

Homily
Rev. Nathan Detering
UU Area Church at First Parish in Sherborn
15 March 2020
Inaugural Online Worship Service

*“Here is the world; beautiful and terrible things will happen.
Keep our hearts tender.
Keep our eyes soft.
Keep our words true.
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
We say we want 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.”*

In the overwhelming blur and lurching headlines
And maddening to me and maybe to you, too,
press conferences and speeches that this week has been,
What’s coming to mind
As we gather this morning across the social distance of our screens,
Our hearts and spirits and faces reaching through the pixels
To help us hold together our fear,
and help each other hold hope, too...

What's coming to mind is the moment
on Friday, just two days ago but that feels like an eternity,
when Karyn and I opened our front door
and down our front steps to walk our way to CVS to hunt down
not toilet paper (we still have some!),
and not Purell (because that is now worth more than liquid
gold),
and not Clorox wipes (because they are more rare and fine
than sheets of silk),

But instead on our way to CVS for something even more important
and worthy of hoarding: *chocolate*.

And not just any chocolate...,

But very specifically those Cadbury candied chocolate Easter eggs

That crunch and then melt in your mouth in just such a way

That prove God exists and wants us to savor the simple things.

And oh how we need to learn and lean into the simple things now,

Because so much of everything else feels scary and uncertain.

Friday afternoon, you might remember, was warm and windy,

The sun through the trees and blue patches of sky offering

A note of discord and dissonance, but also antidote,

To all that has changed in this last week.

At our side, or rather 5 feet out in front,

keeping his social distance,

Was the dog on his leash...

He smiling even more than usual because while the humans
Across the world are stressed and strained,
One population that is surely glad for this new normal...
Are the pets,
Because now they have us home with them all the time!

Holliston schools had cancelled the night before,
And what that meant was that all day kids were riding bikes
And razor scooters up and down the street....
All of them riding in the middle of the street, in fact,
because all the cars
Were either stuck in the parking lot of the local Market Basket
Or idle in the driveways.
Normally kids just blaze me without even an eye of acknowledgment,
But on Friday just as we come down the stairs
A pack of 9-year-olds come rushing up to us:

“Hi!!!!” Hi, Hi Hi...”

“Hey everybody.” (we say)

*“Hey, um, now that we’re not in school we’re starting a Dog Walking
business. Can we walk your dog?? We’re offering a good price! – 2\$ per
walk or 6 walks for \$10!*

I’m thinking, you’re thinking: so much has been cancelled,
But on the list of what hasn’t been cancelled is *entrepreneurial spirit!*

Ok, we say, can you start on Monday?

We can start now...but I guess Monday is ok. Morning?

Yes, morning.

And off the pack goes to the next house, squealing: *we've got another!*

Further down the street, around the block,

Karyn and I are also noticing this...

How whisper quiet the streets are,

But here and there, small groups walking -

Families, couples, friends and they are walking,

And if before, even in my small town,

Most of the people and me would pass by without acknowledging each other,

Now everyone makes a point to lift their head and offer greeting.

It is cliché to note how disruption in our lives causes us to change

Our behavior toward one another,

And also true to note that not all of those changes are welcome (hording, panic),

But this is also true:

How here in America we live in and celebrate such an individualistic culture,

But when hard, big, scary, overwhelming things happen,

More of us long to become a collectivist culture.

We don't want to be isolated from each other.

We're don't want to be quarantined from each other.

We don't want to pretend anymore that we're not reliant on each

Other.

Which is why this new and necessary practice of social distancing
Is so painful, because we know the very thing we need – connection –
Is the thing that risks our own and everyone's health, particularly among
those of who are most vulnerable.

As if on cue, and as I wait with the dog out front of CVS
while Karyn stands in line snaking back through the isles to the greeting
cards,

A woman in pulls up into the handicap spot, slips the wheelchair sign
Onto her rearview mirror,

Slips a facemask on,

And slowly makes her way out of her car toward the automatic
Door that only opens half-way open.

All week I've been worried about church, about zoom,
About me (asthma), about my kids, about everything....

All important things, but also all 'close-in' things...

And now, what I know, as the dog and I move to push the door

Open wide,

Is how now is the time to practice being the people we want to be:

People who protect ourselves from sickness, yes,

But also people who don't wall ourselves off from other people,

Many of whom, and indeed some of us,

who will be suffering from isolation, from anxiety, or from the virus itself.

What this will look like for you and for us in the coming weeks is still

Taking shape,

But for now maybe it is enough to offer this:

- When you hear the president or someone else refer to this as a ‘foreign virus,’ take a breath and say aloud that in these times there is them or us, no foreign or domestic, no me and you. There is only we and us.
- When we see others, or watch ourselves, scramble for extra pasta And tuna fish and toilet paper and think about fleeing to some ‘safer place,’ may we feel, maybe for the first time, a deeper Empathy for those who flee war and famine.
- When we get to feeling helpless, because that is what fear does, May we remember that the most vulnerable among us – people who are frail, and those without insurance, or paid sick leave, Or with suppressed immune systems – will need our love and care, And what that looks like right is phone calls, offers to shop for food, letters of support, and anything that isn’t forgetting them.
- And for those in our midst, in our community, who count yourselves among this vulnerable population, this promise: we love you, we see you, we are here with you and for you.

Karyn comes out with chocolate Easter eggs in hand,

And extra asthma medication for me and Emerson, now home from college

Like every other college student,

And holds up her phone with news of some latest horror headline.

But then she says out loud to me and to herself and to the parking lot:

No. Nope. Enough.

Because if we can binge on Netflix, what’s also true is that we can binge

On bad news.

I mean, look: we need to protect our bodies from infection, but we also need to protect our spirits and mental health from infection, too:

- Adults, parents: find a balanced way to stay informed about all this, and then find a way to put it down to do other things.
- Kids, teens: as Heather said, look out for the helpers and when or if you feel worried, remember that the job of the grown-ups in our life is to worry for you.
- And remember, in the midst of all the cancellations, you know what hasn't been cancelled?

.....getting outside, not cancelled,

Family, not cancelled,

Singing, not cancelled,

Laughter, not cancelled,

Dancing in your house, not cancelled.

And, friends, hope...not cancelled.

Friends, family of UUAC, I know this is such a hard time,

But I also know the community we have and connections we've made

Are made for these moments.

Together, across our social distance, across our fear, across the unknown,

We will get through.

Amen.