

How I hope to approach the days following the election

Last time I woke early, opened the curtains, sat down to pray, and started crying.

by [L. Roger Owens](#)

November 2, 2020

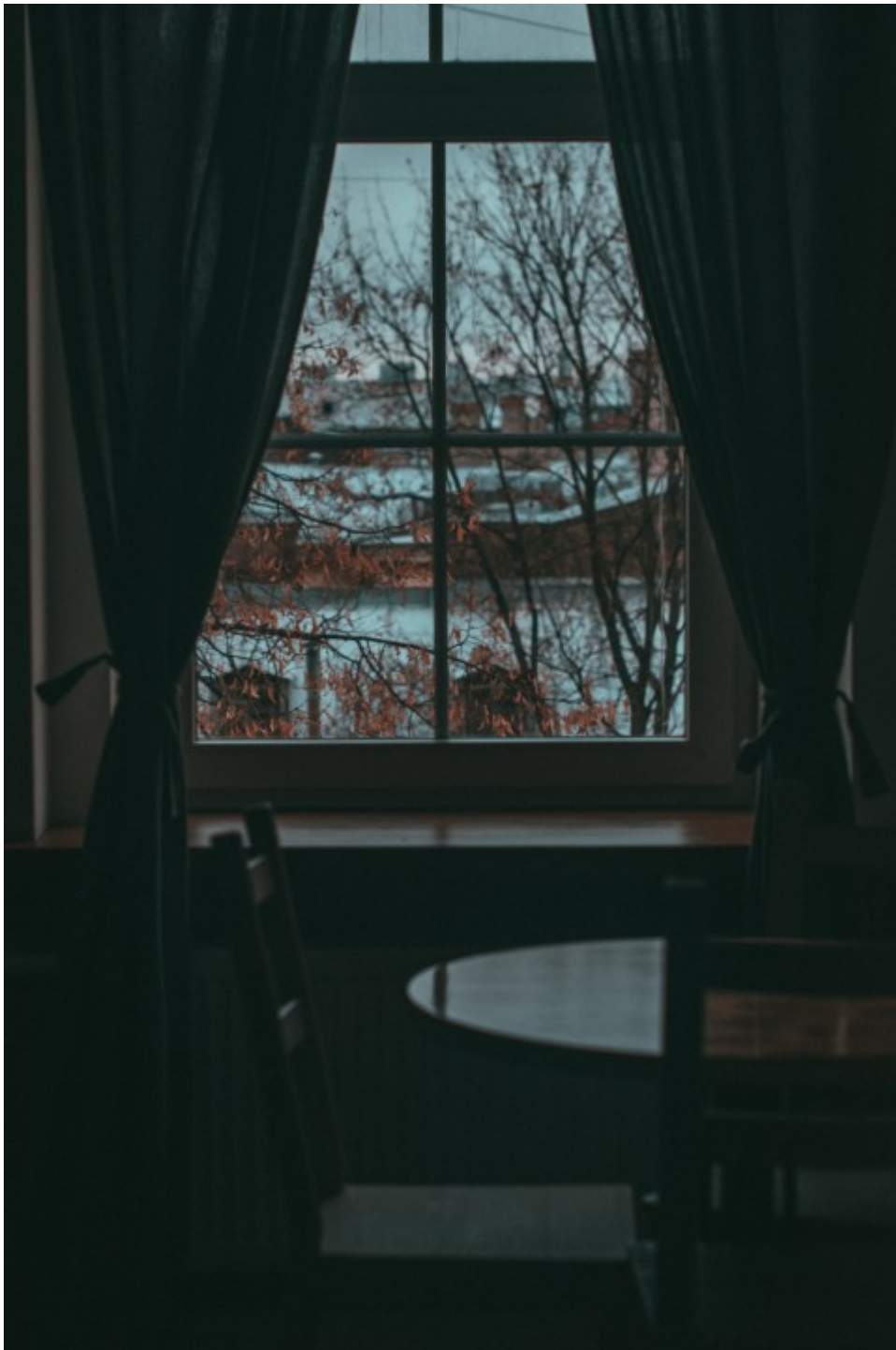


Photo by [Artem Maltsev](#) on [Unsplash](#)

After the last presidential election, my first reaction was: wake early, open the curtains on the blue dark of morning, sit down to pray, and before I can open my Bible, let the tears flow—tears of fear, tears of grief, tears of anger at feeling betrayed by so many Christians who'd given their vote to Trump.

