

Rev. Kim K. Crawford Harvie
Arlington Street Church
7 May, 2017

So Chocolate Bar

A sermon in celebration of Covenant Renewal

“I have to take off my shoe, and I prick myself, and the blood comes out,” 10-year-old Jonah tells NPR reporter Erika Lantz.¹ “Sometimes kids just stare, because they just don’t know what it’s about. It’s kind of weird, people staring. Dylan, he doesn’t really stare, he just

¹ Reported by Erika Lantz, *Kind World #22: So Chocolate Bar*, 4/14/16. Please read and listen at wbur.org/kindworld/2016/04/14/kind-world-22-so-chocolate-bar

talks to me. And we laugh together, and it's really fun.”

Jonah Pour-nah-ZARE-ian² met 9-year-old Dylan Siegel in preschool. Dylan has watched his friend check his blood sugar many times.

Three years ago, when the boys were in first grade in Los Angeles, Dylan's

² Pournazarian

mother, Debra Siegel, had to tell him that Jonah has a one-in-a-million liver disease. She explained that there was no cure, that doctors were trying to save his life, but they needed money for their research. Dylan said he wanted to help.

“I said, ‘Great! I love that!’” Debra remembers. “Do you want to do a bake sale? Do you want to do a lemonade

stand?’ He looked at me like I was insane. What horrible ideas.

“Later that night, I was putting him to bed, and he said, ‘I thought about what I want to do for Jonah.’

“I didn’t even think he would bring it up again.

“He said, ‘I’m going to write a book.’”

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The next day, Dylan took out his markers and wrote a storybook he dedicated to Jonah. He titled it *Chocolate Bar*, which is what Dylan says when he means “awesome.” Each illustrated page shows something “chocolate bar,” such as Disneyland, or swimming, or helping his friends.

Dylan had a plan. He was going to sell the small paperback to raise money for research. But first, he needed some parental assistance.

Debra says, “He marched into my office and said, ‘Here’s my book. Will you [please] make copies?’”

And Dylan says, “[My parents] were like, ‘Uh, okay, we’ll do it later, blah blah blah.’ I’m like, ‘Please, please, please print it. Print it!’ Every day.” Finally, they printed it.

A week later, at a special event at school, Dylan sat behind a table with his freshly printed books and some chocolate bars. He sold out. He raised more than \$5,000. But he was nowhere near done.

The next week, Dylan spoke at a PTA meeting. Someone asked how much money he wanted to raise. Dylan responded without hesitating. “A million dollars.”

The gasp in the room was audible. Debra says, “I was like, what did he just say?” She’s laughing. “I mean, he’s six years old. I asked him, ‘Do you know

how much a million dollars is?’ He’s like, ‘It’s half a Bugatti!’”

A Bugatti, in case you’re not sure, is one of the ten most expensive cars in the world.

Dylan was undeterred. “I’m like, wait. I can do anything I want. I can raise a million dollars. [We can] cure this disease.”

Jonah has to drink cornstarch mixed with water every two hours. If his parents sleep through an alarm in the middle of the night, Jonah could die. Dylan was motivated. He took every opportunity to approach people with his book.

“People told friends, their friends told ... friends, their friends told more

friends,” he says. Both families started getting calls from the media.

Two years later, the book had sold more than 26,000 copies in more than 60 countries. They raised more than a million dollars. A team led by Dr. David Weinstein, Jonah’s doctor, has found treatments for mice with Jonah’s disease,

and is now planning human trials for gene therapy.

“I’m still in shock,” says Dr. Weinstein. “We are on the verge of curing ... this disease.... That would not have been possible if a 6-year-old boy” hadn’t stepped up.

“I want to tell [you],” says Dylan, “... you can make a difference in the world. Any time you want.”

When asked what he’s looking forward to, Jonah says, “Well, I never [get to] have a sleepover at someone else’s house. Once I get cured, Dylan and I made plans to have a huge slumber party and just have fun. Play games. Watch TV. Just us two.”



So chocolate bar!

My money's on Dylan and Jonah's team. Do we have to be six to be undaunted by the seemingly impossible? What's stopping us from believing that we can make that kind of a difference?

