

**Rev. Nathan Detering**

**February 3, 2019**

**“Love on a Wednesday Night in a Middle School Auditorium”**

*“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.”*

The new year wasn't even three weeks old when - out with the old,

In with the new –

CVS was fire selling the 5ft. plastic Santa mannequin

And the 5-pack of jingle bells wrapping paper,

All of it taken from the prime location center aisle

And positioned for impulse buy right near the register lines,

Because now that it was mid-January time was short and love was in the air,

And I mean that literally,

Because hanging from the florescent lights were (still are!) big hearts and  
cupids aiming their arrows down at the woman bulk-buying toilet paper  
In the pharmacy line  
and the bored teenager restocking the nasal decongestant section  
and the guy in front of me  
Waiting for the register to spit out 7ft worth of receipt coupons  
After buying a single sponge,  
And the woman behind the register whose  
Reading glasses sit on the edge of her nose,  
On her collar a single Patriots helmet,  
And around her neck a thin gold chain and a small star of David,  
All of them, all of us deserving of love,  
But is this what we mean when we say that?  
Is some Latin-era little winged baby with hunting arrows what we mean we  
say in our church Love is the Spirit?

*You think too much*, I think to myself,  
as I feel around me the claustrophobia of red hearts, red-wrapped chocolates,  
red-cheeked cupids, and red Valentine love cards,  
and make a mental note to rant later – in a sermon – about how it is  
that love has come to be bought and sold and commodified  
and domesticated and molded into plops of Hershey kiss over-sweet  
sweetness and not whispered like the fragile secret it is,  
not held and treasured in our hands like the tiny, raw-cut jewel it is,  
meant for use carefully and with precision  
in these beautiful, broken, fierce, icy, heart-strung, high-strung,  
anxious, angry times in which we live.

All of which is why no one in my family likes to go to the store with me.

But that night – 3 weeks ago – had earned the right to hang over me with intensity.

Because after I buy my little tube of tums, my stomach upset by nerves  
I'm not used to feeling before I speak, because I speak in front of people  
All the time,

I needed to drive to Adams Middle School in Holliston

And get up on stage in the auditorium with the Superintendent of Holliston  
Schools,

And not one but two rabbis,

And Barb Fritts, a child therapist and also a member here –

All of us there on a Wednesday night right after the dinner hour,

Invited there by Diverse Holliston, a group of community members

Who seek to help Holliston discuss questions of diversity in a town

That is not practiced at it - its racial diversity slim (but not as slim as some  
think it is)

its economic diversity hidden (but not as hidden as some believe it is)

It's religious diversity barely there (but not as minimal as some think;  
remember our CVS cashier?).

All of us invited there not because we wanted to be,

But because we had to be, we needed to be...

Because right before the December break one of the elementary students

Noticed during recess a symbol newly carved into the slide

On the school playground,

A symbol they knew they needed to tell an adult about,  
Because this child knew it meant to send hate and hurt and fear.

And before we despair too much with the world,  
And wonder what has become of us, and what will,  
Can we permit some praise to peak in for that child  
And their family and their teachers and maybe their religious community,  
If they have one – that somewhere, some-when,  
They got the message that they couldn't be a bystander to hate,  
That instead they had to be an 'upstander' to hate,  
So that when they saw the lines carved deep into the plastic,  
Maybe knowing it was called a swastika, maybe not,  
But knowing it meant to say *hurt* and *hate* and *fear*  
To Jewish people who would see or hear about it,  
They knew they had to TELL.

Because in these times, and in all times, complacency is dangerous  
And silence is a weapon  
And, as our reading that Nora read reminds us,  
If we forgo speaking out because....we're not an immigrant, or a Mexican,  
or a journalist, or a woman, a transgender soldier, a lesbian mom, or a Jew...  
no one will be left to speak for us when we cannot.

So.....will anyone come to such a forum as this?

It isn't the only question, but it is one question...

Will folks be too busy? Too drawn in by the next streaming Netflix  
episode? There are some good ones!

Too tired after a long day getting into Boston for work and back out again?

Some of you have terrifically tough commutes.

