

UNIVERSALIST UNITARIAN CHURCH - Waterville, Maine

Date: Sunday, October 9th, 2022

Theme: “*The Shoreline of Courage*” creates an understanding of our fears, obstacles - real and imagined - and the ways we muster courage. Come prepared to explore what frightens you, as well as how you are courageous.

Worship Leader: Rev. “Twinkle” Marie Manning

Sermon: “*The Shoreline of Courage*”

The Shoreline of Courage is the place of the present moment where we acknowledge that which we are most afraid of. This, like the landscapes of each of our lives, looks different for every person. This landscape can, and does, change throughout our lives. It changes based on what we experience AND how we react to our experiences.

It changes again, and again,
experiences/reactions,
actions/experiences.

Like the moulding of any shoreline that is nudged through gentle tides and completely reconstructed through voracious storms.

Sometimes being built back up, though never the same. Sometimes accepting with grace and dignity its new appearance and place of being. And letting go of what once was to what now will be.

A key is acknowledging where one is.

Again *The Shoreline of Courage* is the place of the present moment where we acknowledge that which we are most afraid of. And draw upon that which is needed to confront and overcome that fear.

For, in words attributed to Carl Jung:
“*Where your fear is, there is your task.”*

Jung, as many here know, was a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst influential in the fields of psychiatry, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, and more.

In a few short words he places before us an objective and personified reality of fear.

“Where your fear is, there is your task.”

Understanding our fears - *real* and *imagined* - can place us in a position of power over them.

Such as in the perspective of a little girl-self as featured in **Maya Angelou**'s “Life Doesn't Frighten Me” poem read earlier in our service.

*“Shadows on the wall;
Noises down the hall.”*

She grew to recognize them for what they were and knew they didn't have to frighten her anymore. Except, perhaps, in her dreams.

And, except, perhaps, when she was still afraid anyways and so she found ways to cope with her fear in the moment, such as with the “magic charm” she kept up her sleeve.

Yes, when we acknowledge the fearful things, it places us in a position of being able to transform our fear into something else.

Something that no longer has control over us.

Far different than once-believed ideals, some turned urban legends *that we will delve into in future sermons*, superstitions such as that voicing that which we were afraid of would be akin to calling it into our presence, into manifestation.

Instead. Naming our fears, acknowledging them, sets you in the present. And in the present moment, there is power to change what happens next.

That power is in your actions.

Owning up to and acknowledging our fears helps us to better realize obstacles we ourselves are placing on our paths.

Distinguishing them too from the obstacles *others* place there. And then deciding which will continue to have power over us, if any. And, if we cannot completely eliminate the cause of our fear, we can conceive and construct effective ways to manage and cope.

There are seemingly endless kinds of fear:

Fear of Failure
of Loss
of Change
Fear of the Unknown
of Being Judged
of Rejection
Fear of Intimacy
of Loneliness
Fear of Not Being Good Enough
Fear of Success

Amid and among these are vast amounts of phobias. Many finding their opposites intact:

Claustrophobia (fear of enclosed spaces)
To
Agoraphobia (fear of open spaces)

Fear of animals, of birds, snakes and spiders.
Fear of public speaking and of flying.
Fear of needles and of thunder.

Fear of death is common.

Each with their almost unpronounceable fill-in-the-blank *often greek-pre-fix-and-scientific-rooted-word plus phobia-suffix*.

For all those listening I won't attempt the pronunciation of such now.

Allow me to digress just momentarily to share that

when I was writing this portion of the service, a completely unrelated song my mother used to sing started humming in the background of my mind.

The Johnny Cash song: "I've Been Everywhere." A fast-paced listing of locations the song's character had travelled to.

*I've been to Reno, Chicago, Fargo, Minnesota
Buffalo, Toronto, Winslow, Sarasota
Wichita, Tulsa, Ottawa, Oklahoma
Tampa, Panama, Mattawa, La Paloma
Bangor, Baltimore, Salvador, Amarillo*

If my sister were here she could sing it all by heart, in perfect pitch, and keep pace with the original song.

