

**“Everyday Courage”
Sunday, August 8, 2020**

Welcome & Chalice Lighting

Good morning and welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes (UUFES). My name is Betsy Tabor. I'm happy to gather together again on Sunday as we begin our fifth year together. I am grateful to you, the people of UUFES, for your presence, your hard work, your smiles, your love of fun, and for all the ways you say “yes.” Most of all, I appreciate what matters to you. Thank you...and onward!

UU's have *diverse beliefs*...and *shared principles*. Our seven principle remind us of how we want to live this life. We come together in this community with gratitude for life's gifts, compassion for all people, longing for peace, and the hope that we can help make the world a more loving place. Know that you belong here with all that you are.

Welcome. Here we seek justice and truth and understanding.
Here we celebrate life and contemplate mystery.
Here we seek healing and wholeness. Welcome, all.

Our service is called “Everyday Courage.” Covid and world events can give us a felt sense of fear, and while not many of us think of ourselves as brave, we are braver than we think. A well known philosopher, Christopher Robin, once told Pooh Bear: "You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think." A service about mustering what it takes to be who we want to be.

We're grateful to hear from Marion, Margaret, Peter, Shana and singers today...and we appreciate Sandy Trask's can-do ways and technical skills. Thanks too for your photos – please keep sending them in! Thanks, all.

The flaming chalice is the symbol of Unitarian Universalism. Today we light our chalices and our candles in the spirit of one of the many sources of our faith: the words and deeds of prophetic women and men – words and deeds that challenge us to *confront* expressions of evil and injustice and to *speak and act* with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love. With UUs everywhere, let us kindle the flame.

Centering We now remember a man of courage, Congressman John Lewis. In gratitude for his inspiring life, let us center. “We Shall Overcome” Played by Shana Aisenberg

Shared Affirmation

Hymn – “How Can I Keep From Singing”

Time for All Ages – Marion Posner

'May the courage we see everyday inspire us to muster what it takes to be who we want to be,' wrote Reverend Betsy in introducing today's theme. In thinking about this, I was moved by the story of a woman I have known about for years: Beatrix Potter. She wrote many books for

children, and compiled carefully researched and beautifully executed natural history paintings and sketches. She was a renowned conservationist.

Do you know Peter Rabbit? Mrs. Tiggywinkle? The Tailor of Gloucester and perhaps Jemima Puddle Duck?

“Once upon a time, there were four little rabbits; their names were Flopsy, Mopsy, Cottontail and Peter. They lived with their Mother in a sand bank underneath the roof of a very big fir tree. No my dears, said Mrs. Rabbit one morning. You may go into the fields or down the lane, but do not go into Mr. McGregor’s garden. Your father had an accident there. He was put into a pie by Mrs. Mcgregor”.....Hmmm.

At first, I thought, ‘No, what has Beatrix Potter’s story to do with courage, because surely courage is to do with high drama, grand deeds?’ But no of course it isn’t. It is usually much quieter than that, does not enter the newspaper headlines, and is perhaps not known about at all. The deeds that take courage are often like plants that grow up through the earth, braving forbidding weather, and bringing forth a little color, a little hope, a little something that will help others onward and spread seeds of courage in other hearts.

Beatrix Potter showed courage. She was inspired to muster what it takes to do what we feel we should do, could do, must do. Her life had constraints, reasons not to do what she wanted to do. Just as ours does. And yet we have to get beyond those reasons. She did.

Born into a privileged family in London, 1866, she was brought up by Nannies and Governesses. A lot of rules had to be followed. “Children should be seen but not heard.” Her brother went to Boarding school. Education for girls not considered important.

Beatrix loved drawing and painting, especially on family vacations in summertimes to the Lake District in England, a landscape I lived near for many years and love. A land of lakes and mountains, gentle paths, pastures, copses. Stonewalls run up and down its hillsides. A picture book landscape. A land of openness. Hiking there you see for miles. The Potter family moved there.

It was not considered proper for women to have careers. But Beatrix wanted more people to see her sketches and paintings because she felt their lives would be enriched by seeing glorious detail of the countryside she lived in. She thought it would help them value it, protect it, and lead happier lives.

