



Take Heart

BY **MOLLY HOUSH GORDON**, MINISTER OF THE UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

In her TEDTalk “What Fear Can Teach Us,” novelist Karen Thompson Walker tells us that fear can be understood as an amazing act of the imagination; as an unintentional storytelling that we are born knowing how to do.

Fears have the same elements as stories, she points out: characters, usually us and the ones we love; plots, usually catastrophic ones; and plenty of suspense. The task, she argues, is to read our fears like stories, for the glimpses of wisdom and insight they have to give us. This makes sense to me, because over the years, stories themselves have helped me manage my fears.

As a child, Maurice Sendak’s beloved book *Where the Wild Things Are*, controversial at the time for its scary monsters and gnashing of teeth, gave me a safe place to look at those terrifying beasts on the page in front of me and confront them there, at a safe distance.

As a teenager, the diary of Anne Frank and novels set during the Holocaust allowed me to dip my toe into acknowledging the evils of this world from the safety of my own soft bed—to encounter even the idea of such evil, to see the tenuousness of all our lives in such a world, and survive that knowledge. Every child deserves to first encounter evil at such a distance. All too many don’t. Still, all children need tools to help manage their fears.

In an article for *The Atlantic* about Maurice Sendak, Joe Fassler writes:

In his book The Uses of Enchantment, child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim suggests that fairy tales help children externalize, and ultimately diffuse, their deepest anxieties. ‘The child must somehow distance himself from the content of his unconsciousness and see it as something external to him [if he is] to gain any sort of mastery over it,’ Bettelheim writes. This is why so many fairy tales take place in the deep and mysterious woods, he argues—it is the realm of the subconscious, where the wandering child-mind can encounter its fears and wants in reified form, then neutralize them.

Alas, I must not have neutralized them all, as I have gone from being a worried child to a worried adult. The other day, when my husband forgot to tell me that he was going to be home late, and then didn’t answer his phone when I called, for just a moment my imagination ran away once more. What if the lights had gone out on his bike? What if he was in a ditch somewhere?

When he got home, I yelled. No, I declared forcefully, “I was worried about you. I pictured you in a ditch!” He apologized, and when I had calmed down he said, “I love you too.” Aha.

If our fears are themselves compelling stories, then they most often have something to tell us about what we value, as all stories do. Our fears are not something to shun or shut away, but rather powerful stories about the true depths of our care.

In other words, our worries are drenched in love. And honestly, sometimes I think it’s a miracle we don’t all walk around this world scared out of our wits all the time. Our hearts are so tender, and the world around us is beautiful and awesome, but it is not tender. Life is fragile, contingent on so many things, and we love it so much.

From the storybook *Wild Things* to the wilds of life, eventually we grow up and realize that we don’t get to control the story. The monsters don’t stay on the page.

Quest

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It takes a great deal
of bravery to stand up
to our enemies,
but just as much
to stand up
to our friends.

— J.K. Rowling

A monthly for religious liberals

THINKING ABOUT COURAGE

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Somehow we keep on loving anyway, keep on living. And that is courage. Not our capacity to overcome fear, but the capacity to move through life in the face of loss, in the fact of change.

Perhaps courage is simply the beating heart of our story, or better yet, the story of our hearts. In this way, courage is a fact of our lives. Life stretches our hearts, and lo and behold, they grow and do not burst or shatter.

The poet David Whyte says:

We are here, essentially, to risk ourselves in the world... we seem meant to hazard ourselves for the right thing, for the right woman or the right man, for a son or a daughter, for the right work or for a gift given against all the odds. And in all this continual risking the most profound courage may be found in just the simple willingness to allow ourselves, amidst the hazard and vulnerability, to be happy along the way...

Perhaps courage is simply the beating heart of our story, or better yet, the story of our hearts.

After all, when we're doing it right, we walk this earth giving away pieces of our hearts, and not always into safe-keeping. It is a huge risk. But what joy it brings us. It takes courage beyond belief to trust our hearts to love, and yet every person, perhaps every creature on this planet, does so every day. We are already brave.

Listen, you are here with pieces of your heart scattered across the country, the world. And you are already brave. Because some of those pieces have been shattered by betrayal, or loss, or tragedy, or simply change. But still you give them, and have found a calling in life to give more. You are already brave.

The miracle is that love has not left me quivering on the floor in fear. Love has made me braver. I have climbed mountains for the love of my spouse, and dealt with worms for the love of my dog. I have pursued this wild and crazy calling with the love of my family and friends. I have pursued justice with your love and partnership.



If I did not love, I'm not sure I could leave my house each day. So, yes, opening our

hearts puts them at risk. But opening our hearts is also what makes us brave. Perhaps courage, like the heart, is just a muscle—in us already, pumping away without notice half the time as we move through our days, sometimes noticeable only when working hard or causing pain, but always, always made stronger with exercise.

As you move through the challenges of life, I invite you to remember that you are already brave. We can, each of us, practice the courage that sustains us, not through acts of valor or physical prowess, but through the simple willingness to extend our hearts a little further, fill our stories a little fuller, keep our imaginations working away in the service of love, so that our story becomes an exercise in compassion, strength, and hope. ■

The CLF seeks to be a courageous voice for justice, for growth, for community amongst people who would probably never meet without our web that connects lives around the world. In a time of growing division, simply bringing people together is a courageous act. Please support the CLF in this important work by sending a check in the enclosed envelope, or by giving online at clfu.org/give.



