

**“Stronger Together”**

**Rev. Nathan Detering**

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Take a deep breath with me...breath in this space that has nurtured

And needled people for centuries, including your own...

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

*Be not afraid.*

*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.”*

Earlier this summer, before the hurricanes,

Between the scary news coming in from North Korea,

Before Charlottesville and KKK marches and presidential pardons

And immigrant dreamers waking up to a nightmare that they may

Only six months left as legal residents here,  
And efore the blink of an eye eclipse that proved people really  
Will look away from their screens for a while to stare at nature,  
this happened:

It was a Saturday night on the beach in peak tourist season in Florida,  
and Jessica and Derek Simmons saw people on the beach staring out  
Into the ocean water, assuming someone had a seen a shark.

Then they noticed the flashing lights by the boardwalk, a police truck  
On the sand and nearly a dozen bobbing heads about 100 yards beyond the  
beach, crying desperately for help.

Six members of a single family — four adults and two young boys — and  
four other swimmers had been swept away by powerful and deceptive rip  
currents churning below the water's surface.

Jessica – because somewhere deep in her she knew that the only  
Answer we have in this beautiful and broken world is to love another,  
Thought to herself:

*“These people are not drowning today. It's not happening. We're going to  
get them out.”*

Jessica was a strong swimmer and fairly fearless in the face of adversity.

But others had tried to reach them and each previous rescue attempt had only stranded more people.

There was no lifeguard on duty, and law enforcement on the scene had opted to wait for a rescue boat.

People on the beach had no rescue equipment, only boogie boards, surf boards and their arms and legs.

And then came the shout: "*Form a human chain!*"

Roberta was among those caught in the rip currents.

From 100 yards away in the Gulf of Mexico, between crashing waves and gulps of salt water, she heard the shouting.

By then, Roberta and the other eight people stranded with her had already been in the water for nearly 20 minutes, fighting for their lives.

She and the others had ventured into the water to rescue her two sons, Noah, 11, and Stephen, 8, who had gotten separated from their family while chasing waves on their boogie boards.

*"The tide knocked every bit of energy out of us,"* Roberta said.

So much water went up her nose that she was sure she would drown, she told the newspaper.

*"I was exhausted,"* she said.

On shore, the human chain began forming, first with just five volunteers, then 15, then dozens more as the rescue mission grew more desperate.

Jessica and Derek Simmons swam past the 80 or so human links, some who couldn't swim, and headed straight for Roberta, using surf and boogie boards to aid their rescue efforts.

She and Derek started with the children, passing Noah and Stephen back along the human chain, which passed them all the way to the beach.

By the time Jessica Simmons reached Roberta, the 34-year-old mother could hardly keep her head above water.

*“I’m going to die this way,”* she thought to herself.

*“My family is going to die this way. I just can’t do it.”*

And then she blacked out.

She woke up on the sand moments later to the sound of more yelling in the water.

Someone yelled that Roberta’s mother, Barbara, still in the water, was having a heart attack.

*“That’s when the chain got the biggest,”* Roberta said. *“They linked up wrists, legs, arms. If they were there, they were helping.”*

Nearly an hour after they first started struggling, just as the sun prepared to set, all 10 of the stranded swimmers were safely back on shore.

The entire beach began to applaud.

*“It was beachgoers and the grace of God,”* Roberta said.

*“It actually showed me there are good people in this world,”* Roberta Said.

What do we want to do with this story?

It’d be easy to want to just cuddle up to it like a warm blanket,

Keeping the harder stories and truths at bay.

But instead I say we use it as a reminder:

That there are things happening in the world that not one of us can

Handle alone; there are problems that cannot be saved by a single person.

What are some? (ask here...)

So, of course, you saw this coming.

Alone, no matter our strength, we cannot make the difference the world needs.

But together, as a community, we can gather the strength we need.

So let us rise, let us reach across isle and to our neighbors and link arms...

We gather in this house of the spirit...

Because this church doesn't exist for your salvation or mine,

It gives us a way to participate in the saving of the world,

For the strong arms on my right and my left, help us lean in and on,

Find courage, don't be carried away in the current of the times,

Do justice, love our neighbor,

We say thank you...and amen...

As we return to our seats and sing Blue Boat Home.....