Tears might come again this year. If they do, I'll give them the space they need. But I hope there's more this time. I hope that whatever the outcome, my grief—or relief—will find its place in a wider horizon.

When my mother died, I ended up with her recipe box, a battered cardboard thing held together by yellowing nylon tape. Not long ago, I was rifling through the box looking for her apple pie recipe. The card wasn't in the dessert section, so I sought it among the side dishes and salads elsewhere in the box.

While searching for it, I discovered, folded up in the back of the box, a photocopy of someone's typed list of unexpected uses for a product called Avon Skin-So-Soft, a bath oil my mother used in the 80s. Apparently the product removes "soap scum from shower doors, shower curtains, windows, and bathroom and kitchen fixtures" and "scuff marks from patent leather shoes" and, my favorite as a father of three children, "chewing gum from hair, skin, and most non-porous surfaces."

As I read the list, I wondered what kind of person wakes up in the morning and says, "Today I'm going to rub bath oil on my shoes. Who knows what will happen?"

Whoever it was, I bet they were fun to spend a Friday evening with—so few constraints on their imagination, on their willingness to give-it-a-try, on their ability to see endless possibilities in the moment and in the mundane. Most people see a bath oil and think to use it only as a bath oil. A blessed few see limitless potential.

I thought of Zen master Suzuki Roshi's famous line, "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the experts there are few."

And I thought, *On the mornings after the election—however frustrating those mornings are, however troubled I feel—I want to wake with beginner's mind. I want to continue to see possibilities.*

Travel writer Pico Iyer once said in an interview, "I think that most of my writing is about putting hope and realism into the same sentence. I want to see the world as it really is, but I don't want to give up on a sense of possibility." To stay grounded in realism, he reads spy novels by John le Carré. To stay open to possibility, he reads Emerson and Thoreau.

I read Jesus.

Jesus never tells us what he means when he says that we must become like little children to enter the kingdom of God, so I like to imagine that his fondness for childhood stems from the unconstrained, playful nature of a child's imagination, the way a child can spy possibility in the unlikeliest of places—a trait necessary, it seems to me, to see the hidden reality of God's kingdom lurking where most of us would never dare to look. An imagination that can see a sword in a stick, a rocket ship in a refrigerator box, or an ocean in a mud puddle is the kind of imagination that can see a feast in a few loaves of bread or the face of Christ in those who are poor, naked, and imprisoned.

It's as if Jesus was saying, "In the child's mind there are many possibilities, but in the grownup's there are few." To see and enter God's kingdom we need the former.

And I suspect I will need just such an imagination to endure the days and weeks after the election—indeed, the years that follow, whoever wins. For when do we not need the creativity of mind to spy the possibilities of God's kingdom in and around the narrow options offered by political regimes?

We talk politics at the family dinner table. My 16-year-old son, who is gay, says he hates Trump, hates that Trump wants to limit the future possibilities available to him. My 15-year-old son, who possesses an innate sense of justice, watches with pain the erosion of any sense of what is right, what is fair. My ten-year-old daughter worries especially about the environment but also absorbs all the worry she senses in the rest of us.

A few days ago, over a dinner of takeout sub sandwiches, she asked nervously, "But what will we do if Trump wins?"

I paused. I thought, *We'll wake early, open the curtains on the blue dark of morning; we'll sit in prayer and let the tears come—tears of fear, grief, and anger.*

I mumbled something hopeful, something about love. I don't remember exactly what.

But that's OK, because I trust my kids know the answer to her question. What else could we do but what we did last week and the week before that? We'll stand against racism, feed the hungry, check on our neighbors, demand rights for LGBTQ people. We'll pray to see God's kingdom and to live in it accordingly. We'll laugh. We'll love—each other and those Donald Trump mocks as unlovable. And maybe,

eventually, if God answers our prayers for imagination, even Donald Trump himself.

In other words, we'll refuse to let the narrow horizon of political realities frame our lives. We'll acknowledge fear and anger but deny them the power to constrain us.

We'll become like little children, looking for possibilities each morning as we open the curtains on this world God so loves, this world in which God is endlessly, if hiddenly, making all things new.