

Courage—UUFVB Covenant Groups—March 2016

Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,
but connected, in mystery and miracle,
to the universe, to this community and to each other.

Check-in: How is your spirit right now?

Opening Readings

Winston Churchill stated, "Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities because it is the quality that guarantees all others." According to Maya Angelou, "Courage is the most important of the virtues, because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently. You can practice any virtue erratically, but nothing consistently without courage."

Topic Exploration

"Courage is required in almost every basic human activity or endeavor. For instance, to allow oneself to love and commit to another person takes immense courage. Separating from our parents and forging an independent life for ourselves is a courageous act. To survive an abusive, traumatic or neglected childhood with some sense of dignity and integrity intact demonstrates tremendous courage and resilience. Getting old demands courage. Indeed, it takes terrific courage to live, and to do so creatively, lovingly, meaningfully and productively. Courage is the empowering experience of a decision to persevere rather than quit. To act with integrity rather than expedience. To take responsibility rather than slough it off. If truth be told, the archetypal virtue of courage--true courage rather than mere bravado--is a prime determinant of what we do with life. And what we don't do with it. And of how we feel about ourselves. Like the Cowardly Lion, who constantly looks for courage outside himself, we may already be more courageous, more heroic, than we imagine." (Diamond)

Questions / Sharing

A. Courage in our daily lives. Consider the courage required of all of us in our daily lives, whether it's returning to the field after striking out in a baseball game; apologizing to someone we've hurt; continuing to apply after losing a job; undertaking the painful daily regimen of rehab or recovery; rebuilding life after the loss of a precious person; or speaking up when we witness bias, bullying, or disrespect.

1. What does daily courage mean to you? Is it courageous to stick to a diet, or quit smoking, or invest in a start-up company? How do you arrive at your definitions?
2. Share instances from your life, current or past, in which you believe you showed courage.
3. Do you know somebody that you feel is courageous, but would not necessarily be seen as courageous by many other people?

B. Courage in business or government. Consider these actions: A division vice president blows the whistle on corruption at his company's highest levels. A manager refuses to work on her boss's pet project because she fears it'll discredit the company. A lower level employee uncovers and reveals graft or illegal behavior in a governmental department. All these situations have potentially life-threatening ramifications.

4. Are these actions courageous? To what extent does personal jeopardy affect our ability to be courageous?
5. How do we draw the line between loyalty and the public good?

C. Courage to risk life and limb. "Courage, I suggest, is the willingness to risk life and limb for the sake of something. In other words, courage reveals what we care about. It reveals those things that matter more to us than our own lives and limbs. Through the history of Western political thought there are five fundamental cares for the sake of which we risk life and limb: honor, justice, liberty, wealth, and authenticity. I limit the catalogue to five because it is around these cares that communities most often emerge. 'Death before dishonor' sounds a familiar bell, even in this day and age. Martial courage, I suggest, is the glue that holds honor societies together." (Avramenko)

6. Does risking life and limb require a special kind of courage? In what way?
7. Is this type of courage more admirable than daily life courage?
8. Is a suicide bomber courageous?
9. What do you personally believe is worth dying for?

Closing Reading

Courage is not necessarily an outward act of heroism; it can be purely internal, such as making the decision to be cheerful in grief, to adhere to values different from those around us, or to give something another try. Courage is summoning strength in the face of life's difficulties or, sometimes, life's horrors. It means proceeding in spite of pain, cost, or risk. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the deliberate decision that action is necessary regardless. Courage acknowledges uncertainty, but perseveres because of conviction and resolve. It offers us focus and self-possession so we can call up our competencies to meet our challenges. (www.wisdomcommons.org)

Check- out and reflection on today's session

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Housekeeping

Rachael Freed, Huffington Post blog on Legacy Writing on Courage, posted 3/08/11; Wikipedia; "Courage as a Skill," Kathleen Reardon, *Harvard Business Review* Jan 2007; "Courage: The Politics of Life and Limb," by Richard Avramenko, U of Notre Dame Press, 2011; www.wisdomcommons.org; "The Mystery of Courage," William Ian Miller, Harvard U Press; "What Is Courage? Lessons from the Cowardly Lion," by Stephen A. Diamon, Ph.d, Psychology Today blog, April 28, 2011.