It all starts with love.

Businessman turned Buddhist
meditation teacher Philip Moffitt
reminds us, “True generosity arises out
of unconditional caring and
compassion.... Each of us is dependent
upon others for our blessings. We
flourish or perish together through
interwoven acts of generosity arising
from the benevolence and integrity of

others, many of whom we shall never meet.”

Ruth Ann Rufus Collinson, a member of our congregation in Gloucester, Massachusetts.

“Every Sunday,” she said from that pulpit, “as I stand at the beginning of the path that leads here, looking up, I am in awe of this big house, its steadfast

presence on the earth, its tall and steady beacon to those returning home from sea. And so I ... too ... have returned from a far-off place to the warmth of ushers, the phenomenon of organ music, the lift of voices, the ring and sway of the bell.

“And I return again and again to this enormous, kindly room, ... its golden light, its history and ancient colors.

“Here I find my place and sit,
surrounded by sanctuary, in the presence
of G*d and ... all of you.

“Every Sunday in this place, ... the
choir will lead us to the river, to peace
and longing and harmony – the
resonance of the music held deep within
our souls.

“Every Sunday in this place, [our minister] gives us a reason to carry on ... words and images that will come back to us during the week to comfort or urge or delight or inspire again and again.

Every Sunday, here with you ...

you ... all ... and each of you,

I break open again to Love

and then travel with you toward
the smell of the coffee,
toward talk and laughter and
loving arms.

I give because I am so grateful to
be here with you.

Because being here with you
feels like an intimation of heaven.

And because as long as sailors

are returning to the ancient

harbor,

as long as the human spirit is

looking for a place to Be,

I want this house to stand.³

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So chocolate bar!

What I want for us gathered here at
Arlington Street, more than anything, is

³ Please see gloucseteruu.org/serons/canvass-messages/

to live into the possibilities of this place.

To live into what is possible for you, for us, for everyone and everything we can touch with kindness and generosity, and to change the world for better and better: love, service, justice, peace.

What kind of difference are we making in the world?

Ours is a faith, and this is a place, for such a time as this. People are turning to us for help, and we are turning to one another.

I'm thinking about driving here on the morning after the election, meeting the staff, opening the doors to our city, and giving sanctuary to the great company of the bereaved.

I'm thinking about our bells ringing for the women's march, providing refuge from the streets; flooding into Copley Square after worship to protest the travel ban; hosting Black Lives Matters; studying Islam and countering Islamophobia; learning to peacefully intervene.

I'm thinking about the long silence of the chapel during Zen Center, our hearts beating together.

I'm thinking about our voices blending and soaring in meeting, in meetings, and Sunday morning worship and beautiful music and programming that teaches kids that everyone matters and we are all connected.

I'm thinking about giving away half
our Sunday morning collection plate to a
partner in our good work

I'm thinking about people's beautiful
faces, illuminated by Christmas Eve
candlelight. I'm thinking about any
given moment on Sunday or any day ...
and what floods my heart is joy.

What kind of difference are we making in the world? This is the day we show what we are made of, we reveal the generosity that makes this place a beacon, a sanctuary, that makes this house stand for love, service, justice, and peace. It is – we are – so chocolate bar.

Beloved spiritual companions,

Dylan Siegel says we can do anything we
want.

We can make a difference in the world,
any time we want.

May we be undaunted by the seemingly
impossible.

This is the day we show what we are
made of,
we reveal the generosity
that makes this place a beacon, a
sanctuary,
of love, service, justice, and peace.

I give because I am so grateful
to be here with you.

Because being here with you
feels like an intimation of heaven.

As long as the human spirit
is looking for a place to be,

I want this house to stand.

We flourish or perish together
through interwoven acts of generosity.

It all starts with love.

Every Sunday, here with you,

I break open again to Love.

When I think of you,
what floods my heart
is joy.

It is — we are — so chocolate bar.

Benediction

As long as the human spirit
is looking for a place to be,

I want this house to stand.

Being here with you
feels like an intimation of heaven.

You are so chocolate bar!

The service begins
when the service ends.

Bless your hearts!

THANK YOU!

Amen.