

Rev Nathan Detering

February 5, 2017

“A Moment for Imagination, A Time for Commitment”

“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.”

“Honey,” I say to Ella, now 13 but still my baby.

“What you doing?”

I ask because she closes her door now, the monsters

She used to need me to protect her from no longer a threat,

Which means I no longer need to stand at the open door until she falls asleep.

“Nothing!” she says, over the scraping of the bed being moved,

The kerclunk of things being dropped and dropped again.

I turn the handle and poke my dad eye into the crack,

Seeing there her long legs dangling out from under her bed,

The box of dolls she hasn't played with in a couple years dragged

Out into the middle of the floor along with dust bunnies and a couple
Errant Cheez-Its that aren't supposed to be brought up to the bedroom....
Because that is how the mouse I keep hearing at night gets fed.

"Aww, she is playing with her dolls again," I say to myself
As I quietly close the door,
A vision that is for me the equivalent of a big warm hug in the midst of
A tumultuous day, week, month, year...telling me that all this tumult
In the world hasn't made its way up into my child's bedroom,
And yes, there is privilege in being able to say such a thing,
Because it might be different if her last name didn't sound European,
And she didn't have an American passport in the safe we keep in the next
room.

But for now I can't let myself get all fired up and frenzied about that.
No, I just need, for my emotional and spiritual health, to let myself
Be enveloped in the warm vision of my baby playing with her dolls in her
room,
Me imagining the story Ella might be playing out....
This doll having fallen from this horse, and now sitting in this wheelchair
After breaking her leg....
And because she is lonely she is having a party to invite her friends
over...and she's looking in this refrigerator (that Ella and I made out
cardboard one summer four years ago) to see what party food she has
To share....

Me as invested, maybe even MORE invested, in this game of imagination

Than Ella might be, because remember her door is closed and
Who knows what the heck she's up to,
But me invested in thinking all this because I read somewhere that
imagination means to cast a vision wider,
to widen your vision that has gotten too narrow,
And good lord how narrow do I feel in these weeks, pressed in from all sides
By the news, the Facebook feeds, by the important, but incessant calls to
march here, petition there, protest, move, act...all so important,
But all leaving me at times feeling pressed in from all sides,
Squeezed by reality.
And remember, I'm one of the privileged ones.
Maybe you feel the same...maybe you'll tell me I'm not alone.
Am I alone?

You've heard it said, but just to confirm: parenting, or for that matter
"adult-ing," isn't for the faint of heart.
Because just as I'm resisting the evening news, and imagining
Ella upstairs imagining the next chapter of her doll saga,
And I'm getting all invested in the vision that she's not getting older,
And neither am I,
and thinking it must just be a scary dream that our son has his driving test
tomorrow (he does),
or that the president of the US is a reality TV star who seems to be treating
the office like a Nielson ratings game at best, or a dictatorship, at worst.
Ella bounds down the stairs into the kitchen.

"Dad, the boxes are ready."

*What boxes? I ask. Ready for what?
Remember you said to clean my room?
Like last week, yeah...
Yeah, I cleaned out from under my bed. You know the dolls
I don't play with anymore?
I put them in boxes.
You can take up in the attic when you're ready."
Adult-ing isn't for the faint of heart.*

And maybe one reason for that is in times like these
We're all feeling squeezed,
our vision, our imagination, our hope for what's possible
folded down and bent into the boxes of some of the political realities
before us...and lifted up into the attic along with
what Mary Luti in our reading referred to as the 'bliss-ninnies'
who are doing guided meditations while the world is in flames.

You want to pray? Goes the thinking. Move your feet.
You want to linger of Mary Oliver poetry? Read it while you march.
You want to sing songs about imagination? Do it while knitting pink hats.
You want to dream a world along with Langston Hughes? How about
waking up and making some commitments to that world.
You want to make a difference? Get your head out of the clouds, out the
attic, and get to work.

Adult-ing is hard, isn't it?
Because it's hard knowing when being still is just us being complacent.

Or when savoring the world is just us forgoing the work of saving it.

Or when our seeking sanctuary for the spirit is just another word for hiding, for avoidance.

Or when constant attention to the news and staying on top of things and being informed is just a desperate expression for control.

Or when the hurried and harried desire to do something/make a difference is actually you acting on the belief that the whole world rests on your shoulders.

Or when our investment in our kid's imaginations is actually just an expression of how weary of reality we actually are.

It kind of feels like a narrow path, doesn't it?

I've said to us frequently these last several months, these months

When I think I've actually just been giving one sermon Sunday after Sunday

Which sounds something like: *stay strong, stay committed, stay full of faith...*

That over the years of ministry with you I haven't every quite seen our congregation at once so energized and mobilized to take action,

While also so scared and anxious for the future.

It's a tender, exhilarating, exhausting place to live...right?

I should know.

Because I feel exactly the same.

Because as one of your ministers I both receive and reflect how we're feeling.

And one thing I also notice us feeling...in your emails to me, in the lingering Hugs in the receiving line, in the wordless hands on shoulders

That say 'hang in there' and 'thank you'

Is also a longing for some help in holding onto a vision for what's possible,
Some help with nurturing our own dreams and hopes and imagination for the
world...

While also a longing for some help in direction, in pointing us to places

Where we can make a difference...or in other words,

How to live out the line we say that says

'we can't do everything, but we can do something.'

Now, if we were a different kind of church and I were a different kind

Of minister

This would be the time when I write us a prescription and tell us what to
do...

Meditate this many minutes on Monday, write these senators on Wednesday,

Show up at this march on Saturday

But I'm not inclined to tell you what you to do any more than you're
inclined to listen to me.

Why? Because we're a church of covenants not creeds.

We promise how we hope to be together, not tell each other what to do or
believe or say or think or feel.

Instead, I invite us into a practice (go down out of pulpit):

Posture of imagination...eyes up...hope...vision...expanding narrowness, put down phones...look up...

Complete sentence...*The world I imagine is....*

A place where love doesn't let us off or let us go, where presence matters more than power or perfection.

Next comes commitment...eyes come down...focus....I can't do everything, But I can do something.

I don't make commitments, I am a commitment, meaning

I embody my beliefs and my practices match my values.

I am a commitment to...presence, to putting my body where my beliefs are, To speaking the truth in love.

Next, why does my commitment matter. For the sake of what am I this commitment?

Complete this sentence....

I am this commitment so that...I feel integrated. That I practice being The person I want to be. So those most important to me know where I stand and that I stand with them.

Next, what requests do I have to fulfill this commitment:

Of myself – so no, so I can say yes.

Of others – remind me my job isn't to keep us happy; it's to help us stay faithful.

Here at the end, let me take us back to Ella's room.

There in the closet, cozied up but not in the attic, I found
A doll under a warm blanket, ready for play, ready for imagination.

We can't make the world better if we don't have dreams for what it could
be, not what it is.

As always, our children will lead us.

Amen.