

**“Top Ten Stories of Hope, Salvation, and Resistance from 2018:  
The Don’t Give In Edition”  
Sunday, January 6, 2019  
Rev. Nathan Detering**

*“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.”*

For as long I have been your minister you have, every first or second Sunday in January, humored me as I share some of the top ten religious news stories Of the previous year,

A practice I stole unabashedly from my mentor, Roger Paine,

Who did the same during his long ministry in Lincoln.

Many of you tell me it is a sermon you look forward to all year,

Which is saying something given the sourness the news always seems to bring us.

Which leads me to the insert I put in our programs for us of quotes and pictures (and big shout out to our miracle admin Heather Walker for editing, cutting, pasting all these together),

And let me draw our attention

to that first image at the top of the guy

Holding the steaming, smelling trash bag from 2018.

That is a Bitmoji (some of us will new what that is) of me,

And the reason I put in there is it accurately describes I started to feel

As I reviewed the news.

But then I listened again to the song TNT just played for us,

About all the people who have stood up and resisted – Nina Simone,

Mavis Staples, MLK, they singing ‘*its not the wakin’ it’s the risin’*

*It’s the grounding of the foot uncompromising’* –

And after that I was reminded of RW Emerson’s quote, an old favorite

Of mine that I had not looked at in a long time,

That says how one of our greatest accomplishments is ‘*to be yourself*

*In a world that is constantly trying to make you something else.*”

And sometimes when we look back on the world that someone/something

else is someone who says it is what is, who is cynical, angry (and not the righteous kind, but just the angry kind), or just sad.

And I don’t want to be that person, and I don’t want us to be those people.

So!

A little like last year this year I looked for stories that show us a

Little hope, a little salvation (which comes from the word ‘salve’ or ‘heal’),  
A little resistance to help us not give in or give up.

And even if they don’t seem outwardly religious, remember what you’ve  
Heard me remind us many times before,  
That the word religion comes from the Latin ‘religio’  
Meaning to bring together that which has been torn apart.  
Ready? Ready.

And a big shout-out to the Christian Century Magazine and Google  
who helped me find and shape these stories.

### **10) The Prince Says Wow!**

In year that saw another sexual abuse scandal rock the Catholic Church,  
This time in Pennsylvania,  
And some prominent leaders in the evangelical church resigning after years  
Of sexual harassment and misconduct,  
How refreshing watch as 2 billion people tuned into the royal wedding  
Of Prince Harry, a white prince of a colonial power and Meghan Markle,  
A biracial, divorced woman from its most famous breakaway province...  
All of whom watched as American Episcopal Bishop Michael Curry stepped  
Up to the lectern at St. George’s Chapel in Windsor Castle  
And invoked MLK, renegade Catholic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin,  
And ‘*some old slaves in America’s Antebellum South*’  
To preach to them about the power of love, their marriage,  
And they work and witness they are called to offer Britain, its  
Commonwealth, and the whole world,  
Showing that the church may not entirely so judgmental or irrelevant

As some people think.

Said one BBC commentator: *Who will emerge victorious? The Joy of Michael J. Curry or 600 Polite English Scowls?*

The answer for all of us to see was witnessed on the listening faces  
Of Meghan and Harry, who after Bishop Curry sat down,  
In full view of the cameras, mouthed the word: “*Wow.*”  
Go home and watch this sermon!

### **9) Don't Be a Meanie!**

Many of you love to send me gifts of a good Pew Study – what's  
A Pew Study? A Pew Study is named after the Pew family  
That started a non-partisan research center in DC and they issue  
All kinds of results from surveys they've done on politics, social issues,  
And, of course, religion.

One of you recently sent me one that showed that when people under 30  
were asked what word comes to mind when they think of church,  
93% said something along the lines of ‘*meanies.*’

The same study also showed that more and more Americans think religion  
Is ‘irrelevant’ to the problems facing our country and our world today.  
I'll admit: it's hard to not feel defensive.

But given all the things done in God's name that are worthy of shame  
And blame it's hard not to sympathize,  
Because all those things are why so many of us are sheepish about calling  
ourselves religious at all,  
for fear that people will get the wrong idea about us.

In a world broken with too much language and twitter and weaponized words,

I say it's up to churches like ours to show not tell who we are.

Drawing my inspiration are these stories this year:

- Of the Covenant Church in Carlton, TX that on Easter Sunday Decided to spend its advertising budget not on advertising but on seeding a fund to wipe out \$100K of medical debt of local families. The church made the transaction through RIP Medical Debt – an American nonprofit that buys up and abolishes medical debt. Since medical debt can be bought by collection agencies for a fraction of what they're worth, \$100,000 translates to over \$10 million in medical debt that has now been lifted off the shoulders of struggling Texas families. 4,229 families and veterans who have been forgiven of the medical debt will be receiving letters in the mail this week notifying them of the donation.
- Of the Grace Church in Amherst, MA that raised money and then sent volunteers to rebuild St. Matthieu's School in Bayonnais, Haiti So that the teachers would no longer have to teach five different grades simultaneously in the church sanctuary, a room smaller than a basketball court. As one volunteer, John Stilfer, said after surveying The unfinished classroom, and who had been wondering why they sent \$\$ so far away, said: "*I'm beginning to understand why I am here.*"
- Of the Old South Church in Boston that, this year, raised money On top of their budget to install an elevator up to the pulpit so that Different kinds of people, not just able people, could preach there.

