

**Rev. Nathan Detering**

**“Rescue”**

**January 28, 2018**

**UU Area Church at First Parish in Sherborn**

*“Here is the world; beautiful and terrible things will happen.  
Keep our hearts tender.  
Keep our eyes soft.  
Because what shows up as conceit or bad manners or rudeness  
Or withdrawnness  
Is often a sign of things no eyes of seen and no ears have heard.  
And so we learn again how there is no answer but to love one another.  
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.”*

Even though we had the garage-turned garden shed-turned-‘shove  
everything in there until spring so I don’t have to look at it’  
buttoned up and straightened so it wouldn’t blow down because it is so old,  
When the wind tunnels between the houses, as it has so often this winter,  
And presses against and in-between the front swinging doors,  
Creating swirling pressure against the 100-year-old wood and hinges  
And latches,

The doors will often swing open, creating an open mouth  
To swallow whatever the wind has caught and carried,  
The garage like the whale and the leaves and rumpled Christmas wrapping  
paper and plastic bottles scooped from the street all like tiny Jonah's  
Poured into the back belly of the garden shed.  
And if you don't get that reference, friends, add it the list of why  
Reading the Bible and not just owning the Bible can make an important  
difference.

Late one night I heard the *whoosh!* of wind outside the bedroom window,  
Sounding not unlike a jet engine,  
And then a squeak squeak of hinges and then a scrape of wood along asphalt  
And frozen snow and then a slam,  
Loud enough that the sounds entered my dreams  
And had me piloting a cargo plane full of mice squeak squeaking in the back  
While they played a loud game of shuffleboard,  
Which is dream strange enough that I might just mention it to my therapist  
Next time I see him.

The next morning I looked outside the window  
To see one of the swinging shed doors swaying in the still strong wind,  
So that after coffee and before commuting one of the kids to school  
I ventured out into the soggy, melting mess of the backyard  
To close and lock the doors,  
Only realizing halfway across that I was still in my slippers,  
Which aren't just any slippers but the ones that had been my younger  
brother's before he died too soon,

And that my mom had included in the box of things of his that she wanted me to have,

And that I wear every day because it helps me feel closer to him,

Me literally walking through my life in his shoes.

Should I go back through the sludge and get my boots?

Or maybe I can jump from one lily pad of still frozen

Ice to another, frogging my way to the shed?

It's not the first time in my life, or the last, that I feel marooned,

All of us knowing what it feels like to be caught in the middle between no good choices,

All of us looking for a way out, looking for a rescue.

But because I am close enough to the shed,

And because the wind has now shushed enough

That I can hear silence,

Which, I pray, you can hear, too, on at least on an occasional morning,

Because silence and stillness is what our spirit's crave...

I hear, from the silence, a murmur, a *ththwtwwwwwth*,

a pulsing, a struggle.

And where is it coming from?

Over there? Back there? Across the yard?

Listen: *ththwtwwwwwth*....

Listen: *ththwtwwwwwth*....

Is that coming from the shed?

Listen: *ththwtwwwwwth*,

It is.

It is said that curiosity killed the cat.  
But maybe, for us, it can also save.  
So across the island of ice pond yard  
I move forward toward the shed –  
Leaping in Nick's slippers there, to there,  
On tip-toe's, to there.  
Balance on one leg and stretch with the other long leg  
Given me by the grandfather I never met,  
His heart stopping, attacking with so much life to live and four daughters  
still to raise,  
One of them my mom, just 19 then and about to leave for college,  
Reaching with my grandfather's legs given me by him through my mom  
To the dry slab of stone there,  
Standing at the mouth of the garden shed whale,  
Me in the rugged slippers of my brother and the long legs of my  
grandfather...

Both of whom couldn't be saved, my friends,  
Despite all the good efforts of loving friends and family,  
And doctors rushing to them, and sirens,  
Which I mention because all of us have someone in our lives we are thinking  
Of right this very moment who, despite everything we could do  
Or could be done,  
Couldn't be saved – from illness, from medical emergency, from depression,  
from drugs or alcohol, from themselves,  
Which is hard enough all on its own, it's hard enough,  
without any one of us feeling guilty,

Feeling shame, feeling if ‘*if I had just done this or said that or called earlier*’

We could have rescued them,

Which, sometimes and even a lot of the time, is beyond our power.

You hear me?

I want you to hear me because sometimes you and I have such a hard time forgiving ourselves of things that are beyond our power to control.

Which isn’t the same as saying that we can’t make a difference.

Because there at the mouth of the garden shed whale

Is the source of the *ththwtwwwwwth....*,

the wind and whale having pushed and then swallowed

a Swallow –

she battering her blue, white wings against the back window,

drawn to the light, struggling to find a way out,

struggling for a rescue.

And so, for once, without pause or second guessing

Or calling for somewhere else,

Because I am famously phobic of wild, feathery, furry undomesticated

things,

I stepped in long, grandfather-given strides in Nick’s shoes toward its

panicking body,

And reached with cupped hands toward the bird,

Cupping it against the window glass,

And then wrapping my fingers softly around the edges of its fluttering body,

And then bringing it against my chest,

My heart against its panicked heart, beating, beating, beating.

Let me stop here for a moment and share with us what I have been thinking  
and feeling this week, this week that found me, last Sunday,  
Sitting with our own Rev. Heather in her office as she heard  
The terrible, tragic, beyond words news that her dad, John, had taken  
His own life that morning,  
And this week that has brought many of you to my door or email  
Asking: *what can I do for Heather to help?*  
And, then also, naturally wondering about those people we are worried  
About in our lives,  
And me also sitting with Heather and her family as we prepare for the  
service tomorrow in their hometown of Leominster,  
You with me, friends, in every moment,  
Because as your minister I am your representative, your emissary,  
Your presence....

Through it all me thinking and feeling that, yes, there are times  
When we can hear the sounds of those in our lives who are hurting,  
And, yes, we rush to them, and yes, we cup our hearts and our hands  
To them, and yes, we take their panicked hearts against our hearts  
And say...shhhh, ,shhhh, shhhh,

And me also thinking and feeling and knowing from experience that yes,  
There are also times when our hearts, as Adrienne Rich has said,  
*Are moved by all that we cannot save,*  
Because the depression is too deep, because the addiction is too strong,  
Because for us to help rescue someone means they must, first,

Want to be rescued.

Can both be true? Can we at once reach out, cup, hold, seek to rescue...

And also know that sometimes, it isn't up to us in the end?

Isn't the answer yes?

But friends there in the mouth of the garden shed where I find

A saving message.

That sometimes we are that bird. We are afraid and panicked and alone

And pushed up against the pane of light.

And sometimes we are door that is pushed open, giving exit

And a clear pathway to whoever the swallow is for us, telling them

Where to get help, telling them they're not alone, telling them you will  
accompany them to therapists and AA or whatever it takes.

And sometimes we are the cupped hands, as you are, we are, for Heather,  
Holding her and her family in your soft, gentle love.

And sometimes we are even the air underneath the bird's wings,

Giving the resistance, giving those people in our lives the tough, tender

Love to push against, the love that will lift them up

If and when they are ready.

And so it is with that message that I walk out the open door with

With that swallow, my heart and its heart, beating as one,

Until I raise my arms, and then un-cup my hands,

And watch in the morning light as she, in streaks of blue and white,

Flew and flew and flew.

May we be the air, the hands, the bird accepting help when needed, the open door,

The beating heart to calm all panic, to soothe all fear..

And may our prayers fly west on wings

To the Concannon family.

I love you.

Amen.