I know *this particular song* came to mind, because as I was listing out and researching the myriad fears and phobias, it struck me that most of us do not carry with us, visit or encounter, only **one** thing we are afraid of.

No, the maps of our lives are marked with many fears.

Some serving as landmarks to places we've traversed in our lives. Valleys, Caverns we've crawled through and moved beyond. Mountainous regions or hills we've climbed and left behind. The memories of them linger.

Others may seem like more permanent fixtures, historic sites, monuments or ruins. Monoliths signifying that which we may not yet know how to overcome.

Consider how many places of fear you have been to. How many have maintained residence, perhaps through imminent domain, in the territory of your life?

Phobias, even if imagined, are real fears.

Fears have their own triggers and causes.

Sometimes due to traumas we've experienced.
Recent or long ago.
Some fears can sometimes be traced back decades.
There are even inherited fears passed down through generations.

Likewise, with Social phobias - also known as social anxiety disorders - run rampant. While their place of origins begin in our minds, they impact our entire bodies and our being.

Our fears, like all our emotions and feelings, are accompanied by Biochemical Reactions and Emotional Responses.

Where as the Biochemical Reaction is systematic for everyone. The Emotional Response is unique to each individual. As well as unique by culture and even by gender.

Regardless of the kind of fear, across the board they can have elevations of degrees:

Trepidation
Nervousness
Anxiety
Dread
Desperation
Panic
Horror
Terror

These ranges of fear response can include symptoms of:
Heart racing, chest pains, nauseousness, *can't catch ones breath*,
feeling of impending doom and over all overwhelm and lack of control.

Many have claimed to be frozen, even crippled, by fear.

The fear of fear is also incredibly common.

Whether our fears are phobias or generalized anxiety disorders and trauma responses, they are often accompanied with other co-morbidities.

Depression, Bipolar, Combative/Defiant Disorder, Eating Disorders, Body dysmorphic disorders, insomnia, ADD & ADHD, the list goes on and with or without each can lead to substance abuse and other harmful behaviors.

Relationships, family life and work life can be negatively impacted if these are not attended to appropriately.

A predominant factor in such escalation is because the disorders can go undiagnosed *or misdiagnosed* for a variety of reasons.

For instance, according to an article about ADHD by Olivia Guy-Evans entitled “*What are the Differences & Symptoms in Kids and Adults?*” published July 06, 2022, her research found that,

“Girls and women are more likely to mask their symptoms of ADHD. A reason for this may be that girls are often expected to be more social than boys and so they learn to present in ways which are deemed more acceptable, which can make it harder for girls to get a diagnosis.

Often, girls and women who have undiagnosed ADHD get diagnosed as having a mood disorder. This may be because their undetected symptoms can lead to complications such as anxiety and depression, which can be flagged up more easily by professionals.” When it comes to diagnosing - and misdiagnosing women.

Alternately, men, even if they had a diagnosis of ADD or else-wise as boys, by the time they are adults they are more likely to suffer from depression. Yet, less likely to be *diagnosed* for depression.

Dr. Terry Real, a psychotherapist known first in his field as a couples therapist, wrote the landmark book on male depression called, ***I Don't Want to Talk About It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression.***

He explains that throughout boyhood males are taught to sever from their feelings.

Now, his findings were published more than two decades ago and I know we don't want this to be true in our modern era. Nevertheless, it still is.

When boys are taught to disconnect from their feelings, such as to use sheer willpower to **not** be afraid, even if they are afraid, the feelings of fear do not merely evaporate.

They pile up and they transmute into anger and into depression.

Which by the time they reach adulthood, again with the very clear message that men are to be unwavering, the manifestation of such is often fatigue, loss of interest in things they once cared a lot about, and feelings of worthlessness.

Dependent on factors such as how other male role models were in their lives, which leave lasting imprints, and disconnection from their mothers due to the aforementioned severing of all-things-feeling, the long stuffed down fearful feelings can boil over into alcohol and drug abuse and even domestic violence.

