

Once Upon a Time: Poetry and Preaching

Rev. Nathan Detering and Jamele Adams

February 23, 2020

Reading

Comfort Control
Written and Read by Jamele Adams

How do you feel about the situation in Ferguson MI?

It's an epidemic; NOT a situation

And if it's not an epidemic to you,

That tells me it's not effecting you.....yet

...if a group killed countless numbers of people grouped like you

It would be an epidemic to you

But hold up, stop and frisk this

When old enough to play outside by myself

My mother told me

"when stopped by the police, don't do anything that might get you killed or
 locked up"

In fact stay in this neighborhood,

On this block

In front of this building

So you're close to home.

And that's exactly where these boys are killed?

In their neighborhoods, On their blocks,

In front of their buildings; And Close to home

Imagine outliving your future grandchildren's murdered father?

This is poverty of a soul, living in a wealth of pain

How do explain ripping the life out of an unarmed body?

How do you feel for real about Ferguson, MI?

I say I don't know what to say

So I begin to act

Act like my name is Michael Brown

And lived in Ferguson, MI

Act like my name is Eric Garner

And lived in Brooklyn, NY

Act like my name is Oscar Grant

And lived in Oakland, CA

Living like them black boys do

Dyin' like them black boys do

I'm told I'm not under attack,

But that's mostly said by those whom are not Black

The New York Times reminds me

Black boys like me are not angels

But when those bullets pierce through me I become one

Bleeding for reasons

That feel like this is human hunting season

It's hard being human when you're property

It's hard being human when you're the anomaly

It's hard being human when you're called minority

It's hard being human when you learn you were once 3/5ths of one

See us as heartbeats and not target sheets

This ain't just about Black boys

Or 200 kidnapped girls

Or condemning all the police in the world

It's about deconstructing systems of oppression

Breaking away from the chains

Unshackling our brains

Seeing all humans as humane

The question of the summer has been "turn down for what?"

This gives us every reason to TURN UP.

How do you repair despair?
 I dare to go there with you
 What happens when we share halos
 Clip our own wings, so we're all grounded
 I mean you'll still have pretty and fluffy feathers,
 But we'd all share the sky

Let's Sacrifice; like.....
 Unlace our eyelashes
 Let them flutter to the floor
 Catch as much as we can in our eyes
 So the dirt never gets in yours

Is sacrifice that hard?
 Or is it uncomfortable.
 Is privilege a right
 Or is it comfortable?,
 Let us be merciless in our truth.
 Someone please hum amazing grace!

Ferguson, Mi shouldn't be modern American history,
 But it is the reflection of many cities
 And deconstruction of the myth,
 That we live in a post-racial consensus
 But with togetherness,
 The right reading list
 And raised fist that kiss instead of punish
 We can do this.
 Lift your spirit!

Not a moment, but a movement.
Will we work together or remain separate forever?
How many deaths does it take before we see life?
They been Killing Black men since Jesus Christ.
If not anywhere else on the planet
We can forgive and heal tonight.

Morning Offering and Anthem

Mass Poetry believes that words matter. We support poets and poetry in Massachusetts, help to broaden the audience of poetry readers, bring poetry to readers of all ages, and transform people's lives through inspiring verse

Give what you can and that is enough....

“Once Upon a Time: Poetry and Preaching”

“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.

Nathan:

Say after me: *Once Upon a Time!*

Say after me: *Once Upon a Time!*

Ok, I'll tell you: once upon a time, almost four years ago, Jamele and I met
 With Katie F. and Anne L. at the Station 5 Grille down
 The road in Natick (cash only, in case you go) –
 Jamele's poetry mentioned to me after folks from our Racial Justice Team
 And others of you went to see the movie "I Am Not Your Negro" about the
 book James Baldwin never finished at The Center for Arts in Natick
 And you Jamele,
 Opened the show with your poetry, including "*Comfort Control*"
 That you shared with us earlier....
 That opening line about Ferguson, MO (which is only 11 miles from where
 I grew up)
 That stays with me still....

How do you feel about the situation in Ferguson MI?

It's an epidemic; NOT a situation

And if it's not an epidemic to you,

That tells me it's not effecting you.....yet

...if a group killed countless numbers of people grouped like you

It would be an epidemic to you.

Those lines, Jamele, so hot to these ears, so hot to this heart,
 Because they are showing us again and again what we know in our head
 But so often don't have to experience in our bodies,
 Which is just how segregated and segmented we've all become...this notion
 that "*if it's not affecting me*"
 Then what's an epidemic for some is more like just a headline for others of
 us.

I mean, look: my mom never told me what yours did, Jamele:

*"when stopped by the police, don't do anything that might get you killed or
locked up"
In fact stay in this neighborhood,
On this block
In front of this building
So you're close to home."*

Right, mom? (she's in pews today)

And there's a cold-water shock to hearing those words, Jamele,

That once upon a time when your mom told you that is still *this upon a time*,

And what's needed, as you say, is for white people like me and us

To join with you and deconstruct the myth...

That we live in a post-racial consensus

Because with togetherness,

And the right reading list

And raised fist that kisses instead of punishes

We can do this.

Lift your spirit!

Preach the poem, Jamele!

