

COURAGE? I EVEN SCARE MYSELF!
The Rev. Julie Stoneberg
Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
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OPENING WORDS *The Edge* ~ David O. Rankin

A religion that promises a life without tension, a life without conflict, a life without suffering, is a religion of passivity, a religion of mediocrity, a religion of insignificance. Everything worth doing in the world is a desperate gamble, a game of chance, where nothing is certain.

What is love? Is it not a wild and sublime speculation that can end in ecstasy or despair? What is courage? Is it not a hazardous risk of fortune that can end in victory or defeat? What is adventure? Is it not a blind leap in the dark that can end in joy or disaster? ... If I refuse to play the game, if I refuse to risk myself, if I refuse to throw the dice, I am never really alive. I am then only flesh, baking in the sun on a middling plateau, with no view of the valley and no road to the peak.

Come, let us risk entering this time together, paying attention to that which matters most.

STORY FOR ALL *Mirette on the High Wire* ~ Emily Arnold McCully
(In this story, a young girl is inspired to learn to walk the tightrope, and in doing so, helps a performer who has lost his courage to find it again.)

READING *Unity Statement* ~ People of Peterborough

A Unity Statement was circulated last week that has collected about 2000 signatures from individuals and organizations, as well as letters of support from the New Canadians Centre and from the Peterborough Police Department.

LOVE LIVES HERE. END WHITE SUPREMACY. UNITY STATEMENT:

We come together to respond to racism, white supremacy and neo-Nazism with a resistance that is grounded in love, justice, hope, care and creativity.

Building relationships on the traditional territory of the Mississauga Anishinaabe in the territory covered by the Williams Treaty, we recommit ourselves to addressing our ongoing colonial history, and dismantling the white supremacy at the root of our society.

We vow to honour, listen and protect those who are targeted by colonialism, racism, Islamophobia, anti-Jewishness, and xenophobia.

We work toward solidarity as accomplices in our collective liberation - we believe no one is truly free until all are free. We strive to build unity while respecting the rich differences among our communities, sectors, and approaches.

We are deeply dedicated to the vision of a welcoming, inclusive, resilient, loving and diverse community - a place in which everyone can fully enjoy their protected human rights, free from hatred and oppression.

White supremacism and neo-Nazism must not be paraded un-challenged on our streets. As we commit to resisting such a display, we also commit to the long-term work of unlearning and dismantling white supremacy and racism within ourselves, our relationships, our communities, our governments, and our world. We will continue this work until ONLY love lives here.

We invite you to join us in non-violent resistance.

MESSAGE *Courage? I Even Scare Myself!* ~ Rev. Stoneberg

“What makes a king out of a slave? Courage! What makes the flag on the mast to wave? Courage! What makes the elephant charge his tusk in the misty mist, or the dusky dusk? What makes the muskrat guard his musk? Courage! What makes the sphinx the seventh wonder? Courage! What makes the dawn come up like thunder? Courage! What makes the Hottentot so hot? What puts the "ape" in apricot? What have they got that I ain't got?”¹

Congregation's response: Courage!

You can say that again!

Courage is often a word reserved for heroes and those with super-powers, for brave souls who risk everything, for those who walk into danger and back out again. A courageous person shows no fear, no tears, no doubts...they step up whenever called upon...they're like teflon, getting hurt but immediately recovering... falling down and bouncing right back up. Right? I mean, I ain't got that kind of courage.

Yesterday, I saw so many of you downtown...physically showing up, putting your fears aside, uniting with people from all over Peterborough and the Kawarthas, representing all kinds of groups, insisting that our Peterborough is a place where love lives, where hate is not welcome, where we are willing to work to end systems of oppression and exclusion. I saw you there. I saw the kind of courage you have...to be seen, to be interviewed, to chalk your values onto the sidewalk, to carry signs, to chant and dance and put your whole beings out there for what matters to you. And I know that many of you showed up here on Friday and Saturday, and at the Mosque, to surround our friends with support so that they could celebrate their services in peace.

And I've seen you be courageous in all kinds of situations. Having that hard conversation, making a tough decision, getting yourself out of harms way, choosing to be the person you are rather than who you are told you should be.

