

Black Lives Matter
A Sermon by
The Reverend Bill Clark

November 4th, 2008 Barack Obama was elected the 44th President of the United States. I recall that day very well and saved the front page of the New York Times from the next day – the headline read; “Obama elected President as Racial Barriers Fall” The article went on to say;

“Barack Hussein Obama was elected the 44th president of the United States on Tuesday, sweeping away the last racial barrier in American politics with ease as the country chose him as its first black chief executive.”

.....But it was just as much a strikingly symbolic moment in the evolution of the nation’s fraught racial history, a breakthrough that would have seemed unthinkable just two years ago.” (NYTimes: 2008)

Racial barriers fall and a breakthrough in our nations fraught racial history. It was a time of great hope and celebration for some – a dangerous precedent and deep concern for others. I watched the election returns at one of my favorite restaurants in town with a group of friends and local townies and personally, I wept, (I know no big deal for me) but the emotional release for what this could mean for our nation and its racial history was profound. We’re on our way, I thought. We are on our way!!

Of course, now not quite eight years later with his two presidential terms almost complete racial tensions and systematic racism are alive and well in these United States of America. Now I certainly do not mean to imply this Obama's fault. Goodness knows he has been blamed for enough troubles. But I do believe there is a correlation between the election of our first African-American President and what appears to be an almost unconscious reaction by the increase in racial tension along with the killing of innocent black individuals, both men and women in our nation. Racial barriers fall – referring back to the NYT headlines? Not yet. Certainly not yet. We have a long way to go!!

In the year 2012 following the murder of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of George Zimmerman a movement was created called Black Lives Matter.

This movement was created by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi as call to action for Black people following the murder of Martin and the refusal to hold the shooter George Zimmerman accountable. It was, according to Garza, “a response to the anti-black racism that permeates our society. Black lives matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise.” (Internet: BLM)

The creators of BLM go on to say; “when we say black lives matter, we are broadening the conversation around state violence to include all of the ways in which Black people are intentionally left powerless at the hands of the state. We are talking about the ways in which Black lives are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity.” (*Internet: BLM*)

For me, as a white ally to this movement it all boils down to human rights and dignity. The systematic racism embedded within our nation helps to keep the human rights and dignity of our black brothers and sisters under control. As a Unitarian Universalist the dignity and worth of all human beings is paramount to how I live my life. As many of our churches demonstrate their support for this movement by placing banners and such outside their sanctuary, many were vandalized, stolen or the word “Black” was cut out all together. Some removed them all together – perhaps out of fear or trepidation. Others just got new ones. The point being here that Black Lives Matter is community action at its highest level. I often wondered where we stand as an intentionally welcoming congregation of diverse faiths and shared values fostering spiritual growth, community action and universal justice. Where do you stand?