

Rev. Nathan Detering
February 10, 2019
“Love So Fierce It Made You Run”

“Here is the world; beautiful and terrible things will happen.

Keep our hearts tender.

Keep our eyes soft.

Because this is what we are about:

We know there is no answer but to love one another.

We bear witness against unnecessary destruction.

We gather in community to practice being the person

The world is calling us to be.

We cannot do everything,

But we can do something, and that something is not nothing.

So forget your perfect offering.

There is a crack in everything

That is how the light gets in.”

When our daughter, Ella, was three we enrolled her
Into a preschool program taught and led by UUAC’s own Ellen Kerstein,
Which she runs out of the (beautiful!) basement of her home in Holliston.
It is never easy to see the people you love leave you,
Whether that’s for day, a week, years or a lifetime,
But when we you are preschooler....even three hours feels hard,
Because even though that window of time was barely enough for you,
The parent, to go home, shower,
go to the grocery store for a quick run, or even just breathe.....,

For our Ella and for many if not most toddlers. the prospect of one
The parents dropping her off for a morning was emotionally devastating,
If not actual abandonment.

We tried everything – Juice! Candy! Boxes of those little box cereals!
Promises for unhealthy amount of screen time! –
Nothing worked.

Not even Ellen’s beatific smile or her inspired, original, made-up-on-the-
spot songs (ask her to sing you the one about being two sometime).

Nothing.

It got to the point where pre-school mornings
Caused us all something like pre-traumatic stress syndrome,
Which I think I just made up,
but all parents and guardians and teachers know what I mean.
Yes? Yes.

But if necessity is the mother of invention,
Then desperation the mother of curing separation anxiety,
Because one day Karyn (my wife) got inspired.
Taking Ella down the preschool stairs (big eyes, pre-scream!),
Me close behind,
She took Ella into the far corner and said, “*we’re going to play a game.*”
Games are like cat-nip to toddlers. Toddler-nip.

*I’m going to put here, she says, you stay here – no no, I’m not leaving,
I’m not leaving, I’m not leaving...*

And to me gives me the eye that says – *I know what you’re thinking;
We’re not dropping her in the corner and bolting...*

I'm going to leave you here, she says to Ella, who learned to walk at 9 months and learned to run at 9 months, 1 week...

And then I want you to run as fast as you can to me all the way

Across the room and give me the biggest hug you can.

And then I want you to go back to the corner,

And then take a deep breath,

And run as fast as you can all the way across the room

And give your dad the biggest hug you can.

And here eyes grew wide, but this time with excitement

And not fear, and says, in toddler accent, *'a running hug!'*

Yes, exactly – a running hug!!

But here's the thing – we'll only play this game if you let

Dad and me leave without losing your mind....

Ok, she didn't say it exactly like that, but that's what she meant.

Because listen, Karyn said – we'll see you in only three hours,

and then we'll run back here, our turn to run, to give you

a hug in return. Ok?

And she nodded.

I'm thinking: *Seriously? Running hug? What parenting jujitsu*

Is this? It seriously won't work.

But then we put our baby girl in the corner,

And then we said *"Go!"* and she ran so fierce with arms wide,

No self-consciousness, leaning slightly forward,

Her heart running faster than her feet, her feet trying to catch up with her heart,

into Karyn's arms, lifting her ceiling high.

And then...*ok, do it again! This time for dad...*

OK! She says, no tiredness in the legs, no pre-separation-stress in her face,
running back to the corner, and then....

"Go!" and she ran so fierce with arms wide,

No self-consciousness, leaning slightly forward,

Her heart running faster than her feet, her feet trying to catch up

With her heart,

In my arms, lifting her ceiling high.

But now for the test of truth.

Ok! Now, it's time to go with Ms. Ellen.

We'll see you in a few hours, and then we can do it again.

Ok?

Ok! She says, as if it were the easiest thing in the world,

As if it was us the whole time who was making this so difficult.

And we turned around and walked up the stairs, our ears

Hearing not a wailing sound, not a whimper, not a single tear drop on the
floor.

I'll be damned.

I love being a dad, but I will confess I don't so much miss those toddler
days, except for this – the free abandon, the no self-consciousness,

The heart running faster than the feet,

the feet trying to catch up with heart.

Because something happens to us as we get older, doesn't it? –

These filters that put on the brakes or the pause or the slow into our steps,

So that we get more, somehow, restrained in showing our loving:

Like how....

