

“An Open Letter to My Daughter After the 2016 Presidential Election”
Isaiah 58:8-12; Luke 21:5-19
Church of the Good Shepherd- Nashua, NH
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Rev. Dr. Meg Hess

An Open Letter to My Daughter After the 2016 Presidential Election

Dear Keziah,

When I was your age, Richard Nixon was the president of the United States. Our country was deeply divided over the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement was still reshaping the social landscape. The black and white high schools in my hometown had just been integrated the year before and it was a time of dramatic change and social upheaval. Two years after Nixon’s 1972 landslide reelection he would resign the presidency in disgrace over the Watergate Scandal.

But before that dramatic ending, Nixon would visit China in 1972, opening up relations with Asia that would lead to a seismic shift in trade and foreign policy. Some have argued that opening trade with China fueled the drain in US manufacturing jobs that is behind the deep anger and dissatisfaction of working class America today, a factor at play in this latest Presidential Election- the revenge of unintended consequences.

Also when I was your age, the Equal Rights Amendment was passed by the US senate that year. The Amendment banning discrimination based on gender didn’t receive approval from enough states to become part of the constitution. But feminists were hopeful that progress was still being made for women’s rights, and that soon glass ceilings would no longer restrict women in any quarter of society: business, politics, or religion.

All this is to say that when I was your age, our political scene was contentious, divided, and societal anxiety was high. I’m aware that this year’s political experience is all new to you, but not new to many of us: been there, done that.

However, never before have I heard rhetoric around a presidential election become so hateful and vicious. I have wanted to cover your ears these past few months, especially when campaign speech turned into bullying hate speech. I wanted to cover your ears

when the rhetoric became disparaging of other religions, minorities, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQ communities.

Perhaps most disturbing as a mother of a daughter was hearing derogatory language about women, reducing us to our body parts, assessing women's looks as if they were objects, and all of this dismissed and excused as "locker-room talk" or "boys will be boys." I want to protect your budding sense of yourself as a young woman who is created in the image of God, yet I feel impotent with fear and fury that you and your friends- that all women- have had to endure such degrading speech that has not been challenged nearly enough by those who know better.

As a young woman, you are not the only one made to feel unsafe by this election rhetoric. When you asked us at dinner Wednesday night if you were going to be deported, we said "Of course not. When we brought you home from China and adopted you, you became a US citizen." Sadly, I happen to know that the same conversation was happening at dinner tables all around the country. In a Nashua school this week, a Muslim girl was taunted by her peers: "Now you're going to be deported." She went home in tears. I imagine her family's dinner table talk was not as reassuring as ours was. We are living in a climate of fear. We are desperate for good news.

As your mother, I can't promise that I can protect you, a young woman of a minority race in this country. I can't promise that I can keep you safe, shield you from degradation, or create a world where you and all others free to thrive and become their best. In the political realm, I can cast my vote for a society that is just, merciful, and kind and I can be an advocate for justice. But there are no guarantees.

But there is something I can do: I can continue to live first and foremost as a citizen of the kin-dom of God. I *can* promise you that I will continue to be a follower of Jesus, the Jesus who stood outside temple with his disciples who admired its beauty. "It won't last," Jesus said. "The institutions of this world will all become rubble, they will not save you, no matter how much you put your hope in them." Jesus reminds his followers then and now that the Idols of this world will demand our souls, but they will not save us.

I *can* promise you that I will continue to follow the Jesus whose very soul was formed by the prophetic tradition of Isaiah. Isaiah's nation of Israel was devastated by an exile that destroyed their political and religious structures. And still Isaiah called the people of Israel to be

“repairers of the breach.” The Hebrew notion of “Tikkun Olam”- repairers of the torn fabric of the world- deeply shaped Jesus’ ministry to the poor, the disenfranchised, the outcast, the alien among us, the oppressed, and the abused. Jesus lived and died as a repairer the breach.

I promise you, my daughter that I and the people of Good Shepherd-and many good people throughout the world- will cultivate *endurance* for the sake of God’s reign. We will stand in the breach and work tirelessly for reconciliation, justice, peace, kindness, and mercy. And we will testify to God’s redemptive presence in our midst- no matter which way the political winds blow.

When I was your age, Richard Nixon was president. And for all his flaws and the long-term reverberations of his failings, he did make that trip to China. I speculate that if he hadn’t done that, then you father and I may never have traveled to China 15 years ago to adopt you. An unintended consequence of China’s “one child policy” laid bare a deep undervaluing of the female, and created a situation where you needed a forever home.

In other words: behind the façade of deeply complex socio-political realities God is always relentlessly at work bringing hope, redemption, restitution, reconciliation, and new life in unexpected places. Your very name, *Keziah*, testifies to that reality. At the end of the book of Job, after all of his tragic losses, he was given a new family. Job’s lost daughters were unnamed at the beginning of his story. But his new daughters are now given names of valuable, exotic spices. Keziah means cinnamon. And no matter how foul the stench of a cruel world can become, there is always the sweet scent of cinnamon to testify to God’s redemptive, loving power, which is greater than any kingdom on earth. AMEN.