

All Souls Church, Unitarian
Covenant Group Theme Guide

March 2017

Courage

Whatever you do, you need courage. Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to tell you that you are wrong. There are always difficulties arising that tempt you to believe your critics are right. To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires some of the same courage that a soldier needs. Peace has its victories, but it takes brave men and women to win them.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The root of the word courage is *cor*—the Latin word for heart. In one of its earliest forms, the word courage had a very different definition than it does today. Courage originally meant “To speak one’s mind by telling all one’s heart.” Over time, this definition has changed, and, today, courage is more synonymous with being heroic. Heroics are important and we certainly need heroes, but I think we’ve lost touch with the idea that speaking honestly and openly about who we are, about what we’re feeling, and about our experiences (good and bad) is the definition of courage. Heroics are often about putting our life on the line. Ordinary courage is about putting our vulnerability on the line. In today’s world, that’s pretty extraordinary.

Brene Brown, writing for PBS Parents Online

Courage is not the absence of fear but rather the judgment that something is more important than fear; The brave may not live forever but the cautious do not live at all.

Meg Cabot, *The Princess Diaries*

EMBODYING COURAGE

I am aware that I will always be fearful in some way. But I do not have to be fear-based in my behavior or choices. I can hold my fear in one hand and my commitment to no longer act in a fear-based way in the other. Somehow that combination seems more doable than no fear at all.

David Richo, *The Five Things We Cannot Change*

It takes courage to wake up to how mysterious and profound life is, and not to avoid, deny, scorn, repress or contain what doesn't fit easily with our worldview. It takes courage to know how wrong we can be, and allow our minds to be changed as well as broadened. It takes courage to live wholeheartedly through the range of all our emotions: to be as thoroughly sad and uncertain as we are sometimes buoyant and sure. It takes courage to dive into the murky complexities, ambiguities and contradictions that make up each life, to think about what lies beneath the surface of things that are available to the rational mind. To bring up what is usually revealed only indirectly through dreams, symbols, slips of the tongue, jokes; the way we react when someone speaks to us; the way we breathe, walk, make gestures, sit, smile; the way we dress, cook meals, pick our hobbies, our friends; the way we care for the earth, create our homes. None of us has the courage to face the meaning of all that, all of the time. It is not even desirable that we should. Life is for living, as well as for some commitment to discovering what is — what is open and free in ourselves, as well as what is shadowy and unpalatable. . . .

Stephanie Dowrick, *Forgiveness and Other Acts of Love*

Fear neither causes the thing feared to happen nor prevents it. It is mere static. It is an absence of music. It is not power. There is calmness at the center of us, a very deep well of happiness that cannot be exhausted, but it will never be experienced while our perceptions are twisted by doubt and fear.

Hugh Prather, *How to Live in the World and Still be Happy*

But God doesn't call us to be comfortable. He calls us to trust Him so completely that we are unafraid to put ourselves in situations where we will be in trouble if He doesn't come through.

Francis Chan, *Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God*

We are made strong by the difficulties we face not by those we evade.

Unknown

And the day came when the risk it took to remain tight inside the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

Anais Nin

It is curious that physical courage should be so common in the world, and moral courage so rare.

Mark Twain

To conquer fear is the beginning of wisdom.

Bertrand Russell

The core message of all the great spiritual traditions is 'Be not afraid.' Rather, be confident that life is good and trustworthy. In this light, the great failure is not that of leading a full and vital active life, with all the mistakes and suffering such a life will bring (along with its joys). Instead, the failure is to withdraw fearfully from the place to which one is called, to squander the most precious of all our birthrights — the experience of aliveness itself . . .

. . .The experience of aliveness must never degenerate into a narcissistic celebration of self — for if it does, it dies. Aliveness is relational and communal, responsive to the reality and needs of others as well as to our own.

Parker J. Palmer, *The Active Life: Wisdom for Work, Creativity, and Caring*

The more developed we are, the less self-focused we are, the less self-ascending we are. To say it in a positive way, the more connected we are to others, the more we are connected to life, the more courageous we are, the more spiritual we are and the less we are seeing things only from our view. It means we have a looser and looser hold on our so-called self, our identity.

Integral Coaching: A Conversation with James Flaherty, *Integral Leadership Review*

It Is I Who Must Begin

It is I who must begin.
Once I begin, once I try—
here and now,
right where I am,
not excusing myself by saying that things
would be easier elsewhere,
without grand speeches and
ostentatious gestures,
but all the more persistently
—to live in harmony
with the “voice of being,” as I
understand it within myself

—as soon as I begin that,
I suddenly discover,
to my surprise, that
I am neither the only one,
nor the first,
nor the most important one
to have set out
upon that road.
Whether all is really lost
or not depends entirely on
whether or not I am lost.

Vaclav Havel

Prayer for the Courage to Resist (excerpt)

We pray, great God, for the courage to resist —
to resist inner voices of fear and of selfishness
that make us hoard what privilege we have;
to resist policies and structures that mask
violence, hatred, greed, or discrimination;
to resist those who proclaim
that dominations cannot end
nor can justice come to all.
Grant us the courage to risk,
the courage to suffer,
the courage to choose well
the direction of our days.
That we may have the courage to resist,
send us your Spirit!

Alison L. Boden, "We Pray for the Courage to Resist,"
from *Resist! Christian Dissent for the 21st Century*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How is courage called for in your life now? Is there something that you are not doing that wants to be done?
2. What language, what images, what music helps us you think about or talk about courage? Do they inspire you to take action? Is there language or information in this theme guide that feels especially useful?
3. Is cultivating courage an issue that's up for you right now? How about at other times in your life? Reflect or share about a time when courage was top of mind and how you worked with it.
4. How has your experience at All Souls informed your understanding of courage and the importance of courage? How does your All Souls experience help you embody courage? Are there particular words or songs that you call on as you move through personal challenges?

prepared by Mary Beth Hatem