She wanted to do something that mattered, something important. That took courage. She sent sketches to publishers. “Oh no, Miss Potter. Sorry but really, as a woman it is not correct that you submit your work.”

Not deterred. She looked through a microscope to examine and draw in exquisite detail mushrooms and other plants, submitting her discoveries to a scientific journal published by the venerable Linnean Society. “Oh Miss Potter, dear. We received your quaint little findings. Jolly nice that a woman should find time for such pursuits when not involved in needlework and such

like. But No, leave the serious research up to the gentlemen. Yours faithfully, etc.”

For a little while, Beatrix felt her courage waning but she decided to keep working at what she considered important. She wrote *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. It was turned down by the publishers she sent it to: “Of little interest, dear. A book about bunny rabbits! That will never sell. And take our advice that women rarely succeed as authors. It is quite simply not in their natures. They haven’t the aptitude for it.”

Courage reared its determined head: “I shall print it myself!” She did. Before long, the world knew of Peter Rabbit, and as the publishers finally recognized her work, she wrote 22 more highly successful and much loved books.

She earned a lot of money. She continued on to do something else that mattered and that took courage ~ It was considered improper for an unmarried woman to buy property. But she did. And after marrying, she bought up as much land and property as she could. To protect and conserve it.

She took care of people and animals too by helping pay veterinary bills, paying for a trained nurse to live in the area, helping families create cottage industries to survive poverty.

It took courage, to start doing what she thought important and that mattered and then more courage to keep going, and yet more to persevere and stand up to achieve what she believed in into her older age. As a result of her work, more than 4,000 acres are protected forever. Much of the Lake District looks much as it did when Peter Rabbit hopped into Mr. McGregor’s garden, and will forever be there, for all living things to thrive in.

It takes courage to do what you think matters. It takes courage to know that it might be as simple as writing a story that others might ignore, showing a sketch to a publisher and having it turned away. But courage, coupled with perseverance can go a long way.

A few of Beatrix Potter’s words:

“Believe there is a great power silently working all things for good, behave yourself and never mind the rest.”

“If I have done anything, even a little, to help small children enjoy honest, simple pleasures, I have done a bit of good”.

“There can be few adults reading aloud to little ones who are not comforted by much of what they read. And we all need comfort in order to be courageous, do we not?”

“Peter was not very well during the evening. His mother put him to bed, and made some chamomile tea: One table-spoonful to be taken at bedtime.”

Reflection – From John Lewis’s 7/30/20 NYT Editorial Read by Peter Barnard

Congressman John Lewis wrote these words shortly before his death, to be published the day of his funeral (NYT 7/30/20). They are slightly adapted:

While my time here has now come to an end, I want you to know that in the last days and hours of my life you inspired me. You filled me with hope about the next chapter of the great American story when you used your power to make a difference in our society. Millions of people motivated simply by human compassion laid down the burdens of division. Around the country and the world you set aside race, class, age, language and nationality to demand respect for human dignity.

That is why I had to visit Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington, though I was admitted to the hospital the following day. I just had to see and feel it for myself that, after many years of silent witness, the truth is still marching on.

Emmett Till was my George Floyd. He was my Rayshard Brooks, Sandra Bland and Breonna Taylor. He was 14 when he was killed, and I was only 15 years old at the time. I will never ever forget the moment when it became so clear that he could easily have been me. In those days, fear constrained us like an imaginary prison, and troubling thoughts of potential brutality committed for no understandable reason were the bars.

Though I was surrounded by two loving parents, plenty of brothers, sisters and cousins, their love could not protect me from the unholy oppression waiting just outside that family circle. Unchecked, unrestrained violence and government-sanctioned terror had the power to turn a simple stroll to the store for some Skittles or an innocent morning jog down a lonesome country road into a nightmare. If we are to survive as one unified nation, we must discover what so readily takes root in our hearts that could rob Mother Emanuel Church in South Carolina of her brightest and best, shoot unwitting concertgoers in Las Vegas, and choke to death the hopes and dreams of a gifted violinist like Elijah McClain.

