Shabbat Shalom.

This past Tuesday night, as the election returns were rolling in, my husband Elon and I trekked out to a bar in Cobble Hill. We were there to celebrate our friend, and beloved CBE member, Danielle Noel, who was elected that day as a civil court judge here in New York City. As Danielle can attest, the vibes that night were jubilant. People high fiving, lifting a glass to one another.

Now surely, as we know, not everyone was joyous on Tuesday night. And I hope that any of us who were and are overjoyed about the results of the election do not lose sight of our commitments to love and to stay in close community with those who felt differently. And anyway, *winning* an election is one thing. But *building* the kind of world we hope to live in is another. The first might happen in a single day but the second takes generations.

As I stood there among friends, I was brought back to a different election night, exactly ten years before, which so many of us remember clearly. That night in 2016, I went to a different Brooklyn bar to watch the returns come in and I felt like I was enduring a nightmare. Ever since then, many of us have replayed that evening in our minds. And we have also spent the last decade grappling with the reality of what took shape in our world (agitating and campaigning, and neurosing) because we knew we were living through something scary.

But standing there on Tuesday night, I spent time thinking not only about everything that happened *to* us over the last decade, but about everything *we had done* in the midst of it. All the ways we had continued to live, to love, to organize, and to build, even when the future seemed deeply uncertain.

Election nights, like all annual, biennial or quadrennial rituals, offer us a chance to chart our growth since the last time we passed through them. I feel that feeling every Rosh Hashanah; looking back at my year and thinking about all that's changed since the Rosh Hashanah that came before.

And on Tuesday night, I found myself measuring not merely how much the world had changed since 2016, but how much *life* had happened in the meantime. And over these days since then, I have felt gratitude, and a little sorrow, as well as some catharsis…as this chapter of American life turns to another.

Now let's not get ahead of ourselves. The political era that began a decade ago is not quite over yet. And there will be enormous work to do if this election is going to portend a real, enduring change for our country.

But think for a moment about all that has happened in these intervening years. Election upsets, a pandemic, an insurrection, more elections, more bitterness, war and technological threats that agitate us all. These are the events by which we tend to measure history. The big headlines. The battles won and lost.

And yet, while all of that was happening, there was another story unfolding. People organizing, and volunteering, and strategizing, imagining a different future. There were also so many simchas during that time. So many new relationships and new movements forged. New works of art, new breakthroughs. And of course, new babies being born.

As I considered that thought, I was reminded of a sermon from Frank Boreham, a Christian preacher of the 20th century. In 1909, he wrote:

"A century ago, men were following, with bated breath, the march of Napoleon, and waiting with feverish impatience for the latest news of the wars. And all the while, in their own homes, babies were being born. But who could think about babies? Everybody was thinking about battles…"

He goes on to remind his audience that in that a century prior, in 1809, Abraham Lincoln and Oliver Wendell Holmes were born. As were Felix Mendelssohn and Frederic Chopin and Elizabeth Barett Browning, among so many other people who would transform the world.

"But," his sermon concluded, "nobody thought of babies. Everybody was thinking of battles. Yet which of the *battles* of 1809 mattered more than the *babies* of 1809? We fancy that God can only manage [the] world by big battalions when all the while [God] is doing it by beautiful babies. When a wrong wants righting, or a work wants doing, or a truth wants preaching…God sends a baby into the world to do it."

Those words get me every time.

We tend to measure history by its battles, its crises, its great upheavals. But the future is often made through acts of faith and love that may seem inconsequential at the time. Through people who continue to invest in a world they cannot yet see. And that is precisely the kind of faith we encounter in Parashat Chayei Sarah.

The title Chayei Sarah is famously misleading. The text we call “the life of Sarah,” begins with her death. We read: Vayhi Chayei Sarah meah shana v’esrim shanah v’sheva shanim shnei chayei Sarah. Sarah’s lifetime–the span of Sarah’s years–came to one hundred and twenty seven years.

And what follows is the story of Abraham and Isaac mourning her. We learn of Abraham buying a burial plot for Sarah among the Hittites. And then we encounter Abraham sending his servant to find a wife for Isaac. Those two marquee acts of the drama are, when you think about it, remarkably future-oriented. Neither choice could guarantee what the future would bring. But both were expressions of the faith for which Abraham is well known. And Abraham did not wait for the world to become more promising before investing in it.

We read, “Abraham was old, ba bayamim, advanced in years, and God had blessed Abraham in everything.” But the true measure of Abraham’s blessing is what he does with it.

It won’t spoil much to tell you that the parsha concludes with Isaac embracing Rebecca, and loving her – the first time that love is mentioned between two people in the Torah. Vaye’e’ha’ve’ha Vayinachem Yitzchak acharei imo. Isaac loved her and thus found comfort after his mother’s death.

The medieval sage Ramban explains that the Torah goes out of its way to mention this detail “to hint to us that he had been in profound suffering over his mother’s death and ‘comfort was very far away from him,’” using the language of Lamentations – our greatest text of collective grief.

Through love, actively building with another person, Isaac found a way to begin again.

But all of that was only possible because Abraham refused to mistake the circumstances of the present for the possibilities of the future. He had buried his wife. He was old. The promises God had made to him remained largely unfulfilled. And yet he continued to make plans. To behave as though there were still a world worth building. To have hope – a commitment to the possibilities of the future.

None of us has any idea what will become of this political moment. We cannot know what the next election will bring, or what the next decade will hold. And we certainly cannot know which of the headlines that consume us will matter most a century from today.

Without hope, we surrender the future to the circumstances of the present. Without it, we cease to believe that our actions matter. And if this week has reminded us of anything, it's that the world as it is…isn't the whole story.

But hope doesn't win once and for all. It has to be fought for, sustained, and renewed. Over the next two years, and four years, and ten years, and long beyond that. The work of building a more just and loving world will not end with any election nor will it end with any generation. And in the meantime, people will fall in love. Children will be born. Communities will be built. Human beings will continue to invest in a future they cannot yet see.

That doesn't mean that the battles don't matter. Of course they do. But so do the babies. So do the small acts of faith that rarely make the news. It is, then, fitting that the parsha that opens with Sarah's death is named for her life. Because the story of a life is never exhausted by its ending. It continues in the lives that follow, in the love that survives, and in the future that others dare to build. May we never surrender that hope. And may we never stop doing the work that makes it possible.

Shabbat Shalom.