Jamele:

"Once Upon a Time"

We are, once upon a time

Once upon a time

There was life before us

Not as good as life with us

There will be more

Once upon a times

That could be greater than us

If we once upon a time us together

*Once upon a time there was light
Once upon a time there was freedom
Love was, once upon a time
Time was, once upon us
Like sun-dust
Us was time once
Time was ours.....our time*

*Fairytales came and took our once upon a time
Once upon a time is not the problem
The problem is that
Once upon a time
We became me
Thus no us
Birth of distrust*

*Once upon a time there was kindness
Kindness is upon us
Us was sparked by kindness
Spark Kindness*

*Once upon a time there was no lie
They lied to us
On us
Through us
Once upon a time there was just
US*

*Once upon a time there was no race
Could there be a time once just justice
Once upon a time there might be equality
Once upon a time there was help
Once upon a time there was a sign
Can you see mine
Can you see thine once upon a time*

*Once upon a time there was God
And light
And love*

Devine in her kiss

Kahani

Once upon a time there were no aliens

Now sum humans are called aliens

Once upon a time there were no borders

Now there's a new world order

Once upon a time there was dance

Now, all we have is this

Once upon a time we were familiar

Now we're estranged

We've deranged the range of human emotion

Once upon a time sanctuaries were safe

Once upon a time everyone had water

Once upon a time we could all eat

Once upon a time there were polar ice caps

Once upon a time

There will be climate justice

We are climate justice

Once upon a time there was no YouTube

Now tragedy viewed as comedy

Once upon a time we were personal

Once upon a time we were original

Indigenous turned digital

Turn this Mars Pixar

Swing narratives par-core like monkey bars

Those angel are so children like

They don't know gender, just blessing

Selfless SELFEEZ

Not in the picture

Lightless light bulbs

Photogenic like ghost

Powerless light switch

Always jumping off

SHINE ON

Remove the weapon

*The people will live
Learn them some righteousness
The people will forgive*

*Kahani
Kahani
Kahani*

*Once upon a time there was we
god body
WE are love
Once upon a time we will return to love
Return to love*

Nathan:

Once upon a time we will return to love....

Once upon a time we will return to love....

Jamele, we need your optimism! Jamele, we need your hope.

So far in this new year that now feels like a very old year

I've been waxing and waning - mostly waning – on my private

Until now resolution to turn off the Trump Channel and the outrage

And the news addiction because the upset-ness I feel doesn't help me do

Anything productive except help me go faster from anger on my bike.

Because anger is fuel, but it burns fast, it burns hot,

And it's not sustainable....and your vision, Jamele,

for once upon a time,

Which is as much about the future as it is about the past,

Needs us to have spirits and hearts and souls that are built more

For the marathon than the 100yard sprint..

Am I right?

Hearing your poem, Jamele, that is more about the world we want to see
Than the world as it is,

more about the people we can be than the people we sometimes are...

I'm reminded of one of the affirmations of our UU faith

That says *our religion ought to be concerned primarily with this life and
Not some other life,*

That the point of all this isn't to get more people into heaven,

But more heaven into people.

I mean, that sounds good, right?

But what it means is that salvation is here and now and the people

Around us and in you...

and not in the brochure of clacking palm trees and beaches elsewhere,

or the escape plan to a new life,

Or the new relationship or new gym routine or new diet or any number

Of new, improved gospels we get told to believe.

What am I trying to say?

What I'm trying to say is that I want us to be at home in ourselves

And in what we have and in what is...and to work with what've got

And love who are and love what the world is here....

Because here on the hinge between Feb and March (Farch, Emily taught us),

The work of our religion is staying put in the here and now

And improving this life – tend to your spirit, nourish your soul, come to

church, pay enough attention to news to active yourself but not so much that

You throw your hands up in resignation,

Look in mirror and fall back in love with yourself, prize this moment,

Prize the people around you, especially when you know they're not always

Prize-worthy,
 Reach for improvement and stay rooted, pray and move your feet,
 Don't float away, don't hide, be at home, tend to this world, this time,
 This now, this place.
 Preach the poem, Jamele...

Jamele:

HOME
I am, home
Sometimes
I don't want me here
Myself interrogated my motives
For being here
Like I don't belong
Like I don't follow the rules
Disrespect my laws
I prove to myself that I exist
By calling home by name
This home is big
This home is Black
Sometimes
Someone else answers
Says her name is God
Proof I'm not broken
This home has good and strong bones
I am house of the Lord
I should answer my prayers
And listen when I speak
Forgive myself
That human in me
I am home
Even when I don't want me home
Protect this house
Bless this house
A house divided
Is a house that falls
I keep me together
I am not a home

*If I'm not there
 She is my Home Depot
 My mortgage is paid by how I treat others
 Utilities stay on
 Based on my truth to youth ratio
 I shine!
 And I am a sinner
 This house is not perfect
 Who has a perfect home*

*Our bodies are homes
 Don't let nobody destroy your home
 Don't let nobody disrespect your home*

*Take your shoes off in my house
 Keep evil out of my house
 My home is my church
 And the church always says Amen and ouch
 My brain is a collage of angels painting masterpieces
 There has to be a God in me
 Home.....I am not lost.....even when I don't want me
 Holy be my brain
 And the ghost in my veins....I-AM-ALWAYS-HOME.*

Nathan:

Friends,

What I heard Jamele saying, and what I'm saying,

Is to be at home in ourselves – home enough to love who you are,

And love who you are becoming,

Home enough to lean into where we have to grow,

Home enough to get aware of the privilege that we have here in MetroWest
 Boston...

And home enough not to get defensive or so full of hand-wringing about it

That we think we trip over ourselves with self-loathing or fragility.

Home enough to not escape these times through avoidance or denial,
And home enough to not lose ourselves into Facebook freakouts over
Politics and whatever our in-law might have ‘liked’ or shared.
Home enough to try to renovate the home and not just abandon the home –
The home that is these bodies, these towns we live in, this country, these
times....

“The home is not perfect,” Jamele says.

“Who has a perfect home??”

But we do have each other, and that is something....

Our hearts joining as one heart, our lives joining as one life,

Our families coming to make one family..

Jamele closes with: One heart, one life, one family to end...