Like so many young people today, I was searching for a way out, or some might say a way in, and then I heard the voice of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on an old radio. He was talking about... nonviolence. He said we are all complicit when we tolerate injustice. He said it is not enough to say it will get better by and by. He said each of us has a moral obligation to stand up, speak up and speak out. When you see something that is not right, you must say something. You must do something. Democracy is not a state. It is an act, and each generation must do its part to help build what we called the Beloved Community, a nation and world society at peace with itself.

Ordinary people with extraordinary vision can redeem the soul of America by getting in what I call good trouble, necessary trouble. Voting and participating in the democratic process are key. The vote is the most powerful nonviolent change agent you have in a democratic society. You must use it because it is not guaranteed. You can lose it.

You must also study and learn the lessons of history because humanity has been involved in this soul-wrenching, existential struggle for a very long time....Continue to build union between

movements stretching across the globe because we must put away our willingness to profit from the exploitation of others.

...I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe. In my life I have done all I can to demonstrate that the way of peace, the way of love and nonviolence is the more excellent way. Now it is your turn to let freedom ring....

Joys & Concerns “Though I May Speak with Bravest Fire” Played by Shana Aisenberg

“Spirit of Life”

Meditation and Prayer

We give thanks for summer
for roses, zinnias, sunflowers
for books and naps
afternoon rain showers and the shade of a tree.

We are grateful for people who take time to listen,
who understand, help calm our fears,
sometimes make us laugh.

May we speak and act with love, love always.
When we speak artlessly, without love,
may we dare to ask for forgiveness,
and when someone’s words or actions hurt us,
may we forgive them with generosity of spirit.

We hold in the light those at the end of life,
those who are sick or worried or lonely,
those who live in fear.
May they know they are not alone.

May we treasure moments of peace and contentment
that find their way to our door, to every door. Blessed be and Amen.

[Respond to Joys and Concerns.]

Reading – “Connections” by Marge Piercy Read by Margaret Rieser

Connections are made slowly, sometimes they grow underground.
You cannot always tell by looking at what is happening.
More than half a tree is spread out in the soil under your feet.
Penetrate quietly as the earthworm that blows no trumpet.
Fight persistently as the creeper that brings down the tree.
Spread like the squash plant that overruns the garden.
Gnaw in the dark, and use the sun to make sugar.

Weave real connections, create real nodes, build real houses.
 Live a life you can endure: make life that is loving.
 Keep tangling and interweaving and taking more in, a thicket and bramble
 wilderness to the outside,
 but to us it is interconnected with rabbit runs and burrows and lairs.

This is how we are going to live for a long time: not always.
 For every gardener knows that after the digging, after the planting, after the long
 season of tending and growth, the harvest comes.

Reflection “Everyday Courage” Rev. Betsy Mead Tabor

The notice announced a committee meeting, this time in person, indoors, no mask language in the invitation. This committee had met once before without masks – no one spoke up, though some partners at home were unhappy. Now, with NH numbers ticking up, this meeting. My husband and I talked about it several times. Yes, he’d stand out if he were the only one wearing a mask. And yes, that takes courage even when you know what YOU want to do. Going along with the crowd can feel easier. Yes, it would be “leaderly” to wear the mask. In the end, everyone did that day.

The mask question puts us back in junior high, tempted to go along with the group and not call attention to ourselves, even while knowing the “right thing” deep down. People have different ideas about masks, and it dials up our fear: fear of the virus, on the one hand, and fear of social ostracism on the other.

Peer pressure turned up for me the other night. In Maine for a few days, I couldn’t get to sleep for the raucous yelling and laughter of some twenty teenagers partying in the woods across from our house, so loud you could hear the rise and fall of every joke, every punch line. Mad and unable to get to sleep, then later at 1:30 awakened by them, still at it, did I go out into the dark and do the right thing: speak to them? No. Did I dare? No. The wimp in me didn’t want to make the kids mad, lest they retaliate in some way, and also, even after all these years, something else in me didn’t want to be the nerdy outsider, not part of the cool social scene.

