

“Holding Hands: Reclaiming Connection in a Wireless World”

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

Be not afraid.

Because this is what we are about:

We hold hope for each other when hope is hard to find.

We plant seeds that will one day grow.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

We cannot do everything,

But we can do something.

So forget your perfect offering.

There is a crack in everything.

That is how the light gets in.”

In an old-ish video clip of Boston comedian Louis CK talking with late night host and Brookline native Conan O’Brien

That I recently rediscovered and shared again with our Covenant Group Facilitators a couple weeks ago,

And have re-watched again and again as our president tweets himself into tweet oblivion,

And have watched again and again as I sit scrolling on my bloody phone, More than in is good for me, my British better half saying:

‘don’t you listen to your own sermons?!?’

Louis CK explains why he hates cell phones and why he didn’t let his then Pre-teen daughter get one...

Saying, *“You know, I think these things are toxic, especially for kids.*

You know, (when they have them kids don't look at people, they don't build the empathy.

Because kids are mean...and they like to try out being mean...

So they say something mean...and then they see the kid cry,

And they go like: ew, that doesn't feel good.

But, when they text the mean thing, and they don't see the face,

They just go... "mmm, that tasted good! That was fun; I liked that."

And then he goes on to say: 'you need to build an ability to just be yourself, And not be doing something.

That's what the phones are taking away, is the ability to just sit there...

(like this...twiddling fingers).

The ability to just sit there...and not doing something...that's called being A person, right?

We're unlearning how to do that...I gotta check (show looking at phone),

Because....someone might have posted something....

Because look, underneath everything in your life, says Louis CK preaching

To me and to you and to us,

There's that thing...that empty, that forever empty...

And to laughs...he says, you know, that knowledge that it's all for nothing and you're all alone (which I don't believe, but go with me).

But it's down there and sometimes when things clear away,

You're not watching anything, you're in your car,

And you start going...ohhhhh, here it comes....I'm alone....that feeling

Starts to visit on you...

You know...just the sadness, life can be tremendously sad,

Just by being in it...

And you're driving...and you go 'ohhh, I don't like this....'

And you reach for the phone...which is why we text and drive,

Because I look around and pretty much 100% of people are texting and driving, we're all killing each other..

But people are willing to risk taking a life and ruining their own...

Because they don't want to be alone for a second, because it's so hard

Louis preaching truth now, friends?

And then Louis goes on to describe how he was in his car once,

And a Bruce Springsteen song comes on and he says it made him really sad,

As Bruce can do.

It's one where Bruce wails 'hahuuuuuuuuuuuu'

Can we do it? 'hahuuuuuuuuuu'

Like Bruce is far away...

And Louis CK says, I heard it and it gave me a like a 'fall, time to go back to school' feeling (we know that feeling?);

it made me really sad...And I go..oh god, I'm gettin' sad,

gotta get the phone and text 'HI' to like fifty people...

And I started reaching for the phone...and I said:

'You know what? Don't. Just be sad; just let the sadness come,

Let it hit you, like a truck...

And I let it come...and Bruce is like 'hahuuuuuuuuuu'

And I started to feel... 'oh my god.'

And I pulled over and I just cried...like a baby; I just cried.

And, and...says Louis CK...it was beautiful; it was beautiful...

*Because sadness is poetic; we're lucky to live sad moments,
And then I had happy feelings...because when you let yourself
Feel sad, your body has antibodies, it has happiness and joy
to meet the meet the sadness.
So, I was...grateful to feel sad...and then I met it with true,
Profound happiness.*

*And the thing is...because we don't want that first, little bit of sad
We push it way with a little texting, phone, twitter blah, blah, blah...
And so...you never feel, we never feel completely sad...
Or completely happy...
You just feel kinda satisfied with your product...and then
Your life is over before you know.*

And so, says Louis CK, that is why I don't want to get my daughter a phone.

Pretty wonderful, isn't it?

And a reminder there are sermons we need hear being shared everywhere;

We just have to have enough room in ourselves to hear them.

Which is hard....because even though we live in this connected world,

And the speed of our wireless network connection is huuuge,

And we even have cell phone antennas in our steeple, keeping us connected

So we can load pages of CNN and politico and Huffpost and Fox News

Ever faster and faster, with little buffering,

And no, the irony of that it is not lost on me.

