

“Trust Fall”
Rev Nathan Detering
November 17, 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.”

Ten years before Chrissie Hynde and the Pretenders released “I’ll Stand By You” in 1994,

Which was ten years too late after I needed it and its promise of presence most,

I stood in the kitchen and tried to stand my ground.

“I’m not going! No way. Uh-huh,”

I proclaimed.

“NO! No, ok? You can’t make me!”

Which wasn’t entirely true.

Because the people I was protesting were my parents.

And because I was only 13.

But my face was on fire with red splotches,

The Clearasil having not worked at all to clear up the pimples

That had erupted ever since the ‘teen’ suffix was added to my age,

And even though I wouldn’t know the kids, all boys,

who be there at this so-called

‘summer academic achievement program,’

Which, as any kid knows, is a string of words that should never

Be allowed to be put together into a single sentence,

The fact that I didn’t know them meant that I was more self-conscious than

ever – certain they would look at me and whisper,

Certain they would point at my pimples and laugh,

Certain they would elbow their friends and say, ‘*look, ha-ha...*’

Oh how terrorizing it can be to see yourself as you think others

See you,

And you don’t need to be teenager to know what I mean.

But my protests were all bemoaning and bluster,

Not actual ‘*body goes limp on floor, I’m not moving*’ resistance

That we all learn how to do as toddlers, mainly in grocery stores,

Because deeper down I maybe thought my parents maybe might be right,

Maybe -

That it would be good for me to stretch myself beyond my own

Safe circle,

And good for me to challenge myself in ways the nuns weren’t doing

in 8th grade at Our Lady of Lourdes,

which, of course, I can only admit to now that I am a parent
and experience first hand how hard it is to know when
to push and when to pull back when it comes to our children,
or for that matter, when it comes to our aging parents,
or for that matter, when it comes to ourselves,
all of us balancing in the tension between when to nurture and when to
needle,
when to show tender love and when to show love that is tough.

“Go on Nate,” Dad said with toughness as the car pulled up to the curb,
But then with a tender hand on the arm, *“you’ll be fine.”*
And because this was the eighties and hovering helicopter parenting wasn’t
yet a thing,
No sooner did I slink out of the car was he gone,
blue smoke from the tailpipes hazing around my legs and the other boys
around me,
all of us 13 and so very angry that the calendar said late June
but here we were with backpacks on our back,
standing in front of the Catholic high school
with Christian brothers waiting for us inside,
their summer-time shorts and t-shirts not fooling any one of us
about what this really was, which was school in summer.
Summer school.

“Who’s that kid?” I heard the wide-shouldered boy-man sneer
To another boy-man near me, nodding in my direction,
both of them wearing wispy beards AND clear skin,

proof that some kids just get all the luck,
or that God must love them more, or both,
and me, and maybe you, too, remembering back or thinking even now,
to that feeling like everyone else just seems to have it better,
brighter, bigger, happier, healthier than you,
a comparison game that will come out in full glory this coming week
as photos of perfect turkeys and napkins folded into swans
and already decorated for the holidays houses pop up on our social media
feeds even before the dishes are done and the turkey tryptophan wears off!

Which I'm sure is what the Christian Brothers had in mind as they
welcomed us in and introduced us to the rigors of the program,
Three weeks long,
Intended to help us become the young men they said God wanted us to be –
But first, they said, let's get more comfortable with some ICEBREAKERS,
Which always have a way of doing just the opposite,
Including, yes, acoustic guitar songs about Jesus, and forced clapping,
And getting in several giant circles where we held edges of giant sheets
In the center of which was a ball that said "God Loves You"
That we were supposed to bat around...and as we laugh,
Let's remember: there are worse messages to send flying into the sky.

*And finally boys, let's do this final thing:
Get into your small groups, the number is on the back of your name tag;
This is the group of 10 you will spend the next three weeks with –
These are young men who you will learn with, rely on, lean on,
And support.*

*And in order for you to do this for one another, you need to know
 You have each other's back, that these are the young men
 You can _____ what? You can TRUST.*

So I go and search out my group #5, swim through the teen noise,
*Why does it seem like everyone knows each other?
 Why does it feel like I'm always the odd guy out?
 Doesn't God love me? Is that ball I just batted around telling the truth?*
 And in the corner where group five is gathering –
 who is there, in the center?
 Of course it is.
 It's the two bearded man-boys who snickered in my direction earlier.
 Awesome.

*OK boys – so the idea with this last activity is to demonstrate
 How you can rely on and lean into each other.
 We call this (a what?) A TRUST FALL.
 So what you're going to do is four of you will line up facing each other,
 And one of you at the end,
 And then when it's your turn you will stand at the end of the line,
 Your back to your new friends,
 And you are going to fall back, back and back,
 And you are going to TRUST that your new friends are going
 To catch you.*

Somewhere on the other side of the gym, a voice says:
Did Jesus make the disciples do this?
 Which the brothers ignore.

So we all get in line and begin our forced rotations of trust,
Which can't ever be a thing that's forced or required,
Because trust is a thing that's earned and given as a gift,

But never mind, because now it's my turn,
And I stand at the line, and turn my back,
And I hear the two boy-men snickering,
And instead of trust I feel fear, I feel alone,
But these kids that are supposed to have my back
Are chanting 'go, go, go, go'
So I close my eyes and let my mind fall blank,
And let myself go....

Back, back, waiting for the arms, waiting for catch,
Waiting for the experience of being caught,
The feeling of being held,
You ever felt this?
But then feeling panic when I knew it was taking too long,
Taking too late,
As I heard the boy-men, the ringleaders, push the others out
Of the way...
And felt my body fall to floor.

You're thinking: what a great Thanksgiving story, Nathan!

Thanks!

But listen:

I can't lie to you. I won't lie to you.

You and we have all because too accustomed to
People on the screens, people in power, people behind podiums
And pulpits telling us one thing and doing quite another.
I mean, even just these last weeks we have watched as women tell the truth
About sexual harassment and assault and watched, also,
As they have been met with varying degrees of belief and trust.
And news some don't like is called fake.
And falsehood are described as alternative facts.
And religion used like a weapon.
And religious words that were once precious rendered ugly.
And so what happens is....we are forgetting how to trust,
We've been allowed to fall on the floor,
Wanting to be held, wanting to lean back and lean on,
But wondering when and when and how to whom will stand by
Us, as TNT sings, who we can trust, and who will want to trust us –
All of us – me, you, all of us – back there in the gym in 1994,
Damaged trust-ers,
Cursing, lashing out, pretending like it didn't hurt,
And then waiting whole days, whole years, whole lifetimes
To return home, like I did, and falling into the arms of my mothers,
Those arms, yes, that I could trust.

Friends, listen:

Sometimes in our lives we are the eyes that close,
We are the heart that hopes we will be caught,
We are the body that falls,
We are the arms that catch,

We are the hands that hold,
We are the bruised and broken limbs that have not been
Caught one too many times.
It takes risk and courage to keep falling, and to get again,
And trust again.

(go down)

Doesn't it?
It takes risk and courage and trust and people we can count on.
But those people are around us and redemption is possible.

(Trust Fall into arms of church members).

As we launch like a cannon into this week of holidays, family,
Hard conversations,
Be the hands, the arms, the body you need to re-trust again.

Amen.