

Rev. Nathan Detering
March 3, 2019
“You Say You Want a Revolution”

“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.”

Several weeks ago, when I remembered that the worship theme for March is

Revolution and Grit,

And I realized that this theme would kick off just as I was leaving

For sabbatical,

I couldn't help but laugh.

You gonna have a revolution while I'm gone? You gonna?

Go for it! Have a great, wild time! It's not my church, it's yours!

As I shared at our staff meeting this week, it reminds me of when I was an intern in Lincoln way, way back in 2001,

And the senior minister left in the spring of my time there,
Leaving me to learn all on my own.

Imagine doing such a thing, right Jessica?

And on his first Sunday back I got up in the pulpit

And whispered: *don't tell Roger this is the first time*

We've been here since he left 5 months ago.

So friends, who I love more than I think any minister can love

Their congregation,

I want to bring some context to this time away for me and for you,

You who have told me with open heart and open encouragement

How good it is that I get this time, which is all true, and you are all so
generous -

Though I also know how hard you all work, too,

And how much you need and deserve a sabbatical in your lives, too...

So it isn't without some sheepishness and good old Catholic guilt

That still tugs at the corners of my spirit even though I am a lifetime

Removed from the church....

That I put into your arms, and Heather, Jessica, Sarah, India and Kathleen's
arms,

And the Board's arms, this work of ministry that isn't mine, but it ours,

Because this I know: the best ministry happens when I, when you,

when we...don't hold it for ourselves, but instead give it away,

Which is maybe – Bible quote – why Jesus said that in order for us to keep
our souls, keep our life,

we first have to lose ourselves in service to something bigger than ourselves.

But, some context: when I get up on the balcony of my life, and get up off
The sanctuary floor, but get up on the balcony and get some perspective,
As we all need to do even though the fullness and fastness of life constantly
seems to block us,

I am acknowledging that the last several years have been some of the hardest
Of my life,

Bookended by two personal losses you have heard me preach from and lead
from - the loss of my brother Nick four years ago this August to a drug
overdose, and then my dad David this past August to cancer.

Ministry has always made sure that I am no stranger to death and loss,
But these last years have made sure that I welcome death and loss into my
home and then clean out a spare bedroom we don't have...because they are
unpacking their bags and moving in.

The courageous response, the one our UU faith invites and encourages,
Tells us that suffering is a part of life and not punishment for a way of
living,

And that death makes life worth living, and that we ought to make our lives
worth dying for,

Which I know to be true and preach to be true and counsel to be true.

But then there is part of me, isn't there in you?

That just wants to turn the time back, turn the clock back,

To the time before the cancer spread, or the opiates were prescribed,

Or the depression had descended....

Because who knows, maybe a difference could have been made,

A conversation could have been had,
Or, even, a moment of joy, connection, free of worry could be lived.
Not for nothing, then, did I take note when I learned this week
What revolution means – you knew it was coming, right?
Revolution, from the Latin *revolutio*, meaning to ‘*turn around, or turn back.*’

So now, at least here, it’s not a political revolution I want,
But a personal one – where my brother is still alive, still sober, still thriving
as a principal and dad and husband,
And my dad can breath a full breath and not spend more time in that out
Of hospitals,
And, maybe for you, a personal revolution you want - to a time you want to
relive, reclaim, recover before...
the loss or the election or lay-off or the diagnosis....

You say you want a revolution, TNT will sing a bit, and yes,
Don’t we all? And if yes, what are we supposed to do with that feeling
Of wanting to reclaim, renew, refresh when we can’t, in fact, go back
In time?

All of you know, I hope, that in addition to getting some of that balcony
Time that I just spoke during these next months,
That my main project will be writing a book for Skinner House, the UUA’s
publishing house, that will be an addiction resource for individuals and
families who have a loved one suffering with addiction problems.
What many of you don’t know is how this project came to be,

How in the spring before Nick's death, when his use of pain pills
Increased and his performance at work began to suffer
And the inpatient recovery stay didn't last,
He would call me on the phone. Every morning. Like clockwork.
Call me every morning as I drove here to church
And then parked in the third slot from the left and listened,
And tried to get a word in edgewise as he would talk and spin out ideas
And never quite own up to what was happening,
Never quite willing to let me hold him with accountability and love.