There are a variety of cultural and evolutionary theories that point to similar gender distinctions when coping with fears and anxieties.

We can be conditioned to fear - *and to cope with fear* - in ways that manifest what is culturally appropriate, rather than in ways that address and heal our fears.

In addition to gender, age, socio-economics and circumstantial (or environmental) stress all also play roles in how fear, phobias and related mental illnesses impact one's quality of life.

They also impact how one copes with them.

It is here where my sermon wants to take two paths, each in their fullness to offer explanation and solutions. One that quickly moves on towards the antidote to fears. The specific facets of courage we could explore in depth.

And the other one that resides here for a moment more to discuss the environmental factors of fear in more detail.

Because in the understanding of "Why" we become better equipped to plan for the "How" of ending suffering, the "How" of healing.

The latter path won out when I revisited the work of Dr. Mario Martinez.

Dr. Martinez is a clinical neuropsychologist exploring how the immune system responds to cultural beliefs. He has written about the kinds of *what he calls* “Tribal Shaming” we all encounter.

He argues that it is essential to include the influence cultural contexts have on the process of health, illness, aging and longevity.

He believes that it is crucial to account as well for the mind/body connection as they are shaped within the societies, the environments, the cultures, we live.

He has put forth in his research and in his practice that there are three archetypal wounds that people need to be aware of. Wounds our cultures readily distribute to everyone.

- Shame,
- Abandonment,
- and Betrayal.

Shame, which creates the energetic field of Hopelessness (and sense of Desperation); Abandonment, which creates the field of Fear (and sense of Loneliness); and Betrayal, which creates the field of Frustration (and lack of Trust).

He states that of these archetypal wounds, at least one is carried by everyone, and many of us carry multiple or even all three.

Dr. Martinez explains that how these wounds manifest in our daily lives are directly linked to the cultural environment we are raised in and that which we reside in.

For both, how those in our culture Shame, Abandon and Betray us are as *unique* to how we feel the Shame, Abandonment and Betrayal.

For instance, he suggests that people in Eastern Cultures when they feel a sense of Shame, it is more on the level group shame.

They feel they’ve let their families, their communities down. And they wear the mantle of shame for the collective.

Whereas in Western Cultures, shame is more personalized. Shame is felt (and often delivered) in a targeted and singular way. The sense of shame is wrapped up, embodied and internalized individually.

He says that just as each culture will shame, abandon, or betray in a different way, the physical manifestation of that shame will also be different culture to culture.

Yet, the wounds are archetypal and experienced universally by humankind. Likewise the healing attributes for each are universal across cultures.

Dr. Martinez says:

The healing field for Shame is *Honor*.

The healing field for Abandonment is *Commitment*.

The healing field for Betrayal is *Loyalty*.

His phrasing of the “healing field” is one that resolves the wound at an intellectual, cognitive and psycho-analogical level.

His findings are in alignment with the types of **Courage** predominately sited in modern psychology literature, of which there are six typically identified:

- Physical
- Emotional
- Intellectual
- Social
- Moral

and

- Spiritual

- **Physical Courage** - involves developing physical strength, resiliency, and awareness. Bravery at the risk of bodily harm or even death;
- **Emotional Courage** - following one’s own heart;
- **Intellectual Courage** - willingness to learn - or unlearn;
- **Social Courage** - involves social risk, potential exclusion or rejection, if ones’ views are unpopular. Social courage is connected to leadership traits;

- **Moral Courage** - standing up for what is right, especially doing what is right, akin to social courage, even if it is unpopular to do so.
- **Spiritual Courage** - rooted in faith, helps us face pain and uncertainty with dignity, and allows us to live with purpose and meaning.

Two additional kinds of everyday courage can accompany each and any of the above:

Disciplined Courage - a commitment and a follow through.

Empathetic Courage - empathetic to others *and to ourselves*.

As a **noun** - Courage is the ability to do something that frightens us; strength in the face of pain or grief.