Who doesn’t have a terrible urge to belong? Who’s not crestfallen when not invited to a party or even a meeting? Who doesn’t feel it when some people seem to get more attention than others...when some people look like an “in-crowd”? Who doesn’t notice the ways every system prevents some people from participating fully? Like Zoom – meeting this way leaves some people out. That hurts.

What does this have to do with courage? Well, it takes courage to speak up when you feel left out. It takes guts to run the risk of looking like a complainer or a know-it-all or, worse yet, a loser. We might tell a friend when we feel left out or hurt, but often we don’t speak up. Instead, we nurse the hurt and feed the burning nugget of resentment.

Speaking up, though, defines some people. Some we know and admire for their forthrightness. Their perseverance. Others we look up to. Famous, brave people who speak up – prominent

dissenters, like John Lewis. “I could never do that,” we say. “I couldn’t take that kind of heat. I couldn’t put myself in harm’s way like that.”

The most recent *New Yorker* is about dissenting: speaking up, insisting on being heard, demanding to be included. That fierce need to belong is a driving force for us humans (the flip side is our other driving need, to individuate and be our unique self).

Because many social problems are as alive today as ever, it took me a while yesterday to figure out that this *New Yorker* was “a retrospective,” every article from the past. How unsettling to read about racism and misogyny and hatred as usual and suddenly see the date in red, and realize it was written years ago:

1967: A service in memory of Black poet Langston Hughes, when a brave teacher describes being fired for giving students the hard-hitting, real-life, hurting poems of Hughes instead of his beautiful, lyrical ones

1969: Thirty brave women show up at a NY legislative committee where a panel of expert witnesses, all male (doctors, lawyers and clergy) discuss abortion. The senators keep shutting the women down, but they speak up. “What do YOU know about birthing a baby?” “Why are there no women on this panel?” A senator finally concludes: “All I can say,” he says, “is that you’re the rudest bunch of people I’ve ever met.” Ouch, perhaps, but mission accomplished ☺.

1964: A conversation overheard on a plane as a weary traveler, MLKJr, patiently responds to a pushy stranger. “Uh-huh,” he says over and over again, letting the guy talk.

2002: AIDS activist Larry Kramer is called a pariah, despised by the very people whose lives he bravely fights to save.

2013 Margaret Fuller, a brave voice of the mid-1800s, ahead of her time intellectually but painfully, laughably to some, awkward. She struggles to find love.

2016 Alicia Garza, founder of Black Lives Matter, writes those first tender words: “I continue to be surprised at how little black lives matter.”

There’s more, including 1948: Shirley Jackson’s chilling story “The Lottery” about going along with the crowd. Read it and weep.

Were these men and woman “born leaders”? I don’t know. Is there such a thing? What I can tell you is that each story breaks your heart. You see the vulnerability in every one of these thought leaders...movement leaders. Speaking up, dissenting, they weren’t fighting to be brave or famous. They hurt. So much that they couldn’t live anymore feeling not heard, not seen, pushed down, dismissed.

And so they spoke up. Like Elizabeth Warren, nevertheless they persisted. Maybe that’s what it is to be brave. To persist. Say yet again, “Hey, over here! Can you hear me? Will you listen?” I’m somebody, too.

You know how the spiritual goes, “There’s a river flowing in my heart.... and it’s telling me that I’m somebody.” Everyone is somebody. Somebody with a voice.

You may not know what it’s like to have people shout ugly words at you. You may not have been beaten or spat upon or arrested. You may have lived a privileged enough life to not even know what it’s like to be held back from who you are or what you want. But every one of us has felt excluded or misunderstood or not seen. We know that vulnerability and hurt.

That thing we call “courage” starts with just a whisper: “Hey, what about us? We want that too. We need it. What about me? That respect, that somebody-ness? That’s my birthright.”

We also know what it takes to speak up for ourselves. To dare to say, not to a friend, but to the person who needs to hear it...

Ouch. Why wasn’t I invited? I have an idea.

Ouch. How am I supposed to help when the meetings all happen when I’m at work?

Ouch. I don’t have a strong wifi signal so I can’t come to services or check-ins...I’m having trouble feeling part of this community.

