

Soul Matters 2019-2020

March's Theme: Courage

The Soul Matters Sharing Circles provide an opportunity to explore our congregation's monthly theme from the previous month in more depth. Here's my reflection on this theme from The Beacon newsletter for March:

I live in a housing coop called "Le Coeur" – French for "the heart." I was pleased to learn it has a Unitarian connection. The coop website explains:

Le Coeur Housing Co-operative was established in 1981 on the foundations of the co-operative principles: caring, affordable and secure housing for all people regardless of age, income, cultural background, religion or sexual orientation. The original idea to use this land came from a group of Unitarians who dreamed of creating a village based on liberal religious values. When the project got too big for them, the village idea became a housing cooperative. Le Coeur has grown into a Co-op with individuals and families of many different beliefs that support cooperative living.

That kind of dreaming big takes courage. Over the past 38 years, many people have benefited from their vision and investment of time and energy, and many still do. I'm very grateful to them.

The word "courage" comes from the Latin root *cor* which also means "heart." It was thought to be the place of our feelings. Having courage does engage our feelings, our convictions. It also takes courage to stand up for ourselves whether that be in relationships with family, a dear one, at work, or at church. It includes standing up for what you believe in. What have you done in your life that took courage? In what do you invest your heart?

In the spirit,

Rev. Meg Roberts

A Spiritual Exercise for This Coming Month

Unitarian Universalists want to do more than just read and talk about spiritual topics—they enjoy experiential learning. Many of us learn and process concepts best through direct experience. Given this, group members are invited to choose a “spiritual exercise” on each month’s topic to engage prior to the meeting. I ask you to try the exercises, believing that—whether you “enjoyed” it or not—the experience of doing it will help you learn something about life and yourself— something that sitting in a room just thinking about the topic never could. *I invite you to choose one of the spiritual exercises below and try it out over the coming month.*

Option A

Do a spiritual exercise of praying or meditating about adversity and courage. It could concern your relationship to a higher power/divine source, within the universe, within a personal or work relationship, or a situation addressing a justice issue. What comes up for you? In light of what comes up, choose one thing you will do this month. Come back to the group with your reflections on your experience.

Option B

Think back to a time of adversity in your life. What supported you to get through that time? What gave you courage and strength to persevere? Was there anything you learned that influenced how you lived after that time? Come back to the group with some thoughts to share from doing this spiritual exercise.

Option C

One of the sources Unitarians and Universalists draw on is “Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love.” Reflect on someone who has inspired you by their example of dealing with adversity with courage, compassion and the transforming power of love. How did their example influence you to create greater justice and compassion in the world? Come to the group with your thoughts and feelings about having done this spiritual exercise.

Option D

In celebration of International Women’s Day on March 8th, consider the courage and wisdom you learned from other women as well as from the earth (the mother of us all). Share one piece of that wisdom with someone else – a family member, a friend, someone in the congregation. Come back to the group with some thoughts to share from doing this spiritual exercise.

Option E

What is a spiritual exercise that comes to your mind when you think of the theme “Adversity and Courage”? Create that exercise and share it with the group by email (if you are willing). Come to the group at our meeting to share what it was like to create this exercise, how it was to do it, and what you learned from it.

Questions to Live With:

Don't treat these questions like "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply look them over and **find the one that 'hooks' you most**. Then let it take you on a ride. Live with it over the next couple of weeks. **Let it wander around in your unconscious the rest of the time**. Allow it to break into--and break open--your ordinary thoughts. And then come to your Soul Matters meeting prepared to share with the group something of what came up for you.

1. When did you need courage to stand up for yourself (whether in a personal, work or community relationship)?
2. When did you stand up for what you believe in? What gave you the courage to do so?
3. When was a time you faced adversity and what did you do?
4. In what do you invest your heart?
5. Whose example inspires you to live with courage and compassion?
6. What are you afraid of? What do you need to cultivate courage?
7. What question do you wish had been included here? Ask yourself that question instead.

Other Resources

Quotes for the weekly e-news update: Beacon This Week

March 5 –

"It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are."
— e.e. cummings

March 12 -

"You can't be brave if you've only had wonderful things happen to you."
— Mary Tyler Moore

March 19 –

"I love those who can smile in trouble..."
— Leonardo da Vinci

March 26 –

"I think that little by little I'll be able to solve my problems and survive."
— Frida Kahlo

Family Resources - How does your family face cultivate courage?

Option 1:

With your family, read the story of "The Farmer on the Hill" https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/documents/uuworld/families/12_winter.pdf

or another story about courage from your local library. Talk about who showed courage and how they did that. Ask these questions and make sure everyone who wants to, has a chance to share their responses:

- When was a time you found the courage to do something difficult that you felt was important to do?
- Where did you find the courage to do it?
- How did you feel afterwards?

Option 2:

Read the Parent Reflection on page 4 of the UU World Families page (winter 2012):

https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/documents/uuworld/families/12_winter.pdf

Consider these questions and one action you will take in answer to each:

- How can you share with your child the strength your resources give you?
- How can you help your child understand your convictions and discover their own?

Please let me know what you think of these family resources and what else we could provide that would be useful about this and other monthly themes.

Quotes

“The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.”
— Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

Love is something you and I must have. We must have it because our spirit feeds upon it. We must have it because without it we become weak and faint. Without love our self-esteem weakens. Without it our courage fails. Without love we can no longer look out confidently at the world...

But with love, we are creative. With it, we march tirelessly. With it, and with it alone, we are able to sacrifice for others.

— Chief Dan George

“It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends.”

— J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*

“You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it.”