Jean Shinoda Bolen tells us that “our word 'courage' comes from the French word *coeur*, 'heart'." So, she says, “courage is a willingness to act from the heart, to let your heart lead the way, not knowing what will be required of you next, and if you can do it.”

Courage is a willingness to act from the heart, not knowing if I can do what is required of me, and trusting my heart to lead the way. That is courage. Can I find THAT inside myself?

The Wizard of Oz is seen by some as a hero's journey...of going out into the world and returning with a new awareness of what's truly important in life.² It's been analyzed as an allegory for the human quest to find such things as brains, heart, courage, home... and ultimately an illustration that we have all of these things within, if we would only trust and step forward into using them.

Because as you know, while in the process of looking for it, each character in that story uses the very gift they think they are missing. The Cowardly Lion bravely protects Dorothy in the face of the wicked witch, the Tin Man shows the depth of his heart by speaking passionately for his friends, the Scarecrow crafts a plan without the help of the brain he thinks he needs, and Dorothy finds companionship, home, in the presence of the ones she is with. By the time they finally return to the wizard, what he gives them...the brains, the heart, and the courage...are merely symbolic of what they already have.

¹ As spoken by the Cowardly Lion in *The Wizard of Oz*

² <http://www.kansascity.com/entertainment/wizard-of-oz/article1277530.html>

And so it is with us, I think. We have within us what we need...but what we often could really use is the spark, a little bit of ignition, to trust that, and to step forward.

The threat of an anti-immigration rally led by self-proclaimed neo-nazis was perhaps just the Dorothy we needed here in Peterborough to unite together. Maybe we were just hung up, rusted stiff, and feeling too timid. But then, skipping along came the vision that we could come together with a unified message of love, and we were knocked off our poles of complacency. We saw that another option is possible! See, come along on the journey, follow that possibility, and maybe there's a way to get that brain, that heart, the needed nerve.

And off we went.

Now, I have to say that I stepped onto that path with some trepidation. The first organizing meeting I attended felt chaotic, with flip chart paper flying all over the place, and the pace of speech about 100 mph faster than I usually 'drive,' and people I'd never met all about ½ my age, using acronyms I'd never heard, in a space where I'd never been.

And yet, I was welcomed in. It was assumed that I was a fitting companion, and that I had something to offer, even though I couldn't imagine what it was. What I wanted, what I wanted, where my heart was leading me, was simply to be part of this exciting and edgy thing...so dear to my heart...even though I felt lost and unprepared to do what might be asked of me. I knew that at the very least I could help spread the word, encouraging others to show up and participate, but I didn't imagine there was anything else I could offer.

So then this happened. Earlier this week, I was asked if I would be a "Police Communicator" at yesterday's event...and connecting with my deep desire to play a useful part, I said yes before I even knew what that meant. Later, when I asked for clarification, I learned that my instructions were to call the police if needed, to report and document hate crimes if necessary, to help get people to safety if the situation called for it, and otherwise to be a calm presence, helping to diffuse potentially tense situations.

Gulp. Who, me? I don't have that kind of courage. I even scare myself.

Well, ultimately not all that much was asked of me. I held space for a heated exchange, and helped to calm nerves of a woman who felt verbally attacked by someone objecting to the content of one of the speeches. I stood close by as witness when a student was engaged in conversation with someone who seemed a bit unstable. And even in each of these minor incidents, my heart went pitter pat, thud, thud. But, my feet were compelled forward by remembering the commitments I'd made to the people I was in this with. They were counting on me. They believed in me.

As it turns out, I was conveniently off duty and had gone to drive someone home just before the incidents of 'violence' broke out, so I don't know what I would have done in that situation. But what I want you to know is that at no time did I FEEL courageous; what I felt was COMPELLED...to be there for people who were counting on me. What I felt was that this was what I needed to do.

And, more than anything else, what I felt was buoyed up by all the brave people around me, who were also showing up and doing their best to be true to their values in support of a city of love and justice. I was given way more than I gave yesterday, and I learned so much. I watched people be willing to see 'the other' just as they are, and to approach with compassion and curiosity, and to offer their support when it gets tough. I watched people give everything of themselves and to do it with a smile and a warm touch.

And I witnessed courage.