Even with all that...it feels so very hard to build, as Louis CK says, the

Empathy,

Face to face, heart to heart, hand held in hand,
 So we can feel the full sadness and the full joy,
 And not keep all of that at bay with distractions and badges of busyness
 And keeping all our apps and ourselves up to date and up to speed....

But before this sermon gallops into preachiness none of us need to hear,
 And before I get all excited about having the ushers show up at you pew
 asking you to hand over your phones and hold them ransom
 Until the world calms the hell down...

Imagine me not in the pulpit all robed and righteous, me fitting or not fitting
 Whatever projections we have of clergy and church,
 but instead all of us in a circle, legs criss-cross, glowing fire in the center,
 And me sharing with you these wishes for us as we prepare to
 Hop, skip and jump into summer in what has felt like a forever-winter year:

This wish...for us to let the sadness come.

What did Louis call it? The Forever Empty.

Never mind for a moment the tagline about your church afflicting the
 comfortable and comforting the afflicted,

Because life is hard for all of us sometimes,
 no matter who you are.

Friends, we're living in such anxious times; it's not your imagination.

And when we're fearful and when we're scared...

We get tempted, I get tempted, to hide, avoid, numb it...

What's one more beer? What's one more hour lost to trolling social media?

What's one more day avoiding the change we know we need to make to help

Us be the person we want to be?

So that we can stay even, not rock the boat, pretend all is well,
Keep satisfied for our product rather than feel the full weight
Of all that your life and our world is bringing to your heart's door.

I wish for us to let your tears come, because they are not as scary as we
think.

I wish for us to rock the boat, acknowledge where you feel uneven, when
You feel alone. Stop pretending you got this when you feel like you don't.
Put down the devices of distraction, whatever that device is for you.
Open your heart. Open your eyes. Let the rain come.

Well, that's uplifting, Nathan...thanks.

So this I wish: I wish to remind us of the antibodies of joy
That flood in around you when you let yourself feel deeply.
So that when, like I did on Friday, you find yourself
Watching from the deck as your neighbor's daughter, Elizabeth,
Who you have known since she was 4 and seen grown right along
With your children, making lemonade sale signs in summer,
And shoveling sled ramps of snow in winter,
As she gathers in the backyard for prom,
Karyn having hemmed her dress...
And me feeling at once sad, so sad that life and lives are moving onward,
And time is so fleeting, and me hearing Bruce go 'hahauuuuuuu'
Only to be reminded, then, of my own prom afternoon all those years ago,
Me in me god-awful mud brown suit and toothy grin and pimply face

So happy to have asked the girl I crushed on, who said unbelievably said
 yes,
 And me remembering in that moment how the whole world was
 PERFECT! And how that afternoon was PERFECT.
 My life blooming bright like the corsage,
 And me, on Friday, reliving such a wonderful memory,
 The time elapsed surely helping the past seem rosier than maybe it was.

But friends, folks...my point is this: *they don't publish the good news!*
The good news needs to be noticed and published by us.
Look around! Children and friends are around you,
Your arms are available, hugging is possible.
And now look at the windows. See the green? See the lush?
Yes, terrible things happen. But beautiful things do, too.
I'm not saying anything earth-shattering here.
We know this.
But then, the best sermons don't inform us; they remind us.
Open your ears. Open your arms. Open your heart.
Let the rain come. And let the light come.

And now this wish:

I wish for us to reclaim connection from this (phone) this this (hand).
 Oh how I wish you could hear the stories I have gotten to hear this year...
 How all these new folks (offer names here.....)
 Have reached out to me, saying how in these times
 Private spirituality and solo-meditation just don't cut it,
 And how you have seen the Black Lives Matter Banner

Or seen the Rainbow Flag
Or heard through Facebook (because everything has some goodness)
That there is a place here on the hill in Sherborn, born in 1685
And carried forth from generation to generation,
Offering connection and community and shared covenant
That needs no buffering and no high speed broadband access to
Connect us to each other,
Because we're all right here, no walls, no barriers to get in,
No passport needed, no internet access required....
This house where love won't let us off, or let us go....

(go down out of pulpit)

So this wish here at the end: *Open ears, open eyes, open heart,*
Open our ears. Open our eyes. Open our heart.
And now, open our hands and grasp the hand of someone near.
As we say...let the rain come, the sadness come.
And now the joy come, the light.
We're not alone. We're connected.
We are held.
Amen.

TNT Song!