### **8) Is it a bird? A plane? A miracle?**

Two weeks ago this Tuesday, on Christmas Day,  
 Guy Benson was out for his usual morning walk in the Attenborough  
 Nature Reserve in Nottingham, England,  
 His Iphone in hand,  
 When came over a hill and saw a swirling mass of starlings, thousands,  
 Erupt from the grasses and begin to dodge and weave –  
 What’s called a murmuration – into different shapes.

This wasn’t unusual.

But what happened next was...as Guy watched in astonishment  
 As the thousands of starlings, each taking a cue from the others,  
 Eventually becoming the shape of a giant, giant bird.

You can see a photo of it there at the bottom of your insert.

Said Guy: *“You could hear them all flapping their wings and swishing  
 overhead; I just stood there open-mouthed, with my camera on.*

*The thing is, Guy said, there are thousands of people who live close by,  
 But so many of them, so many of us, don’t see that ordinary miracles  
 Like this go on.”*

Moral: Look, pay attention, notice.

### **7) The Headline Read “Shalom”**

While the Supreme Court this summer upheld the current administration’s  
 ‘Muslim Ban’ restricting travel to the US from several Muslim majority  
 countries, further inflaming anti-Muslim rhetoric here and abroad,  
 Muslims showed us who they are:

Like when, after the attack on Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh,  
 and anti-Semitism in the UK, several British Muslim groups took out a

full-page ad in the newspaper to voice their opposition to anti-Semitism.

In giant, bold black text across the top, the ad read: “We Muslims have one word for Jews. *Shalom.*”

*“As British Muslims, we believe that the time has come to speak out. For far too long, anti-Semitism has gone unchecked,” the ad continued. “Eradicating it is a challenge faced by all of us.”*

..And like when this past New Year’s Day, 1000 members of the Muslim Youth Association took the the streets of 50 different UK localities for a New Year’s Day clean-up, Kicking off the morning by hosting a special prayer service for the New Year before they donned high-vis vests and tackled the streets With grabbers and bags in hand, on the back of the vests read:  
*“In Islam, Cleanliness is Part of Faith”*

## **6) It was the Divest of Times, It was the Worst of Times**

This story is for the “Cherish the Living Earth” part of our Call to Ministry. By all accounts, 2018 had the more than it’s share of big environmental bummers.

Scientists calmly explained that our current state of warming will cause geological changes akin to a meteor striking the earth.

Former EPA chief Scott Pruitt spend thousands of our tax dollars

On coins, flights, and security cones of silence in his office

While overturning and weakening important rules that protected

Us from dirty water and air.

Brazil got a new president who plans to open up the Amazon to logging.

And the US showed up to the global summit on climate change representing Fossil fuels.

Oh My God!!!!!!

So imagine my surprise when I read the following evidence that this year Wasn't totally terrible. Ready?

- a) Democrats flipped the House in November and a slew of environmentalists ran on a climate platform and joined Congress. The Green New Deal proposed by some of them is losing some traction, but can we just celebrate that people got elected proposing such a deal?
- b) Cities said 'I Do' to clean energy, with 45 cities signing on making clean energy the primary source of energy by 2030, including Abita Springs, LA, where the conservative mayor, Greg Lemon, is among A growing cadre of conservatives who believe renewable energy and their party's fiscal conservative values go hand-in-hand.
- c) Green Courts! 2018 has the been the year of the climate change lawsuit, with two cities in CA letting loose on against major polluters, And then others following along, including Boulder, NY, Richmond, state of RI, and most recently Baltimore.
- d) Year of the Carbon Tax? Almost. A bipartisan group in the House proposed not one but TWO carbon pricing schemes to help incentivize cleaner energy.
- e) Big Oil's pipes got clogged! This year companies that wanted to build massive oil and natural gas pipelines ran into roadblocks in the courts, including the TransCanada XL pipeline that was blocked by a

federal judge who ruled in November that Trump had failed to consider climate change when he approved the pipeline.

- f) Divestments from oil companies went big! Did you know the entire Republic of Ireland is divesting? Did you know the NYC is looking to divest fossil fuels from its 194 billion pension fund by 2022, the biggest pension fund in the US.

Is there work to do? Yes. Is work happening we didn't know about? Yes and more yes.

### **5) Mennonite kids teach former Attorney General Jeff Sessions and the rest of us how to read the Bible**

Remember several months ago when Jeff Sessions cited Romans 13 as an argument for separating parents from the children at the border?