Now, of course there are many kinds of courage, and many ways and times that courage is called for from us. And we don't always have a visible/present group of people around us. Nor do we always have so compelling a cause as yesterday's rally to inspire us. So, what about those other times?

Some examples of those other times are listed in the theme packet: The ordinary work of personal integrity and not allowing oneself to be bent by peer pressure. The bravery of embracing your beauty even when it doesn't fit the air-brushed images surrounding you. The courage needed to call out the micro-aggressions that happen almost every day around us. Resisting the persistent seduction of status and stuff. Turning down that drink one day at a time. Making yourself get out of bed when the depression tells you to stay there. Holding your partner's hand in public.

What is it that is calling for you to be courageous right now? What do you feel just too scared of, too overwhelmed by, to confront? For what do you need to summon a few extra jolts of umph?

Here's what I can tell you today. Number 1. Listen to your heart. It will not lie to you. Number 2. You have everything you need to find your courage. Number three. No matter how it feels in the moment, you are not alone.

Listen to your heart. It will not lie to you. Find that deep place where your desire resides, and listen to it. Connecting with your desire may just offer you the jump-start your courage needs. You have everything you need. It might not be close at hand. You may need to reach for it. Or dig for it. Or ask for it. But it's there. Who you are and what you have is enough. Always. And, you are not alone. I know it can feel like it. I've been in that place many times. But it's not the truth. We might not be able to see it right at the moment, but none of us is ever completely alone.

Do you believe that? What if all three of those things were true? What if indeed your heart doesn't lie to you, and you have everything you need, and you are never alone? What if all that is true? Or, what if you acted as if it were true? What if you chose to live as if? Would you be more courageous then? Would you step onto the path? Would you confront the wizards and the witches, holding hands with friends you've met along the way?

Yesterday, our city received a couple of strong challenges from those who spoke. Are we willing to do the work that's needed to organize and meet the challenges of these times? Are we ready to take on the dismantling of systems that seem locked in place...systems that perpetuate injustice and racism and homophobia and islamophobia and anti-Semitism, and, and...Can we summon the courage?

Are you ready to summon the courage to do what you need to do? To flourish? To stand behind your values? To love yourself? Can you find your courage? Can you remember these words of Maryanne Williamson: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us." See. We even scare ourselves.

Cowardly Lion: [singing] I'm afraid there's no denyin' / I'm just a dandy-lion / A fate I don't deserve / I'm sure I could show my prowess / Be a lion, not a mouse / If I only had the nerve. If you're like me, you have both laughed at, and commiserated with, the Cowardly Lion time and time again. He is the very model of humanity...the way he attempts to cover his fear with false bravado, the way his knees quiver and his voice shakes, the way he melts into tears when confronted, AND also, ultimately, in the way he chooses to overcome his fears for the sake of

his friends and his commitments, to access and expose the brave and courageous being that he is.

In those moments, when your knees quiver and fear paralyzes you...when you feel like you just can't do what you know you need to do...may your inner Dorothy show up to unhook you, oil your joints, and boost your bravado. For you are, indeed, a courageous being. Your heart is true. You have all you need. You are not alone.

So may it always be.

READING *If We Do Not Venture Out* ~ Marni Harmony (adapted)

If, on a starlit night,
with the moon brightly shimmering,
We stay inside and do not venture out,
the evening universe remains a part of life we shall not know.

If, on a cloudy day,
with grayness infusing all
and rain dancing rivers in the grass,
We stay inside and do not venture out,
the stormy, threatening energy of
the universe remains
a part of life we shall not know.

If, on a frosty morning,
dreading the chilling air before the sunrise,
We stay inside and do not venture out,
the awesome cold, quiet, and stillness of
the dawn universe remains
a part of life we shall not know.

If, throughout these grace-given days of ours,
surrounded as we are by green life and
brown death, hot pink joy and cold gray
pain and miracles – always miracles –

If we stay inside ourselves and do not venture out
then the Fullness of the universe
shall be unknown to us

And our locked hearts shall never feel the rush of [connection and possibility].

***CLOSING WORDS** *The World is Too Beautiful* ~ Eric Williams

Please remain standing for our closing words. You're invite to join hands if that's comfortable for you.

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.

EXTINGUISHING THE FLAME