

Bravery: The practice of risk taking

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

Our theme for the month of October invites us to consider what it means to be brave and to take risks. The symbol of our faith, the flaming chalice, reflects our **2nd UU Principle Justice, equity and compassion in human relations** and has roots in bravery and risk taking. The flaming chalice symbol was created in 1941 for the Unitarian Service Committee, a Boston group dedicated to a life of service, who risked everything to help eastern Europeans safely flee Nazi persecution.

Media offers many opportunities for family conversation about bravery and risk taking. As an example consider the scene in the movie, "The Wizard of Oz" when Dorothy, the tin man and scarecrow first meet the lion. The lion jumps out of the woods, proceeding to frighten the group. It is when he chases Toto, Dorothy quickly comes to the rescue, admonishing the lion and exposing him as a coward and a bully. The lion reacts with a surprising display of self-awareness and remorse. He is then invited to join the group on the journey to OZ.

A natural part of our job as parents and caring adults, is to love, nurture and protect our children. Sometimes we work so hard to take care of children we shelter them from mistakes and failure, causing them to become risk averse and preventing healthy growth and independence.

Questions for Discussion and Discernment on your own, or with each other:

- What does it mean to be brave as a community of faith? as an individual?
- Can you be brave and fearful?
- Is the willingness to have your convictions challenged a form of bravery?
- Talk about a time when you were inspired by another person's bravery.
- How is the bravery shown by Dorothy different than that of the lion? What were the risks taken by each?
- What is an example of a time you witnessed someone bravely stand up for another person? A time when you witnessed someone act in a way that may have been bravado rather than true bravery?
- How can we define healthy and unhealthy risks?
- How can we/when should we be intentional in helping our children (and ourselves) to be brave?
- Is it more difficult to be brave for someone else or help them to develop the tools needed to be brave?
- How does bravery link to our **3rd UU principle: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations?**

Quotes and short readings:

I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.
— Nelson Mandela

"It takes a great deal of courage to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends."
-Albus Dumbledore

"You can, you should, and if you're brave enough to start, you will."
— Stephen King

Bran thought about it. 'Can a man still be brave if he's afraid?'
'That is the only time a man can be brave,' his father told him.
-George R.R. Martin, [A Game of Thrones](#)

"Have the courage to look inward. Question your own attitudes. Don't be defensive when something you do or say ends up hurting someone else. Try hard to understand how your own attitudes and actions might inadvertently perpetuate sexism and violence, and work toward changing them."-Jackson Katz

Fearlessness is not the absence of fear, but the willingness to walk into it. When I walk into my fear, practice there, sit upright in the middle of it, completely open to the experience, with no expectation of the outcome, anything is possible. When our circumstances look impossible or terrifying, there is a way. - Judith Randall, "The Hidden Lamp"

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (**Psalm 23:4**)

Personal stories from church member:

The man was small and thin, with graying hair. His deep set, brown eyes shown through the lines. Mostly they were the familiar kind of lines that commonly appear on aging skin. A large angry scar on one cheek suggested another story. Lionel was living in his house while many of the others, in similar condition were vacant. Blue tarps had been placed over the windows and roof on the tiny house in the 9th ward as a temporary fix. But that was 3 years ago. Now they flapped in the breeze, torn and faded, offering little protection.

He was anxious, as many were, to tell his story. When Katrina came the neighbors hurried to escape, shouting for him to get out as well. Lionel did not not evacuate. He never left. "This is my house." he said. He wasn't going anywhere.

Was it courage? , I wondered. Did he feel brave and sure this was the best course of action? Or was he ignorant of risk, or recklessly disregarding advice of others who may have known better? Were others who attempted to flee more courageous? Or were they risking more by leaving.? What must have gone through their minds and motivated their decisions? I could only wonder as I listened.

What he said next was most compelling to me. "I was afraid! I can't swim, and when I saw that water coming in fast I started to pray for courage.", he said. It was rising so quick and I began to say the 23rd Psalm"...and he proceeded to recite the words. "The lord is my shepherd I shall not want, he maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me to still waters He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me..."

I remembered the Psalm from my days of Sunday school and memorizing Bible verses. As I recited them with him, silently in my head, I heard the words for the first time. Never had I imagined the passage as one to inspire courage and transformation. I had thought it was all about death and giving up.

He went on..."I climbed on top of my refrigerator when the water came fast. It stopped at 7 feet 10 inches. You can see the mark by the ceiling. My walls are 8 feet tall. I got out through the roof and was up there for 3 days. And then I waited and prayed some more." ...

I don't know how I would have responded or what choices I would have made had I been in NOLA in the 9th ward when Katrina hit with no warning. I wonder what would have felt like the right thing, the most courageous, and the least risky. Lionel knew what HE had to do. Courage must have come out so many different ways during Katrina.

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 We welcome your thoughts on Bravery: the practice of risk taking. Feel free to answer a question or share a story from your life, then either post it on the Worship Associates board in Unity Hall, or leave it in a basket to be posted later. You may be anonymous or not as you choose.
