

## **“Poetry and Sermon Slam”**

**Rev Nathan Detering and Jamele Adams**

**October 15, 2017**

*“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.”*

The calendar says we are in the middle of October in the year 2017,

And even though the season of autumn is said to usher in cool and crisp

And maybe even calm to go along with so much pumpkin spice

That it's a wonder our water doesn't flow neon orange,

This fall has been anything but cool and calm outside these windows,

So much so that it's hard, isn't it, to even catch our breath -

Our hearts, our souls, our spirits kind of like that spinning dial

We see on our phones that says we are loading, loading, loading,

Just trying to keep up with all the data, all the developments,

all the destruction around us.

Now, I find it tempting when I get to feeling this ‘overwhelm’ to kind  
Of go into my ‘shhhhh’ mode – and not such the comfort kind of ‘shhhh’  
We whisper to our babies, but more the kind that Jamele spoke about that  
lures me into thinking that my voice can’t possibly matter,  
That it must be better not to make more noise,  
That it must be time, come autumn, to hunker down and hide  
Into a kind of powerless paralysis.  
Sound familiar?

But ‘Shhhhh’ is a dangerous sound, as Jamele says,  
Especially in these times, in these last weeks,  
When you’ve got football players being told to get up off the knee  
Or lose your job,  
And news stations being threatened by the President for reporting news  
He doesn’t like,  
And – can I say it plain? – people like me, preachers I mean,  
Who wrap their words in such velvety cotton comfort because  
They are afraid of their congregations and believe their jobs are on the line  
and,  
Which in some cases they are.

But I love you, UUAC, really and truly I do,  
And what I especially love about you these last years,  
And this last year in particular, is your willingness to  
Lean into rather than away from the discomfort

That comes from reckoning with our privilege and power,

Not saying “shhhhhh”

And not shying away from putting our voices and our bodies where our UU  
faith ask us to go.

And one place our faith surely asks us to go is witnessing

To the kind of words and experiences Jamele shares

In this next poem:

*“Comfort Control”*

*How do you feel about the situation in Ferguson MO?*

*It's an epidemic; NOT a situation*

*And if it's not an epidemic to you,*

*That tells me it's not effecting you.....yet*

*...if a group killed countless numbers of people grouped like you*

*It would be an epidemic to you*

*But hold up, stop and frisk this*

*When old enough to play outside by myself*

*My mother told me*

*"when stopped by the police, don't do anything that might get you killed or  
locked up"*

*In fact stay in this neighborhood,*

*On this block*

*In front of this building*

*So you're close to home.*

*And that's exactly where these boys are killed?*

*In their neighborhoods, On their blocks,*

*In front of their buildings; And Close to home*

*Imagine outliving your future grandchildren's murdered father?*

*This is poverty of a soul, living in a wealth of pain*

*How do explain ripping the life out of an unarmed body?*

*How do you feel for real about Ferguson, MI?*

*I say I don't know what to say*

*So I begin to act  
 Act like my name is Michael Brown  
 And lived in Ferguson, MI  
 Act like my name is Eric Garner  
 And lived in Brooklyn, NY  
 Act like my name is Oscar Grant  
 And lived in Oakland, CA  
 Living like them black boys do  
 Dyin' like them black boys do*

*I'm told I'm not under attack,  
 But that's mostly said by those whom are not Black  
 The New York Times reminds me  
 Black boys like me are not angels  
 But when those bullets pierce through me I become one  
 Bleeding for reasons  
 That feel like this is human hunting season*

*It's hard being human when you're property  
 It's hard being human when you're the anomaly  
 It's hard being human when you're called minority  
 It's hard being human when you learn you were once 3/5ths of one*

*See us as heartbeats and not target sheets  
 This ain't just about Black boys  
 Or 200 kidnapped girls  
 Or condemning all the police in the world*

*It's about deconstructing systems of oppression  
 Breaking away from the chains  
 Unshackling our brains  
 Seeing all humans as humane*

*The question of the summer has been "turn down for what?"  
 This gives us every reason to TURN UP.*

*How do you repair despair?  
 I dare to go there with you  
 What happens when we share halos  
 Clip our own wings, so we're all grounded*

*I mean you'll still have pretty and fluffy feathers,  
But we'd all share the sky*

*Let's Sacrifice; like.....  
Unlace our eyelashes  
Let them flutter to the floor  
Catch as much as we can in our eyes  
So the dirt never gets in yours*

*Is sacrifice that hard?  
Or is it uncomfortable.  
Is privilege a right  
Or is it comfortable?,  
Let us be merciless in our truth.  
Someone please hum amazing grace!*

*Ferguson, Mi shouldn't be modern American history,  
But it is the reflection of many cities  
And deconstruction of the myth,  
That we live in a post-racial consensus  
But with togetherness,  
The right reading list  
And raised fist that kiss instead of punish  
We can do this.  
Lift your spirit!*

*Not a moment, but a movement.  
Will we work together or remain separate forever?  
How many deaths does it take before we see life?  
They been Killing Black men since Jesus Christ.  
If not anywhere else on the planet  
We can forgive and heal tonight.*

I've told us before that I grew up not 8 miles from Ferguson, Missouri,  
But it might as well have been a different country,  
Black north of me, and like a line,  
White from my neighborhood south.