*“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities,” the scripture says,*

*‘for there is no authority except from God and those authorities That exist which have been instituted by God.’”*

Melissa Florer-Bixler remembers it well because she spent the full semester Of her older-age Sunday School class on this passage,

Her church, the Mennonites, descendants of an illegal breakaway from the Catholic Church who were hunted down and killed for the anti-government action of baptizing one other in the name of Jesus.

So you can imagine how they felt upon hearing Sessions use this passage For the good of the empire, to keep people silent, in line, submissive.

So they spent 12 weeks trying to unpack this passage, learning the history

Of how this passage was meant to convince listeners that Caesar, who claimed divinity,

Was simply a puppet with God pulling the strings.

They also studied a theory that Paul was involved in a smuggling operation, And that this passage was meant to trick the guards at the checkpoints who were on the hunt for Christians, that they were more submissive than they actually were.

Melissa's point in all this was one that Sessions was missing,

That the text needs to be understood and read from its context,

So that we can combat those who use it as a weapon.

It's also a reason why we need to know the text ourselves, so that

We can counteract those who use it to abuse.

#### **4) Top This British Bake-Off!**

After years of legal battles, in June the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Jack Phillips, a Colorado baker who refused – on religious grounds (remember meanies) – to bake a cake for a same-sex wedding.

In response, one of my favorite webpage discoveries was found.

It's title: *14 wedding cakes to remind us that even the Supreme Court Can't Stop Same-Sex Love.*

Please search for this later.

Among the cakes is that has two Marvel action figures – Falcon and Captain America (representing Lane and Lincoln) perched on the top in full embrace,

And two of those new body-positive barbies holding hands,

And several of the most beautiful, whipped, rainbow tasty icing glory you have ever seen.

A new legal case against Phillips is pending.

### 3) (More Bible) Mary Magdalene's Rule.

Who knows who Mary M. is?

She is one of the only women in all four Gospels who traveled with Jesus

And is said to have witnessed his crucifixion.

We also might remember that she is said to have discovered his empty tomb.

And who knows what her rule is?

*"To believe women when they tell you things,"*

Which she offered when all the men around her told her she was just

Seeing things after reporting that empty tomb.

Since we all say Christine Blasey Ford come forward and tell her story

Of being sexually assaulted by the now Supreme Court justice

Brett Kavanaugh when the two were teenagers,

Women in our congregations and our communities have told their clergy,

Their friends, their Facebook community, and almost anyone who will listen

And believe,

About their stories of what happened to them at the hands of fathers,

boyfriends, brothers, classmates, colleagues, bosses,

And yes, clergy and bishops.

This is true in my life and in your life,

And as a man and minister, as a husband and father of a daughter and son,

who has heard some of these stories

I am called again, and with ever greater conviction in this #MeToo era,

To listen, to believe, to be an ally, to be an advocate for women in my life,

And to partner with men who seek to grow, learn and listen with me.

## 2) Bodies on the Line

On November 23<sup>rd</sup> Samuel Oliver-Bruno left City Well United Methodist Church in Durham, NC for the first time since taking sanctuary there In December, 2017.

The Duke Divinity Student and longtime US resident, who returned to Mexico in 2011 to care for his father and returned in 2014 when His wife needed surgery, requested reprieve from a deportation order. The Immigration and Citizenship Services summoned him for fingerprinting. While in line, Sam and his son, a US citizen, were tackled by Immigration And Customs Enforcement agents, And then took them out to an unmarked van out back. But there ICE had to content with Sam's church family, Members of that Methodist Church, Who surrounded the van and began to sing, pray and refused to move. Only after 27 more were arrested could the van depart. Sam was deported on Nov.29<sup>th</sup>.

We're thinking: this is not hopeful. This is not salvation. But it is resistance.

Because after that happened the church members have created A messaging system for sanctuary leaders to quickly mobilize Supports to 'show up, document the situation, and, if necessary, Put their bodies between people like Sam and whatever harm Might come to them.'"

Some of have said to me this is a legal issue, that when folks break The law they must be held accountable.

Ok.

But also hear me when I say that this is religious issue,

That says we are called to welcome the stranger and care for the sick  
And provide shelter for the dispossessed.

How we negotiate these times, knowing that no one leaves their home

Unless they are desperate and scared and hurting,

Is test not just of our laws but also of our religion.

What does it mean to put our bodies where our beliefs are?

- 1) And last, this speech from Rabbi Jeffery Myers, given after 11 members of his congregation were killed this fall at his Tree of Life Synagogue.**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t23RphC-6Oo>

Friends, in 2019 may we discover who and how we can hope for, save for,  
resist for, put our bodies where our beliefs can be for,

And may be the stories of hope we most want to see in the world

That is desperate for them.

Happy, holy, hopeful New Year.....

Amen.