

“Preaching and Poetry Slam”

Rev. Nathan Detering and Jamele Adams

Sunday, October 14, 2018

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

Keep our hearts tender.

Keep our eyes soft.

Keep our words true.

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

We say we want 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.”

The calendar says that we in the middle of October in the year 2018,

Fall the season more than any other - I remind you, you remind me –

That whispers and then shouts the passage of time

As leaves fall and our smart phones ping us with ‘a year ago, two years,

5 years ago photo memories’ that never quite cease to cause a heart-pang

Of bitter-sweetness. You taste the bitter sweet of memory, too?

Speaking of time – it was exactly one year ago this Sunday

That Jamele, you and your voice and your poetry were here with us,

Testifying that you don't need a fancy robe and stole to preach...

Am I right?

But since you were here, Jamele, and we all of us were here...

A lot of statistics have scrolled through our lives –

#metoo stories counting up by the millions, parkland over there,

Scores of babies and children separated down there,

Carbon parts per million and scary UN reports over here,

But then, over here more women than ever running for political office,

And especially more women of color,

And the first every transgender person to run for governor up in Vermont

(and yes, we're going to hear more about Yes on 3, the state vote on transgender right, next Sunday),

And, as always, new babies born here, and birthdays, and anniversaries,

And, yes, losses too...including lost parents and siblings and friends in this room, and death too soon (because isn't every death too soon?).

How do we hold it all, see it all, respond to it all

And – to bring in our theme for the month, and Maya Angelou –

Stay brave than simply stay safe,

And remember that we have hands, as Maya says,

That can strike with such force, and all heal with such tenderness.

Because, whatever we might say about this last year, we can at least say

This...we are alive, we are breathing,

And what the world needs are people, us, you, me - who talk less about the the statistics and bad news and all the need,

And talk more about what makes us come alive and stand

And move act...

Alive.

Stop

You got breath in your lungs

Spit in your mouth

A pumping heart

A dream and a nightmare

Innocence and choice

Dilemma and pause

Reason and decision

You have a brain

Blood in your veins

Grit

Find that love

You are love and loved (even if you don't know it)

Lock onto it like the jaws of life

Rip the top off hate-like the jaws of life

Laugh dam it

Find some of this (shit) funny

Humor is sweat equity in the experience of life

You can't smile without knowing pain

You earned those tears

You earned that joy

You earned that feeling

Fight (damn it!)

It didn't come from know where

You didn't come from nowhere

You come from greatness

Divinity is in your DNA

The devil is a lie

Be Devine

Forgive yourself

Be perfect in recognizing your imperfection

Don't give up

You are courage

*You are now and then
The past does not solely define you
Now is not it
You got more*

So

*Until your angels breath
(Until you are colorless)
And releasing the stench of life
Rot to bones
Burn to ash
Buried
Ghost and angel
And
Not of this world*

Until then.....(damn it)

LIVE.

But Jamele – we need to say this, don't we? -
That living is not the same for everyone,
That life, however much divinity is sparked inside of us,
Is treated differently depending on where you come from,
What gender you identify as,
Or what color your skin is.
One thing I so appreciate about you being here, Jamele,
Is that you help me hear and see things that I,
As a straight white man from the suburbs,
Can choose not to see and hear,
Because I always need reminding, we always need reminding,
Having privilege means not having to think of my privilege.

I was thinking of this the other night as I found myself driving
Home from an evening church meeting here on Route 16,
The section here after the town hall until the canopy of woods
A real – did you know – a real speed trap.
And the sign says 40 or 45, I can't remember, which is the problem,
Because I just want to get home, I can barely stay up past 10 now
That I'm truly officially middle age and a little bit beyond,
So maybe I'm speeding a bit, for the sake of sleep,
When I pass some hidden driveway and I see the black and white
SUV police car pull out after I pass,
And my pulse raises and I feel the tingle of anxiety on the back of the neck,
And I try to ease off the gas without applying the brake, which is a sure
Sign of guilt,
Because I don't want to get in trouble, because the idea of getting
Pulled over scares me, because I fear a flashlight in my face,
Because holsters and guns scare me, because authority scares me...
And, I mean, I'm white, I look just like almost every officer in this town,
I don't read the statistics of how in my town of Holliston people of color
Are pulled over in greater numbers than white people...
And then remember a time when that happened to me or someone I love.

What I'm saying is – the brave thing now, as a white person,
Is for me to hear stories that aren't my own, to listen even
When these stories are hard, and when the poems
Bring a message we might rather not hear....

Who shot you

*The summer is hot
It's also when niggas get shot.....*

*Imagine going to church and getting shot
Imagine reaching for your wallet and getting shot
Imagine holding your cell phone and getting shot
Imagine calling for help and getting shot
Imagine having a broken tail-light and getting shot
Imagine your child in the back seat when you get shot
Imagine being broadcast on facebook live and bleeding out when you get
shot*

*Imagine fitting a description and getting shot
Imagine being handcuffed on the ground of a train-stop and getting shot
Imagine waiting for a friend in a coffee shop, and called cops put you out
Imagine being asked for trust you ain't got
Imagine college, graduating, celebrating and getting shoved off the stage
-with that degree you just got
Imagine getting choked out for selling cigarettes until your "knows" loses
snot
Imagine your snot box rocked like you been shot for being alive on a day
that's hot
Imagine praying everyday to not get shot
Imagine every blue uniform you see gives you flashbacks of being shot*

*You tired of this (shit)
Imagine being tired of being shot at....*

*Imagine they tell your family you got shot cause they forgot
Forgot to check the plot
Forgot to apologize for adding you to the family plot
Forgot to spot a non-lethal location to place the shot*

*Shots fired!
"Are you not entertained?!"*

Imagine getting fired as a slave and then shot
Imagine your love being shot
Imagine running for your freedom and being shot
Imagine being desensitized to being shot
Imagine expecting to be shot
Imagine not being afraid to get shot
Imagine being non-violent, yet ready for a shot
Imagine taking a shot at life and being shot
Imagine taking a shot at shooting back and getting shot
And then your family members get shot

Do they have guns in heaven?
Can you get shot in heaven?
Where can I go and not get shot?
Can you imagine a place where you are not getting shot
I can.....not.