*I'm not racist! I grew up saying. I see people for who they are, not*

*Where and who they come from!*

*I'm a nice guy!*

Yeah, most the time, but a nice guy who has had some learning to do.

Because listening to Jamele I'm confronted again by the reminder

That I will never be on the receiving end of blatant discrimination,

At least due to my skin color.

I will never be pulled over in my car in Holliston because of my race.

I won't have to pay hundreds of questionable fines because of my race.

I won't walk into CVS and be eyed suspiciously.

I won't be referred to as the white preacher; I'm just the preacher.

I won't want to be the guy who has inherited privilege;

I'll want to just be the guy that has

Worked hard to get where I am, earning everything I've got along the way.

I'm not the guy that says "shhhhh," am I? I mean, I preach all the time!

Friends, it hurts to name all this. But naming it is critical,

Because those of us with white skin tend to take race off the table when talking of race...because remember, privilege means not being aware

Of our privilege.

So we have to uncover it and put it on the table in these times, these times you describe to me as 'apocalyptic,' a word that means – remember? - 'to uncover,'

Because the racism, the xenophobia, the fear of other is real and alive

And we can't hide anymore, we can't be 'shhhhh,' we can't put a lid on it anymore,

I can't pretend that my fate isn't caught up in Jamele's fate,

And Jamele's fate isn't caught up in my fate and your fate,

And our fate is caught up in Puerto Rico's fate, and Northern California's fate, and Vegas' fate, and the 21-year DACA kid's fate....

Meaning there is no "I" anymore, there is only 'we,'

And the 'we' are hurting, which means I am hurting and you are hurting too.....

WE G'on BE ALRIGHT

Sometimes when folks say WE

They really mean "I"

But when I say WE

I don't mean without you

I mean you with me,

WE

Not the wii u,

But me and you

Like

WE bad meaning WE GOOD

I mean WE,

Like,

hearts and life

Like open Mics and protesting for rights

We, like the worlds shortest poem written by Muhammad Ali

"ME WE"

Then someone yelled

G'On witchya bad self!

Not gone, but G'On

G'On like WE left to get to a better place

G'On because you are beautiful

G'On because you are necessary

G'On because you have to succeed

G'On because WE need you to go further in order for "WE" to go further

G'ON!

And while you're going,

Don't just BE

BE present

Be beyond measure  
 Be "cataclysmicly" unapologetic for being  
 Be WE  
 Be G'On

Now be Alright  
 And not alright like things are ok  
 But ALRIGHT, like fire  
 Not alright like semi-sun shining days,  
 But ALRIGHT like an amora borealis kaleidoscope of lights  
 Be alright like you not killing us anymore  
 Be alright like freedom  
 Be alright like we love cinnamon women  
 Be alright like the world loves we  
 Be alright like Kendrick  
 Be alright tonight

ALTOGETHER AND FOREVER  
 WE  
 G'ON  
 BE  
 ALRIGHT

I love your hope, Jamele...love it, and so desperately need it.  
 Hope not to be confused with optimism, as I try to remind myself and us,  
 Because while optimism tells us, along with Monty Python,  
 To 'just look on the bright side of life'  
 And the 'glass is half-full' and 'don't worry, be happy,'  
 And tries to look for evidence in the world to claim that  
 'WE GO'ON BE ALRIGHT,'  
 Hope is a condition of the spirit we need that exists in spite of the state of the  
 world.  
 Optimism looks for evidence that the world isn't going to hell.  
 Hope looks honestly and truthfully at the hell in the world,

And says we are meant for something more.

Jamele, you say ‘we gonna be al right.’

But I know that in order for that to be true I need, we need,  
 To remember that, among other things, our US Constitution  
 Enshrined the idea that African slaves were only three-fifths of a person.  
 And if we indeed are gonna be all right what first needs to happen  
 Is to reckon with the truth, to live in the uncovering of this truth,  
 That we have a ways to go before that fraction – three-fifths –  
 Becomes a whole number.

Which is why we communities like this, and why we hang banners  
 That say Black Lives Matter, as we did one year ago next Sunday,  
 And find ways in this community to hear new voices, new poems,  
 New experiences, because we are standing at the gates of hope,  
 And we see how broken, how fractured and faction-ed we are,  
 And we say to each other, beckoning and calling,  
 Telling each other 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.