Too caught up with their stuff, their own problems...some of which I know of.

I mean we can't show up to everything, can we?

We can't do everything can we?

No, but that doesn't mean we can't show up to some things,

Or show up to one thing....

Which is what people did, that auditorium not full,

But not sparse either...

And before we give ourselves over to despair for the world,

For what has come of us, or what will,

Can we allow some praise to peak in,

That, as I said to the crowd when it was my turn to speak,

People came, people put their bodies where they're beliefs are,

And preached with their time and not only their lips

That hate needs to not be explained away or cast aside *'as some kids*

*Doing some stupid thing'* or domesticated....

The Jewish folks in particular that night reminding the rest of

Us how the swastika isn't a generalized, generic symbol that is 'bad,'

But rather one that was used to represent extermination of a people –

*My uncle*, said one man; *my grandmother*, said another...

*3 of my family members*, said another...

*We must not forget.*

What does that have to do with Love?

Everything, but first...

Those who were with me – some of you here –  
Listened with awe as Barb Fritts (so proud to be her minister that night!)  
Reminded us how kids are watching us all the time and hear  
What we don't say as much as what we do say,  
That if we avoid having difficult conversations like these,  
And we try to be so polite and cautious and avoid tough discussions,  
We are allowing bad actors to continue.

And then, next, the Superintendent asked if he could be vulnerable,  
And then went on to say how scared he was of being there that night,  
How, in this time of charged politics, he was fearful he would say the wrong  
thing and cause an impact on someone else he didn't intend.  
And that tonight he was hearing that more conversations like this needed to  
happen, that he and we needed to urged toward brave conversations like  
these.

And the rabbis, when asked what is their antidote to hate, said one word:  
Pride – pride in being who they are, and loving God the way they do, and  
Claiming their heritage with fullness and fulsomeness and no hiding.

And then the African American woman standing up and saying, *I'm not  
Jewish, but I know the fear that symbol is meant to cause,  
I know what it feels like to be targeted with hate...  
So I am here....*

And the reporter of the town newspaper who first reported the story stood,

And when it was pointed out to her that she didn't refer to the Swastika more generally and generically and not as an Antisemitic hate symbol,  
She stood up and apologized to the room,  
For not naming more factually and forcefully what had happened...

And the police chief stood and said they were following leads....

And others in the community talked painfully about the anti-Semitism  
They had experienced in the town...

And, well...I have to say...something was happening that night,  
Something about truth-telling and vulnerability and risk...

And yes, *love*.

Oh, that word – that word that once upon a time the Greeks called *Philia*  
(care for others), *Eros* (romance), and *Agape* (love without condition)...

And that has somehow now become the prevue

Of CVS and Hallmark and Cupid and Lifetime Movies and sweetheart  
candies and heart emojis on our smart phones,

And along the way become, almost, a broken syllable on our tongue –

Its power muted, generalized, domesticated,

Like wilted houseplant or docile pet...

And not something that drives someone out of their house

On a Wednesday night to show up for their Jewish neighbors they didn't  
know they had until a Swastika was carved with a knife

Into the slide of the elementary school,

Or causes the Superintendent who says I'm scared to speak for fear of saying the wrong thing, will you help me be more brave?

Or rabbi who calls his community to claim with Pride their Jewish identity,

Or the black mom saying I am here because hate anywhere is hate everywhere...

And that Jewish members of Holliston who spoke of how it made them

Feel to know the swastika was carved into the slide some of their kids

Played on...

All of that is love is too – love for other people, love for what's possible but is not yet, love that asks us to risk enough to show up and where hate

Shows up,

Love that speaks up, love that doesn't cower,

Love that doesn't hang just from florescent lights in the darkness of early February in time for Valentine's Day,

Love that is fierce, love that is active,

Love – can we say – is what we mean when we say it is the Spirit of this Church.

We say we come to church to practice being the people we say we want to be.

So ask: where is, how is, when is, who is, what is...calling you toward

This kind of fierce love in your life, your family, your community, your job, your time?

Ask: where is this kind of love needed...and what will I do about it?

Amen.