Ouch. How can we all experience an outdoor ritual when some of us can’t be around that many people? This is going to leave some of us out.

This is speaking up. Advocating for that tender part of you. Listening to what’s speaking inside and daring to say it out loud. This is also about “inclusivity,” an important word in our faith tradition. We want inclusivity to be what UUism is all about.

The other night, my brother walked into that wild party across the street. Generously and courteously, he invited the kids to stay, to have a good time, to please keep it down. So brave. So cool. So inclusive.

May we, people of conscience, “ordinary people,” as John Lewis said, “with extraordinary vision,” speak up. When we see something that is not right, may we dare to say something – at Hannafords or right here, with our beloveds.

May we speak with respect. With good intentions. With generosity of spirit. With love. May we be so brave. So may it be.

Offering – “Voice Still and Small”

Community Response

Chat Responses: When does it feel it hard to speak up?

...when other people's feelings will be hurt - when I feel shame, embarrassment, out of sync, I find it hard to present myself - when I feel vulnerable, when I feel hurt - when I know that stating my ideas won't change the opinions of others - when others I am speaking to have a history of hearing me as “policy” or “police” rather than as personally affected and hurt by the issue - when I feel others in the group are more intelligent than me on a topic - when I seem to be the only one

with that belief - when I'm sad when I know others can't "hear" what I'm saying; when they are not "listening" - when I am with others who I know believe differently than me - when people have walked by the mandatory mask sign, without a mask, so obviously don't care - when what I consider to be the truth is going to sting - when my viewpoint has some similarity to other views (such as right wing) that I don't share - when I'm concerned that what is in my heart won't come across - when I make a comment in a zoom meeting and no one responds to it, total silence - when I feel invisible....

When you or someone else does speak up in a way that clears the air, lifts up someone's truth, what does it feel like to you?

...empowering - my heart smiles - I feel happy I am not alone - when someone clarifies for me how I am wrong about something; when they feel comfortable "correcting" me when I'm wrong - I appreciate Diane S for introducing me to UUFES - speaking up about political issues, easier to say in chat than on video for me - very grateful for the support I received in a breakout room here 2 weeks ago, when my beloved cat was critically ill; support for using homeopathy and not intense medical interventions and so much care I received - everyday, those who march, write, demonstrate, and do so safely, with compassion, including those risking assault, as in Portland, and elsewhere...the courage of all who pull together these services... and overcome the small fears and the larger uncertainties, the risks and the rewards of seeking and sharing community and love - agreeing with Sam: those who go out into the world and help to focus our energies on important ideas; they speak/act for me and I appreciate it so much....

Please tell us about someone in whom you see courage:

Kim H: I was thinking of Fiona. I love the courage in her – how she has organized the things she has – the corner protests up in Conway and things like that. I'm very impressed with Fiona. Being a young person, she gives me hope moving forward, for sure. I wish I'd had her courage at that age and mine at my own age.

Eleanor J: I am absolutely in wonder at Margaret for entering the ministry at a time like this when so many things seem to be unraveling, and yet her passion and compassion and her ability to be positive and move us forward is wonderful. She inspires me.

Barbara B: I can't help but think of Harvey Stephenson. He's got a walker; he's, like, 99; he's got a urinary bag on his side. This man never quit to say what was right, in his view. Truly an inspiration.

Closing Hymn – "I Wish I Knew How"

Extinguishing the Chalice

Reminders

- The Poetry and Seriously meetings continue. You never know who'll show up--different people every time
- Betsy off next Sunday
- Coffee hour - the Board would like your ideas about how UUFES can engage in anti-racism work

Benediction:

So I say to you, walk with the wind, brothers and sisters,
and let the spirit of peace and the power of everlasting love be your guide. - John Lewis

Postlude – An Irish fiddle tune for Lunasa

Played by Shana Aisenberg

This service can be viewed until 11/2/20 at:

<https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/5vMpLZuvtSBL4X11VHARJM7M6GmT6a81CkYrvZemhnTBYBe0C7hvMM2XSUFVlhY>

Access Password: 8MYX?FBw