

## **“Make Today Great Again”**

*“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.”*

I know it must be late October when, during our last Thursday of the month staff meeting,

There is a knock on the Fahs Room door where we meet,

Behind which there are 20 children 4 and under in various degrees of

Introversion or extroversion looking up at us saying: *Trick or Treat!*

They the children of the ECDC nursery school who go to school

Here in the church during the week,

And who paraded into our staff meeting just this past week decked out in pre-Halloween costume –

A storm trooper there, a slice of pizza costume here, a choose your own

Interpretation fuzzy animal there,

At least 6 or 7 princesses and fairies blessing us with their wands here,

And a teenage mutant ninja turtle hiding in his shell all the way at the back –

not a one, notice, trying to scare us into submission, because the actual world is scary enough sometimes,  
and not a one nodding to the election this season in any way whatsoever, which was a blessed relief,  
because how many “*Bad Hombres*” and “*Nasty Women*” and “*I’m one of Hillary’s Missing Emails*” costumes do you think we’re going to see on our doorsteps tomorrow night,  
they saying *treat or tricky vote*?  
Let’s just remember the Universalist side of our faith, ok?  
Meaning; everyone gets candy,  
No matter what.

At the end all the kids sang the “Boo” song, which I remember,  
Because nothing like music puts us all aboard the time machine  
Into the past, remembering lives loved and living on in memory,  
Including our own lives,  
Because who we are now is never quite the same as who we were.  
Yes? Yes.

And when I heard the ‘Boo’ song I was catapulted from the here and now, 2016, middle-age no longer deniable,  
two teenagers filling the rooms of our home  
With bodies that seemingly only yesterday were toddler-size,  
One of them saying sentences like ‘*in two years when I leave for college...*’  
The other saying sentences like ‘*Dad, I’ll just text you when I want to be picked up....*’

...catapulted from all this back to the Octobers of more than a decade ago  
When the older one attended this very pre-school,  
And, with his class, knocked on my office door, because  
Back then I didn't have enough church staff to have meetings with,  
And said *Trick or Treat*, he dressed as a Knight, or later,  
As a bottle of catchup (show it),  
And she still a baby in my arms, or Karyn's arms,  
A screaming elephant (show it)....  
All of them, all of us singing the "Boo" song...

Which, when I heard it again last week, had me hurtling,  
Heart-full, eyes closed, into the arms of nostalgia,  
Nostalgia a word from the Greek *nostos* (yes, etymology!) meaning:  
*A longing to return home; sick for home; home-sick.*  
Nostalgia tricking me and treating me into the past:  
*Make me a new parent, before the mistakes, ...again;*  
*Take me to the dinner table before all four of us were often too busy to sit*  
*there ...again;*  
*Take me to the bedtime stories ...again;*  
*Make life simpler, smaller, the way I want to remember it used to be ...again.*  
*Because I want another chance at it ...again.*  
*The present is ok, but the past ...oh, it was so great.*  
*Take me back, return me to that home, that life, that time,*  
*That land in my imagination.*  
Sound familiar?

Says Peter Marty in our reading: *Although historians have yet to locate*

*An idyllic chapter in our nation's history,  
This hasn't stopped large segments of the population from glorifying  
The past.  
Selective memory holds attractive appeal.  
Warm sentimentality, however oblivious to real experience,  
Feels good."*

Which is why, when we're all aboard our respective time  
Machines into the past,  
It is so easy, so tempting to travel right over the harder times we might  
rather not remember –  
*The bone-deep exhaustion of early parenting...  
How poor boundaries with work kept me, maybe kept you  
Physically present, but emotionally absent from those family dinners;  
The date nights missed because of no good reason;  
The family member, now since died, who was actually harder for you to love  
Than you ever admitted to anyone, even yourself;  
The security guards I had forgotten about until writing this sermon  
Who, in my childhood neighborhood in St. Louis, stationed themselves  
around the streets on Halloween night to keep out any of the 'city kids' –  
'city' code for black kids and brown kids,  
Me not even registering that my adopted sister from Vietnam  
Would have likely been questioned by one of those guards if she  
Wasn't walking with me....*

Is this the past we're nostalgic for, longing for,  
Nostalgic for?

Memory is complicated, isn't it?

Memory tricks us sometimes, doesn't?

Maybe that's why Peter Marty cautions us: '*nostalgia that ignores  
The blemishes of the past makes for shabby history.*'

And why Churchill (second time in two weeks he has been quoted!)

Has reminded us: *that those who don't learn from history are  
Doomed to repeat it.*

So here's what I'm learning, and I invite you to learn with me:

Whenever I catch myself boarding the time machine

Named Nostalgia,

And especially when I notice that on that time machine

I'm inclined to minimize the blemishes and maximize the blessings

At the expense of the truth,

I wonder what it is about the present time that is making me

Look so longingly to the past.

You follow me?

Because I know, for example, that the reason I found myself

traveling so far, so fast back in time last Thursday

is that I'm watching my own kids grow up and grow on,

and though it's true that K and I aren't raising them so that they'll never  
leave,

It's also true that I already miss them.

I miss them, and they're not even gone.

So even as I lose my cool at the music too loud,

And the dishes unearthed behind the bed,  
And worry, in the dark of night, what kind of world we are giving them,  
What's also true is that I want time to stand still,  
Because for as many sermons as you and I preach together,  
I'm never as good at making today great as I am at making the past  
Seem even better.

Maybe we should say that again:

*We're often never as good at making today  
Great as we are at making the past seem even better.*

Which lets off the hook of actually having to do something about  
How we're living and the world we're making.

Which is why nostalgia – political, personal,  
Religious – is so alluring.

And why the question before is:

*What will it take for me, for us, to make today great...again?  
What will it take today great, whole, equitable, just for our lives,  
Our children's lives (because all children are our children),  
Our world's life?*

Because today is all we have.

Or to put it in theological terms you will recognize:

*Our goal isn't to get more people into heaven, but more heaven  
Into people.*

At the end of Peter's column, which only came out this week,  
And giving full credit where credit is, he titled "Make Today Great Again,"  
inspiring, I'm sure, countless sermons across the land,  
He offers us instruction we might add to:

*Treat every hour of each as precious and unrepeatable.*

You're thinking: *even in the DMV? Even in the Dr. office?*

*Even while taking the PSAT? Even this month on the Mass Pike*

*Stuck in traffic as the toll booths get taken down?*

Yes, even there.

*Get blisters.* Use your hands, your body, for it was given as a gift.

*Read or engage something foreign to your brain.* Curious why someone

Else could possibly vote the way they do?

Ask them or read what they're reading.

*Cherish hope,* remembering the distinction I've offered us before,

That hope, in contrast to optimism, is something we have in spite of,

Not because of, the state of our world.

Here's something hopeful: there is so much work to do,

And if we're not some of the workers, then who? And if not now, when?

*Love someone difficult.* I'll give us a moment to put

The face of that person in your life in a thought bubble over your head.

And if love seems like a stretch, remember my sermon from years ago...

To forget love, and just try good manners.

Because what seems like conceit, bad manners or cynicism is always

A sign of things no ears have heard or eyes have seen.

However we plot our moves, says Peter,

We'd be wise to fight the urge to romanticize the past,

lest we obscure the opportunities and demands of the present.

What is the present demanding of you?

Who and what is waiting for you to show up?

As you take with me what we'll call the 'Make Today Great Again  
Challenge'

Please report back to me.

Send me emails. Tell me your success. And tell me your failures, too.

Because the good news is we are a church of second chances, and third,  
And fourth.

The first day of the rest of our lives begins....now.

Amen.