

The Courage to Identify with Others

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Courage, the act of behaving bravely. Acting upon principle. Sitting with what is present, regardless, and staying.

Following through on what we start, doing what we say that we will do. Getting up and keeping on, even when the way is long. Even when the way is unclear. Being who we are called to Be. Speaking our truth.

Courage.

“Courage...,” writes David Whyte in his book, *Consolations: The Solace, Nourishment and Underlying Meaning of Everyday Words*, “...is the measure of our heartfelt participation with life, with another, with a community, a work, a future.”

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“To be courageous” he writes, “is not necessarily to go anywhere or to do anything except to make conscious those things we already feel deeply and then to live with the unending vulnerabilities of those consequences. To be courageous is to seat our feelings deeply in the body and in the world; to live up to and into the necessities of relationships that already exist.”¹

To seat our feelings deeply in the body – live up and into the necessities of relationships – sounds like heartfelt work to me. Which makes sense as the word courage comes from the old Norman French word *coeur*, or heart.

Being courageous, as I mentioned earlier in the service, is an essential skill. If we are to live as the people we are called to be. If we are to face injustice, racism; and *act* – if we are to become the beloved community – we must be courageous.

This month we will be exploring more deeply various expressions of courage including the courage – to identify with others, to dream, to BE – and finally the courage to change.

None of these things are necessarily easy. Yet they are also not optional. We must know how to identify with others, be with ourselves, dream and change. We must, or we will never grow. And without growth, comes stagnation, frustration, and ultimately the suppression of true self.

Courage is not something that you either have or you don't. Courage, by its nature, involves discomfort, and confusion. It requires risk taking and tenacity. Humility and confidence.

¹ Whyte, David. *Consolations: The Solace, Nourishment and Underlying Meaning of Everyday Words*, Many Rivers Press, Langley WA, pgs. 39-40.

Margaret Wheatley calls this being fearless. In her book, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*, she writes about fear and the need to be fearless. “Fear is everywhere these days, and it’s only increasing,” she writes. “Fear destroys human capacity; therefore, we are called to be fearless. Fearless doesn’t mean that we are free of fear. It means we learn how to face our fear so that it stops controlling us. . . . If we don’t learn how to move past our fears, we will not be able to host conversations or become active on behalf of this troubled, still beautiful world.”²

Wheatley sees conversation as the most powerful antidote to fear and a direct pathway to developing courage. We saw this demonstrated today by Karen and Marga’s example.

Wheatley writes, “. . . I know with all my heart that the only way the world will change is if many more of us step forward, let go of our judgments, become curious about each other, and take the risk to begin a conversation.”³

Conversation, Wheatley says, is how we think and learn together as humans. The practice of conversation is ancient. People have been gathering together to converse with one another, in circles, and other formats, for thousands of years.

In Wheatley’s experience, good conversation requires four things: simplicity, courage, listening, and diversity.

As well, she identifies the principles of good conversation including staying curious about each other, slowing down so that we have time to think and reflect, expecting it to be messy at times as change always is; and above all; acknowledging one another as equals.

How do we know if we are acknowledging the equality of others? Wheatley gives us a great barometer. She says, “Oppression never occurs between equals.”⁴

Conversing, listening, and genuinely connecting with the equality of other people are skills that require courage AND change lives, and ourselves.

So – you’ve seen Marga and Karen have conversations, and you’ve heard me talk about it – now I’m going to invite us to do something courageous. To connect with one another.

I’m going to invite us now to connect, or identify with one another. This is a very specific type of identifying. It is identifying with another’s humanity.

Not our differences, or our shared experiences. Our humanity. Essential if we are to truly live into the reality of equality.

² Wheatley, Margaret, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers; 2nd edition, 2009, pg. 5.

³ Wheatley, Margaret, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers; 2nd edition, 2009, pg. 3.

⁴ Wheatley, Margaret, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers; 2nd edition, 2009, pg. 79.

Please turn to, or go over to someone else. We are getting into pairs. Groups of two.

This will only take about two minutes. Yes, it may be uncomfortable. That’s okay. Trust me.

When you are with your partner, turn to face one another.

Please look the other person in the eyes, if you can, and repeat after me. I am going to say a series of five statements. After each one, one of you will repeat it to the other. When we are done, we will switch. So – one of you will speak to the other for five sentences, then we will switch, and the other person will speak.

Decide who will go first. When you are listening, you do not respond.

If you choke on the words, that’s okay. If you cannot speak the words, that’s okay. It is all okay.

Let’s begin:

Take a deep breathe, and then the first person repeats after me:

I see courage in you.
I see fear in you.
I see beauty in you.
I see love in you.
I see you.

Take a deep breathe. Now let’s switch.

I see courage in you.
I see fear in you.
I see beauty in you.
I see love in you.
I see you.

This kind of connection, of identifying, will change us. It will break us open, and make us stronger. It will develop the muscle of courage.

I asked Nanc to read her poem today – about being happy – despite all that is happening in the world – because courage, conversation, and connection with others’ humanity ... *will* result in joy.

Are we willing to let ourselves be changed that way?

Are we willing to give ourselves permission to be joyful and to use our agency for good in this world?

Margaret Wheatley says this, “When we humans don’t talk to one another, we stop acting intelligently.... We become objects, not people. When we don’t talk to each other, we give up on our humanity.”⁵

Talk with one another, listen, make time, slow down, look one another in the eye. Act with courage. It all leads to love. And the power of love is transformative. In the words of Lao Tzu,

Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage.

The power of love is what this world needs. It’s what we all need.

Amen and Blessed Be.

⁵ Ibid page 30