be together. We don't need anybody's permission to do that. We don't need a big political infrastructure to do what we did today, to show up at a mosque with a little sign that says "Jews support our Muslim neighbors" and hand out a bunch of roses. I was so honored to get to speak at the mosque today.

We're going to continue thinking of ways that we can interrupt the narrative of hatred. The one whose name should not be spoken has said he intends to register every Muslim in this country.

All right, people, I've got something for you. We as Jews love to say "Never again." We love to say, "Where were the gentiles in Europe and in America when we were being rounded up for the concentration camps?" We love to point the finger and say that no one hid my family. We love to say that no one stood up when our families were ripped out of homes and forced onto trains, not necessarily by German Nazi but by Ukrainians, by Lithuanians, by Russians who had been our neighbors. Well here is our chance, people! Muslims are now being threatened. Immigrants in this country are being threatened. And we are saying to you we are going to be with your community. Never again means never again. Never again means never again!

We are put on this planet with a purpose from God. We are now alive in a moment of history that will test us. That's an awesome obligation. Have hope. Do not fear. Okay, fear, but do not let the fear paralyze you. One thing I ask from God is to be with me every day so I have the strength to do what is right. To put myself on the line, not shut myself off. To have hope. To have courage.

Have hope. Have courage.