Guys give each other awkward hand-shake-hug-chest bumps,

Or how couples, in the same room together, on the same couch even,

text each other rather than putting down phones and talking

(K and I have done this, so you know I'm not preaching holier than thou),

Or how teens need the distance, understandably, and the separation,

understandably, such that heart emojis and those kiss emojis sent by them to

us become the equivalent of a 500 hundred mile running hug -

That song Maureen sang – 500 Miles - some of us will remember from the

1980's, released in 1988 by The Proclaimers.

Those emojis now prized and cherished and beloved.

But something happens when most of us grow up and old,

Such that running becomes something one doesn't do in response

To love or hugs so much anymore....

Instead we run marathons, and run errands, and run ourselves ragged,

and run 5K's, and run a little bit wild on a date night, staying out past 10 (!),

and run ourselves into the ground...

Running all the time, but rarely our heart running faster than our feet,

Our feet trying to catch up with our heart.

Why is that? What happened?

Where or what has come of our love, our affection, our passion....

Such that it doesn't make us run so much anymore?

And that the things that wear us down – the smallness of life, the lesser things, the minutia – seem to make us run, our feet so fast,
Our heart lagging so far behind.

I wonder.

Unless of course, there is emergency. Yes, unless then.

And now, as this week dawned, and Tasker and Heather and I
Planned our installation of desks remembering the 17 lives lost
This coming Thursday, one year ago – *Alyssa, Scott, Martin,*
Nicholas, Aaron, Jaime, Chris, Luke, Cara, Gina, Joaquin,
Alaina, Meadow, Helena, Alex, Carmen, and Peter,

There names each chosen lovingly by parents, precious, beloved...

And me remembering then the footage of all the parents

And classmates and siblings when the news broke of the shooting...

The video of everyone not standing, not walking...but running....

Running with fear so fierce, but also running with love so fierce,

Their hearts so much faster than their feet could take them,

With abandon and desperation and hope and anguish -

Some yes, most, yes, met with blessed relief, cradling their babies

In their arms, running into hugs there and there and there.

And some, yes, met with unspeakable, unspeakable loss and emptiness.

I cannot even imagine...

And yet, because our faith asks us to walk in one other's shoes,

And compassion, co-passion with those near and far,

Not being able to imagine is no reason not run with love so fierce

Toward those whose pain we do not know.

And still, this question: why do we, too often maybe, wait for emergency to run with fierceness to those we love?

Why does it seem that loss or the fear of loss inspires us to run

With honest love toward our children, our partners, our parents, our friends?

Do we take our loves for granted?

I honestly don't know.

Friends, it has been a terrible week for me, Karyn and Ella.

Out of the sky blue our beloved baby boy, now no longer a boy,

So healthy and vibrant and seemingly invincible

Grew shockingly sick and was rushed by ambulance to the hospital,

And then the pediatric floor, and then the ICU, and then back again

To the pediatric floor,

Hoses and tubes and oxygen and masks everywhere, his body

Just six days ago so independent and free and strong within two days

Completely dependent on nurses and doctors and modern medicine.

You know who runs with urgency and fierceness and even love?

Nurses and doctors and the woman who delivered to Em his first morsel

Of food eaten in 6 days.

God bless them. God bless them. God bless them.

And you know who else does?

Me. Karyn. Our heart running so much faster than our feet would take us,

Than the traffic btw here and Framingham MetroWest would allow us,

Than time and space would allow,

Us running hugs back and forth, back and forth, and from you, too,

This congregation who has watched him grow since he was just 3,

And loved him through changes and growth, like all our children,
Through OWL and then COA and sporadic youth group,
Sporadic or sparse, because hey, his dad is one of the ministers.

But here's my message to us, that I'm feeling and re-learning
Again this week:

Run with our love – run, run, run....across the rooms of our lives,
And don't let an emergency or fear or viral pneumonia be the
The thing that gets you to run with wild, unselfconscious, abandon
Toward those who need and want our running hugs.
Don't let bum knees or busy schedules or routine
Be the excuse you give for why your heart has lagged behind your feet.
Don't wait. Don't pause. Don't hesitate. Don't lag. Don't promise to do it
later. Don't chill. Don't go slow.
And instead shout "GO!" and feel your legs churning, and
Open your arms, and have your heart lean you forward over your feet,
And run, run, run, into the arms of your beloved, whoever they are,
Wherever they may be, and let your spirit be lifted to the ceiling....
Because our lives our short, and our love is fierce.
So why not run?
Why wait?
Why not start now?

And so we sing....TNT!

