

Why I'm grieving Elizabeth Warren's exit

Unlike Hillary Clinton's defeat in 2016, Warren's defeat came at the hands of her own party.

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The Sunday after the 2016 presidential election, I [preached](#) on the lectionary gospel text for the day, in which Jesus says, “Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is near!’ Do not go after them” (Luke 21:8). I preached my despair about white supremacy, xenophobia, and the seeming willingness of millions of our electorate to accept a false teacher who

said he was the only one who could save us. I also preached the hope that we would persist, that by our endurance we would gain our souls.

Shaking my hand after church that day, one member said to me, “Well, Hillary was a terrible candidate.” Like that was a given. Like she wasn’t running against a self-admitted sexual abuser.

My parishioner’s comment smarted. I grew up in the same church Hillary Clinton did, and I recognized the language of her faith. She worked for issues that I, as a Christian leader, believed in. To know that most white evangelicals and a good share of other white Christians voted in droves against her was painful.

I knew Clinton wasn’t ideal. She carried the burden of her husband’s legacy. She didn’t run a particularly intersectional campaign. Progressives didn’t trust her when it came to taxing the rich or ending our endless wars. She carried a lot of baggage, earned and otherwise.

Elizabeth Warren’s campaign seemed to have sidestepped this kind of baggage. Warren had institutional credibility and a documented history of progressive politics and plans. She taught at Harvard and wanted to tax the rich. She made an effort to build a truly feminist, faithful, and intersectional campaign, and that showed. Her policies would have lifted all boats, and she knew that because she had done her homework. She was warm and funny and at home with Stephen Colbert. She apologized when her error around self-identifying as Native American was discovered. (She apologized!) Even her missteps became opportunities to shine.

As the field of Democratic candidates narrowed, though, Warren fell behind, caught in the double bind of being both progressive and a woman. The media and voters determined that she was unelectable, and suddenly, she was out. An unprecedentedly diverse competition for the Democratic nomination has come down to a contest between two white men from the Northeast in their late seventies. True: one is a Catholic and one is Jewish. And Tulsi Gabbard is still running. Still, Warren’s exit feels like a loss.

Many women are now grieving. No matter how ideal a candidate, no matter how fearless or compassionate a leader, no matter how brilliant an economic and legal mind, a woman can’t seem to win. Some are grieving even more now than in 2016, because Warren’s defeat came from the hands of her own party. Our brothers and fathers and parishioners—and some of our mothers and friends—believed that only a

man could win. Their fear of misogyny among the electorate overrode their desire to have a progressive feminist in power.

I will vote in the general election for either Joe Biden or Bernie Sanders. Both are light years better than the man in the White House. But I'm sad. I'm sad because I know what it feels like to get an inappropriate shoulder rub. I'm sad because I've heard too many economic arguments that have nothing to do with the lived experiences of women. I'm sad because although I'm an excellent pastoral leader my ideas are never good enough until the male senior pastor restates them. I wanted better for our country, and I wanted better for Elizabeth Warren.

I'm preaching this Sunday, too. The lectionary has assigned the story of Nicodemus. But if I felt like getting in trouble with some members of my congregation, I could preach on Luke 21 again: "Make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance... you will be betrayed... you will be hated. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls" (14, 16-19). Jesus goes to Jerusalem; Elizabeth goes back to the Senate; Christians, hopefully, try to choose the righteous fight.

November 2016 wasn't the only time I've stirred the pot from the pulpit, and each time folks have reacted. But in the most recent iteration, something remarkable happened. Some of our lay leaders started to wonder why complaints are always lodged against the female staff members and why the first collective response is always to assure the complainers and silence the staff.

As the Super Tuesday polls closed, I sat in a Human Resources Committee meeting. We named that there might be a problem, and then we wondered together how to address toxic masculinity in our congregation. It wasn't all the progress I'd longed for our country to see that night. But it felt like something. Enough to endure a little longer.