27 times.

27 times you, Jamele, used the word 'imagine' in that poem,
 Asking us to step outside of ourselves enough to see pictures
 We would rather not see, storied would rather not hear,
 Experiences we would rather not know.

I get it. The chaos is too much. The outer world affects and infects
 Our inner life. Our spirits get worn and weary.

We cry out for sanctuary from the world's tough poems and prose,
 even as we hear the call the use sanctuary for something beyond ourselves.

So how about this: how about we – you and me – understand our work
 Here as religious people is to help each other imagine.

Imagine a world where the phrase 'get real, that's not happening' is banished
 from our lips.

Imagine using all the thrashing and crashing of the news as motivation to get out and vote in a few weeks!

Imagine being an upstander and not a bystander to the offhand sexist remark You hear at school or work or church.

Imagine, for those of that are white, using our positions of power and privilege to open conversations about race at work or friend groups rather than waiting for someone else to do it.

Imagine if you were that ‘someone else!’

Imagine how brave you would feel!

Imagine sending Dr. Christine Ford a letter of encouragement

After being called a ‘evil’ and a ‘hoax’ by the president this week.

Imagine if you acted as if you never believed the lie

That ‘I’m just one person; what difference does it make.’”

Imagine if you acted as if success wasn’t guaranteed

And uncertainty was assured, and you went anyway

On the service trip you really don’t have time for,

or entered the difficult conversation with a family member you’d rather avoid, or took the new job, or let that other job go even though doing nothing was easy and safe.

Imagine! Imagine if a whole bunch of us did this together.

Imagine. What power we’d have. What inspiration we’d draw.

What joy we might feel, despite the wreckage around us.

Because our world is not just broken, is it?

It’s also beautiful. We need each other to help us imagine.

We need each other to find taste the sweet and not just dwell on the bitter.

So Jamele...

Joy

THINGS THAT BRING ME JOY

Love

Trust

Rain

Magic

Matthew verses branded in the Bible

Her purpose

My reasons

Freedom

No home work

Her majesty

Politics not controlling our human limits

Snacks

Sneakers

Youth recognizing their power

The GODDES THAT IS GOD

Comedy

The calm before the storm

The dawn before the morn

The rose and the thorn protecting it

Warm swimming pools

Dead pool

Good teachers in schools

When goons turn in tools

That which brings you joy

Doesn't destroy that which brings me joy

Enjoy

THINGS THAT BRING ME JOY

Good DJz that disc jock jockeys

Like horse jocks jockey

Followers that lead when they follow me

ASAP Rocky

CREED more than Rocky

Harlem hardy body me

125th Street
Pineapple candy
The hungry with full stomachs
The homeless housed
Good music
A beautiful heart;
And people not abusing it
Loved skin
And when it swims through wind
Legacy
Slick poetry
Lit vocabulary
Mariah, Jim, underwood and any Carry
On shoulders baring weight of world and family

THINGS THAT BRING ME JOY

The Black Panther Party
The Black Panther movie
Black Panthers proud as pink panthers

THATS SO JOYFUL

Like a classroom with dead cell phones
And husbands that come home
And families that make that house a home
Guns gone
If McDonalds instead of Toys R Us was gone
Peacefulness in dark and quiet spaces

Joy
Like Palmolive and Dawn

Joy
Like "to the world" in that holiday song

JOY
Like God's tongs, tongues, palms and psalms

THINGS THAT BRING ME JOY

*Joy like joyous & overjoyed
 People being employed
 No soldiers deployed
 Race as one convoy*

JOY

*JOY is the genius of life
 For that of life which is freedom*

GET YOU SOME.

Which is why we communities like this, not just for our own joy,
 Our satisfaction, our own needs,
 But also so that others can GET THEM SOME too.
 Because friends this I know –
 That whenever I'm low, feeling scared, joy in the rearview,
 Bravery left under the bed at home, wondering my purpose,
 Tempted by lure of avoidance in the face of what to do or say
 In response to our times roiling and boiling,
 I know this: that the best thing I know how to do is get out of myself
 And go be there for and with someone else.
 So it's not a mistake, these first weeks of church,
 After a sad summer, that I have sought meeting and coffee and conversation
 And even a beer with some of you, asking you how you are,
 Gaining from you, from us, courage that I need and you need.
 "You're going to a lot of meetings' said one of the kids.
 "No, making a lot of connections," I said in reply.
 Because the promise I extend and receive here,
 Is that together we can be WE,

encouraging each other to have heart

Through the hard truth telling it takes to get there,

And the struggle...and to, the joy,

That are moments and mornings like this when we can pledge together:

PLEDGE of WE

I AM COMMITTED TO WE.
UNAPOLOGETIC FOR WHO WE ARE;
WE ARE THE FUTURE.
DRIVEN BY LOVE.
AND A PASSION;
FOR THE SOLIDARITY IN THE HUMAN COMMUNITY.
IT IS FRUSTRATING,
WHEN LIVES ARE NOT VALUED.
WE MUST NEVER SEVER
OUR EFFORTS
FOR PEACE AND EQUALITY.

Amen.