And how, after he would hang up, sometimes abruptly,
How I would come into church, feeling helpless and frustrated and worried
and lonely...and walk past the credenza and the library where
I looked and couldn't find anything to read that might help me,
A resource that might shore me up and show me a path toward...
Solutions? No, not solutions (because this issue doesn't come with a quick
fix),
but instead just help me come out of the shadows a bit and find a companion.
We didn't have an Alanon meeting here in the church then; otherwise I
would have gone.

When my parents called me that August morning to say that Nick had died
Of an accidental overdose of pain medication...after the shock,
After the deep breaths and eyes up in sky and then down in hands,
Not even an hour after, you know what I knew I needed to do?
I knew I needed to use my role as minister and brother to bring
This issue and these stories out into the open,

Because addiction and mental health problems love secrets and shame,
Because shadows hate cracks of light,
Because I didn't want that lonely ghost of me, walking from the car
After being hung up on, not knowing what to do,
To keep on haunting me.

Was a revolution – a turning back, a return, a turn back in time – possible?
No.

But is a revolution – a changing of how I and we talk about addiction,
a turn from avoidance to acknowledgement and acceptance,
a turn from helplessness to accountability and love, what I call a fierce love
– possible?

Yes.

And one part of this revolution for me is writing this book for people
Like me and families like mine who have a legacy of addiction
From one generation to the next.

The cliché says the book chose me, I didn't choose it.

A better way to say it is that I am writing the thing I most need to read.

And so, friends, you gift me this time – but it isn't just for me.

It's also for those who will get anything that may be helpful to them

From what comes out of this project.

In this way, as in so many other ways, you can say our shared ministry
continues.

And with it this realization – how out of the depths of loss and pain and
turmoil comes, sometimes, learning and opportunity and growth.

I hope you learn this here. I hope we learn this together.

I hope you learn, with me, how to convert or transform or revolutionize,
Some of the hurt you have in your life or you see in your family
Or your community or our country into an opportunity for serving
Something larger than yourself.

It seems counterintuitive, doesn't it?

That in our lowest times, maybe our most desperate times, our darkest times
That we start to come back to life when we ask how we can *turn* – there's
that word – how we can *turn* our experience into someone else's
redemption?

Strange isn't it, odd isn't it, how so many religious types get it wrong –
That our souls are meant to be saved at all, but spent, spent wildly,
Spent freely, spent as if we had no budget at all.

What a revolution that would be.

Here over the next months, a request and an invitation:

The request: to pay attention to what hurts as you look and watch
And get up on the balcony, pay attention to your anger,
Your annoyance, your pain, your loss, don't numb or avoid it or
Bandage it up in a Netflix stupor.

May attention and then ask what it might be calling you to do –
Where it might be calling to serve, what it might be calling you volunteer
for, what it might be asking to you to do with your gift of time and talent?
What is the revolution, the turn, that is waiting for you to spark?

And a invitation: to have this congregation be an engine, a resource,
A cheerleader, a convener, and a spark for these revolutions.

Look at the all the stuff that is happening here,
And if you don't see something talk to folks and ask how might it be
possible.

And show up for each other. Worship, as simple as it may sound,
Is a revolutionary act. Coming for yourself, but staying for someone else,
Is revolutionary.

Singing someone else's song, saying someone else's prayer,
Helping to carry someone's else's hurt.

Generosity like this is revolutionary! Putting your body where your beliefs
Is revolutionary.

Being spiritual and religious is revolutionary!

Not giving up on organized religion is revolutionary!

And giving your minister this time to refresh, renew, to write, to get up on
the balcony, and doing joyfully and with encouragement as you do,
Is revolutionary.

You say you want a revolution? I do. Let's go for it.

I love you.

Amen.