— Maya Angelou

Worship Resources from the Unitarian Universalist Association’s Worship Web

Chalice Lighting Words – by Lindsay Bates

To face the world's shadows, a chalice of light.
To face the world's coldness, a chalice of warmth,
To face the world's terrors, a chalice of courage.
To face the world's turmoil, a chalice of peace.
May its glow fill our spirits, our hearts, and our lives.

Chalice Lighting by Lisa Doege

"Why a flaming chalice?" the question comes.
It's the cup of life, we answer.
A cup of blessings overflowing.
A cup of water to quench our spirits' thirst.
A cup of wine for celebration and dedication.
The flame of truth.
The fire of purification.
Oil for anointing, healing.
Out of chaos, fear, and horror,
thus was the symbol crafted, a generation ago.
So may it be for us,
in these days of uncertainty, sorrow, and rage.
And a light to warm our souls and guide us home.
This chalice lighting was written for the Sunday after 9/11, but is appropriate for many occasions.

Poem – “The Invisible Woman” by Gwendolyn Howard

This poem appears as part of “[We’re Right Here: Transgender and Nonbinary Unitarian Universalist Leaders](#)” in the Summer 2019 edition, developed in collaboration with [TRUUsT](#) and edited by the Rev. Theresa I. Soto.

Behind a façade I hid my soul.
I feared what others would say
(and I feared what I knew to be true).

But I heard you singing in four-part harmony
that everyone,
everyone,
is beautiful.
And I hoped that everyone included me.

I wanted to join your song.
I wanted to raise my voice with yours.
And that's when I discovered that everyone
doesn't mean
all.

You told me to
be silent,
You told me to
go back to the shadows.
You told me to disappear,
again.
You said it was for the best if my soul remained
hidden.

Did I have some hideous, Medusan power
To harden the order of creation into
ugliness?
That is what I heard you say.

I believed you.
I believed you
for a time.

But my soul's tears
And its longing to live its own truth
Grew more powerful than any admonitions,
than any fears.

And I began to sing.

A small voice at first, shaky and tentative.
It was a small voice that could not, would not
stop.

As my own music slowly
crescendomed with confidence,
My hymn soon rang out:

“Enough! Enough!
I will step into the sunlight.
I will sing myself!
The song of my soul
will be heard.”

Though I could never raise my voice
 in your chorus,
You can join my choir of glorious
 harmonies.
And as I have been freed,
 so might you find
 freedom also.
Not an easy freedom,
But it is born of pain and experience,
 of innocence and hope.
It is a divine oratorio.

Yet our tune can only begin
If you believe that I
Am just as beautiful as anyone.
And that we are just as beautiful
 as each other.

The Rev. Dr. Gwendolyn Howard is a clinical social worker in private practice and a community minister affiliated with First Unitarian Church in Providence, Rhode Island. *This poem appears as part of “[We’re Right Here: Transgender and Nonbinary Unitarian Universalist Leaders](#)” in the Summer 2019 edition, developed in collaboration with [TRUUSt](#) and edited by the Rev. Theresa I. Soto.*

Meditation by Jane Ranney Rzepka

I spent some time this weekend with an old friend, a dentist. She's considering buying her own practice, but wonders if she could retain the current patients and attract new ones. She wonders if the office staff would like her, or befriend her too much, or resent her, or desert her; she wonders about bill collecting, spending too much time on crowns and root canals (which she likes) at the expense of oral surgery (which she doesn't); she wonders about being a good wife and mother and all-around person. She's scared.

My friend is intelligent, well organized, energetic, terrific with teeth... but scared. It makes me think we all are. Scared we'll lose the company's big Formica account, scared we'll miss the time change, scared we're handling the kids' curfew wrong, scared our money will be in

all the dumbest places when tax laws change, scared of our failing health, scared of everything falling apart, scared that nobody really loves us, scared of the fragility of all creation. Scared.

O Spirit of Life and Love, we aren't the giants we'd like so much to be, and the world can loom so large. When all is quiet and we are small and the night is dark, may we hear the tender breathing of all who lie awake with us in fear, that together we may gather strength to live with love, and kindness, and confidence.

Blessing by Tania Márquez

Do not fear agitation, for agitation is the rhythm of life itself; to be put into motion, to be stirred.

Do not fear the movements that decenter what you always thought permanent.

You carry within the center of your understanding, the compass to show you the way.

Carry with you the love that will hold you, the vision that will guide you, the relationships to all beings and the world that will ground you. Go in peace and in gentle agitation to stir this world to the side of love.

No temas a la agitación, puesto que es el ritmo de la vida misma: ser puesto en movimiento, incitarte.

No temas los movimientos que decentran lo que creías permanente. Llevas dentro el centro de tu entendimiento, la brújula que te muestra el camino.

Lleva contigo el amor que te sostendrá, la visión que te guiará, las relaciones con todos los seres y el mundo que te pondrán los pies sobre la tierra. Ve en paz y, con una suave agitación, mueve a este mundo hacia el lado del amor.

Benediction by Eric Williams

The world is too beautiful to be praised by only one voice.

May you have the courage to sing your part.

The world is too broken to be healed by only one set of hands.

May you have the courage to use your gifts.

May you go in peace.

Eric Williams

Closing by Jim Magaw

When I say *go in peace*, I don't mean "go in mindless oblivion."

When I say *go in peace*, I don't mean "go without challenging yourself or others."

When I say *go in peace*, I don't mean "go in utter ease and comfort."

When I say *go in peace*, I mean "go in peace, seeking justice."

I mean, "go in peace, committed to equal rights and opportunities for all."

When I say, *go in peace*, I mean "Go in the peace that is created when, together,

We build communities of true solidarity, deep compassion, and fierce, unrelenting love."

Go in peace.