

**Rev. Nathan Detering**

**“No Faking It”**

**23 September 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.”*

There is a light rap on the front door,

And then the door bell,

Which sends the dog running full gallop to the front door,

All bark and no bite, leaving behind him

Clouds of fur suspended in air,

But before either of us can get there I hear the door creak open

And the ‘thunk’ of a package being dropped on the floor,

The neon-vested delivery woman already climbing into her

Bumped and bruised Hyundai Elantra,  
 Showing the miles of this so-called booming economy  
 Where interest rates and unemployment are low,  
 But millions have to work more than one job to make ends meet,  
 Like deliver Amazon packages on the side.

Ever since I heard about that ex-Cosby actor – Geoffrey Owens –  
 Being shamed in a British tabloid for being seen working at a Trader Joe’s  
 To help provide for his family in between acting jobs,  
 I’ve tried to catch the eye of the delivery driver, the Market Basket  
 check-out clerk, the guy behind the counter at the auto parts store  
 down the street who sold me a new headlight lamp,  
 And let them know with a look that I see them,  
*‘I see you,’*  
 Which here in this honest, no-faking-it cold open of a sermon,  
 Is maybe as much about me wanting to feel better about myself  
 As it is showing solidarity with the ranks of educated and skilled workers  
 In low-paying or low-skill jobs.  
 This practicing to be the person you want to be is tricky, isn’t it?

Outside the sign in the front yard mulch we put there after  
 The presidential election that says  
*“In this house black lives matter, women’s rights are human rights,  
 Science is real, health care is a human right,  
 No human is illegal, Love is love,  
 And kindness is everything,”*  
 Is faded and dog-eared from the sun and weather of another year,

And propped upright with the help of some stones,  
 Not unlike me, not unlike you,  
 But still standing, which is something in this age when  
 Standing up for principles has turned into an ironman competition  
 Of marching, accompanying, fundraising, protesting, advocating,  
 Preaching, teaching, witnessing...and breathing, too, and stillness,  
 Because we can only serve the outer world if we have take care  
 Of our inner life, the life we live on the inside.  
 Right?

Which is why this box has arrived, actually, right on time just  
 As Jeff Bezos promised.

Our country may be on fire, but at least we can still get our packages  
 On time.

*Is it for me, for me, for me?* Asks the dog's nose as he sniffs across  
 The surface.

*Back off man, this is mine,* I say,

Using the sharp edge of one of Emerson's '*come put yourself in debt with  
 me*' college mailings to slice open the tape and open the box  
 Within a box within a box.

And as I open, I permit myself this '*no faking it, authentic*' thought:  
 How it feels cathartic to use the high gloss edge of one of these college  
 Brochures for something other than sticker shock,  
 Because what the shine and sheen of all the tours and YouTube trailers  
 Don't show are the parents whispering to each other at night:

*'That number doesn't include room and board? That's just tuition?*

*How in the \_\_\_\_\_ are we going to....?'*

*“Oh it’s beautiful!”* I say, pulling it free.

*“I thought it was going to be bigger”* says one of the kids

*Is it for me, for me, for me?* Sniffs the dog.

*‘Why did we wait so long?’* says Karyn.

Which leads to this question: *how do you know you’re old?*

Ask me: *how do you know you’re old, Nathan?*

Well, since you asked I’ll tell you: you know you’re old when

One of the highlights of the year is when you finally pull the trigger

And buy a new....vacuum.

But not just any vacuum, oh no.

It’s really an actual robot that in addition to being a robot

Also happens to twirl around the house, BY ITSELF!

spinning its brushes for feet, BY ITSELF!

picking up all the dirt and fur and cheerios

And nail clippings (gross) and broken uncooked spaghetti

And Hershey’s Kiss wrappers that one family creates

Over a span of a day or even just an hour,

It launching from its home charging station, BY ITSELF, at the same time

every morning

When no one is home except for the dog....

Who is now, upon seeing the Roomba charged up and spinning

For the first time,

Literally barking himself out of his body.

But, friends, it’s worth the drama, it is worth the cost.

Because here in the launch of the school year and the church  
 Year and post-Labor Day when it feels like the Labor Days begin,  
 Or the launch of another year when everyone seems to get on  
 With life but you,  
 You know how it is...how after a day or a week  
 Of whatever is challenging you or changing you or wearing you down,  
 How coming home to a house that needs one more thing from you  
 Is enough...to just make you want to cry.  
 But because on The Facebook and the Instagram and The Twitter no one  
 Seems to talk of such things,  
 And from the outside, everyone else seems to be doing just fine,  
 Thank you very much,  
 Which is the real fake news,  
 That we're all just fine, the fake news asking:  
*So what's up with you? What's your problem?*  
*Just roll up those sleeves and stiffen that upper lip*  
*And get on with the second shift!*  
 A shift, which we know but often keep too-mum,  
 Is performed more by women and girls than men and boys,  
 A point that is driven home for me when I realize that I, the vacuumer  
 In my house, now has a robot to help with the chore  
 After I had 'I'm about to cry' one of those days...