We all have encountered fear.

We all have struggled with courage.

And, my guess is that we have all been courageous in large and small ways. Do you recognize your own courage when you demonstrate in your everyday lives?

As a community, and for those with whom we are in close relationship with, how do we help each other bolster courage?

It's certainly more than thoughts and prayers.

And, I do believe in the power of thoughts and prayers, yet often more is needed. **Compassionate and Empathetic action is needed.**

Are you familiar with the *The West Wing* television series? A political drama featuring a typically fast walking and talking cast. It was exhilarating to experience the way they performed this impactful writing mechanism.

There was an episode though where the pace slowed and focused in on processing internalized trauma.

The character **Josh Lyman** - played by **Bradley Whitford** was experiencing an emotional breakdown due to severe post-traumatic stress. His colleague, **Leo McGarry** played by **John Spencer**, with

brave empathetic courage addressed the circumstances head on by sharing an anecdotal story with him. He said:

"This guy's walking down a street, when he falls in a hole. The walls are so steep. He can't get out.

A doctor passes by, and the guy shouts up "*Hey you! Can you help me out?*" The doctor writes him a prescription, *as he's qualified to do*, throws it down the hole and moves on.

Then a priest comes along and the guy shouts up "*Father, I'm down in this hole, can you help me out?*" The priest writes out a prayer, *as is his custom when helping those in need*, throws it down in the hole and moves on.

Then a friend walks by. "*Hey Joe, it's me, can you help me out?*" And the friend jumps in the hole!

Our guy says "*Are you stupid? Now we're both down here!*" and the friend says,

"Yeah, but I've been down here before, and I know the way out."

Thoughts and Prayers vs Empathetic Action.

Leo's imparted monologue and the encapsulated scene that followed emphasized the agony, frustration and even disorienting impact of struggling alone versus the entangled nuance of togetherness is not lost on the viewer.

Those familiar with the show know that Leo had found himself at the bottom of an emotional pit before - ***he knew the way out*** - and he helped Josh take the first next steps toward healing. In that case it was directing him to seek professional help.

May we each be blessed with friends and loved ones who be courageous enough, when seeing us struggle alone, to come beside us and help us find the way out of the darkness and towards help.

May we all have the courage to seek such help when we need it.

David Bowie once said that “*Living in Fear*” was what he regarded as the lowest depth of misery. (*in answer to the Proust Questionnaire published by Vanity Fair*)

“*Living in Fear*”
the lowest depth of misery.

The deepest kind of suffering.
Something only *loving courage* can heal.

Nelson Mandela learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it.

Sometimes the courage to stand alone is what is needed most. Sometimes it is the *only* option to abate the fear.

May we have such courage.

“*A Litany for Survival*” portrayed by **Audrey Lorde** in reconciliation both matter of fact and matter of impressions meticulously listing so many of our fears spoken and held in silence provided us with a reality we are all faced with. Beginning with:

“For those of us who live at the shoreline
standing upon the constant edges of decision
crucial and alone....

And concluding with:

“and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid
So - - - it is better to **speak**
remembering
we - - were never meant to survive.”

This is not a hopeless statement.
It is a courageous one.

For though we are not meant to survive this human life, we are meant to live freely and thoroughly while here. In dignity and grace. Free from fear. Ripe with *courage*.

Yes, while we are here, living, may we bear witness, support and accompany one another on *The Shoreline of Courage*.

One way or another, when we reach ***The Shoreline of Courage*** we are confronted with an understanding of *our fears*, obstacles - real and imagined - and we discover the ways we must muster courage.

The ebb and flow of our fears and our choices determine ***how that shoreline and the landscape of our lives moving forward*** will be shaped.

May we make courageous choices.
May we be courageous for each other and for ourselves.
Transforming our lives ever for the better as we do.

May it be so.
Amen.

Pastoral benediction/Closing Words

May we be blessed in the knowledge that we are not alone. May your courage shine bright in this world and empower others along the shoreline to embrace their own courageousness!