"Help!" Roomba says in a gentle but urgent female voice  
 (why female, I Robot creators?), "Help!"  
 What's wrong? What's wrong is she is stuck underneath the radiator.  
 "Great," says Karyn, "another thing I have to take care of."

But I appreciate Roomba's honesty, and Karyn's.  
 She doesn't say *'everything's gonna be alright.'*  
 She doesn't say *'it's fine; I'm fine, this is fine. I'll fake it until I make it.*  
*You do you; I'll do me.*  
 She owns when she can't do something on her own;  
 She owns the limits of the false gospel that says "I got this"  
 Whatever may come.

Later that afternoon I think of Roomba, oddly, after one  
 Of several wedding rehearsals has me waiting with the bride's maid  
 Under the tent, put up because rain is expected the next day,  
 she hearing from the bride of my dad's death over the summer,  
 saying, *'your faith must really help you...  
 Knowing that he is in a better place.'*

Which, as those of you know me know, makes my blood boil,  
 Because if there is a God that thinks that taking people from  
 Their families too young is better, then I want no part of that God.  
 Some Christians ask: *What would Jesus do?*  
 But your minister asked himself then: *What would Roomba do?*  
 The answer: be direct, gentle but urgent. Don't pretend.  
 Don't fake you're fine.

*"I don't believe that,"* I tell her. *"And I'm not sure yet how  
 My faith will help me; I'm not sure what I believe about  
 Where is my dad is, or if there is such a thing as 'a better place.'*

Which probably led her to ask the bride later: *'this guy get ordained on the  
 internet?'*

But no matter, because I don't want to fake it, I don't want

Fake niceness or complicity or complacency to be the sermon  
I give in between the Sundays, the sermon of my life out of sync with  
With the sermon on my lips.

Because I don't know. I'm searching with you how to  
Live my outer life with purpose and authenticity  
While tending to an inner life that is at times whole, broken,  
Uncertain, doubting, messy, in need of a good cleaning,  
Blessed, in need of blessing, able to offer help, in need of helping.

Later that afternoon I come home,  
Which, like Roomba, is my own charging station.  
We need places like that – places we circle back to, after long journeys  
And getting stuck and bumping into walls,  
Cleaning up messes that aren't always ours,  
And spinning ourselves dizzy,  
So we can find our center and get nourished again for the next day.  
You with me?  
Because who knows?  
Maybe if we were more honest with ourselves and others  
About the joy and pain we have going on behind  
Our closed doors and in our inner life  
Then maybe these bucolic-seeming suburbs  
Wouldn't be so damn lonely,  
Which isn't just my assessment;  
It's also a direct quote I get from you...  
You who tell me again and again  
How come it seems like the hardest thing to find

Are places where you don't have to pretend,  
Where we get to call a time-out on the complacency and complicity  
Of politeness and not making waves for the sake of getting along,  
And we can own to our mess,  
And wail and laugh, and get an inordinate amount of joy  
From watching bad RomComs or new vacuums,  
And answering when someone asks you: *you how you doing?*  
With a gentle, but urgent:  
*Can I tell you, I mean really tell you?*  
Places where we can give up the safety of small talk  
And half-truths so we can get into the corners  
And behind to furniture of what we really feel....  
Because isn't what our country and communities need right  
Now are people who aren't faking it,  
People who can talk about your life and life, how it is  
And how it could be,  
About our world, how it is and how it could be,  
And telling people, inviting them in, saying come in, come in, come in.

You're thinking: well, he's doing a church commercial now, isn't he?  
Actually no.

Truth is, faith communities, including this one, struggle just like anywhere  
With learning how to be places of honest love,  
Places that are less Sunday best and niceness and not making waves  
And more authenticity and not faking it and telling truth.  
Friends, we need more of what it is we say we want our communities and  
this community to be.

So, here's the charge, if this place is one of our charging stations,

Here is the charge:

When you need help, when you're stuck,

Don't fake that you've got this. Say with urgency: Help!

When you ask some one who they're doing – ask in such a way

That says you want an honest answer.

Skip the small talk in coffee hour or pews and go deeper,

Ask: what's the most authentic thing you said or did all week?

Try it today!

When you're in the mood of overwhelm that is the news, pick

One headline, one issue, one story

And have that be the thing you will devote some energy to.

Don't let the fake headline that says we have to do everything

To be something – just do one thing!

Give up the ghost of optimism, everything's gonna be alright

Unless you believe it.

Tell someone you're joy, no matter how corny or small,

And struggle, too...

And as safford says,

Stand there, let's stand here together,

Beckoning and calling forward our real, honest inner lives

In a world that expects outer shells, telling people what we see,

Asking them what they see,

And faking no more....