The Most Courageous Act

BY REV. DR. SUSAN FREDERICK-GRAY,
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION

As a first grader, Ruby Bridges was part of the first group of students to racially integrate schools in Louisiana. In 1960, six African American children passed placement tests to go to white schools. Ruby was one of them. Two of the six children decided to stay at their all-black schools, three were assigned to McDonough School and Ruby was the one student assigned to integrate William Frantz public school. She integrated that school all on her own. In that first year, many white parents pulled their children from the school, including the parents of the rest of the first grade class. Most of the teachers left too. For all of first grade it was only Ruby and her teacher.

As Ruby remembers it, her mother rode with her in the car with the federal marshals for the first two days of school. After that, her mother had to get back to work and look after the two younger children. So, Ruby rode with the marshals by herself. Ruby's mom told her, "If you feel afraid, say your prayers. You can pray anytime and God will hear you."

I highlight this because when I explore faith, I keep bumping up against courage. When we look at faith not as a set of beliefs, but rather as a source of strength that keeps us holding on to our values when it gets difficult, or a source of hope when we feel lost, we are also talking about courage. In Ruby's story, you hear how her mom was showing her how to keep moving forward even when she was afraid, through prayer, through her faith.

It's so easy to see courage as boldness, bravery, fearlessness. It's so easy to ascribe courage to heroic fig-

ures throughout time, to put it on such a high shelf that it feels unattainable. I want to rid you of that idea.

Courage is something we all need. It's something we all can live in our lives—something attainable. More than this, it is needed. Not just in historic lives, not just in dramatic moments, but every day. We need the courage to show another way to live—a way that is not based in ego or control, not out of domination, power or materialism. We need ways of being in the world that don't place our sense of worth in being right or being successful, but rather in being human, in being true to ourselves. And for this, we absolutely need courage.

As researcher and author Brené Brown says, we need the courage to show up fully as ourselves in our lives and to let ourselves be seen. Vulnerability begets vulnerability and courage is contagious. She points to Harvard researchers who show that real change is sustained by leaders who are able to show vulnerability. This vulnerability is perceived as courage and it inspires others to be courageous. We need this kind of courage in a world, in a country, in a society, that needs great change. To do this, we need to learn how to develop courage in our own lives and how to teach courage to our children.

Courage is not simply a virtue—it is a quality that the rest of the virtues depend on. C.S. Lewis puts it this way: “Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point.” Whatever it is we hold highest—if it is a commitment to peace and nonviolence, if it is a commitment to human dignity for all, if it is equality, if it is kindness or compassion, a respect for the interdependence of creation—to live these in our lives, to inspire them in our world, we need courage. To truly live these values, there will come a time where we need courage to stay true to them, to practice them at the testing point.

Courage isn't just strength, and it is certainly not just a forcefulness of will. We look to Dr. King, Ruby Bridges, Mahatma Gandhi, Harriet



Tubman, Harvey Milk and we call them courageous because in their dedication to principles of human dignity and

worth, of equity and opportunity, they risked themselves. Their actions made them vulnerable. Brené Brown, in her book *Daring Greatly*, writes “Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage.”

Vulnerable comes from the Latin, “to wound;” it means being in a place of risking yourself. Brown talks about the problem of being so afraid (even unconsciously) of our vulnerability that we seek to control everything around us in order to minimize risk and avoid being hurt. When we do this we separate ourselves from others, and even from our own lives, in order to distance ourselves from the possibility of pain. In this circumstance beginning to learn to share yourself—your whole self, your fears, your needs—being willing to be *seen* is a critical step to developing courage.

It takes courage to let ourselves be seen. But it is so important because it is in being seen, in vulnerability, Brown says, that we find the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, empathy, authenticity and courage. The vulnerability of sharing our whole selves opens up a door to a level of connection and being and understanding that is a source of incredible strength and joy.

On the other hand, I want to be careful about how we look at different types of vulnerability. Brown's definition and perspective is valuable, but it might sound different from a place of social or physical vulnerability. Many

of the people I named as models of courage were or are people marginalized because of the color of their skin, their gender, their sexual orientation. They would rightly argue they didn't need courage to get in touch with their vulnerability; they needed courage not to be victimized by it.

Vulnerability on its own is not courage. We can make ourselves vulnerable out of stupidity, out of a thirst for drama or danger or adventure. Sometimes we are vulnerable because of our position in life, vulnerable because of poverty, vulnerable as children to the power of adults, vulnerable for any number of reasons beyond our control.

Vulnerability and courage are not the same thing. In fact, Brown says “Perfect and bullet-proof are seductive, but they don't exist in the human experience.” All of us are vulnerable. Of course, we are vulnerable to the elements of nature and illness, but also to the risks of loving and losing, of trying and being unsuccessful, vulnerable to social and political circumstances. We are not all equally vulnerable, to be sure. Nevertheless, it is simply a fact of existence. Courage is how we respond to that vulnerability.

So courage is not the same thing as vulnerability. Courage is an inner strength to recognize our vulnerabilities, yet to go forward in spite of them. The courage to take action is not about being certain about what's next. It is instead a determination not to surrender to the vulnerability, but rather to try to go forward despite the risks.

This is important because I don't want to leave you with the idea that vulnerability is something we ought to seek, or cling to. Attempts at perfectionism and control are dangerous, but it is just as problematic to think only of our vulnerability, to deny our power, our agency, our choices, our worth.

When it comes to developing courage, or inspiring it in others, the very first step is being able to be fully yourself.

Sometimes sharing your story of truth—sharing fully the way you doubt or fail, the way you experience the world, that “raw truth” as Brown describes it—is the most courageous thing we can do in a moment. And in those moments, vulnerability not only sounds like truth and feels like courage—it looks like courage. And it can inspire others to be courageous in telling their truths, in being fully themselves and openly engaged.

We remember our agency, and we hold on to the faith—by whatever name we call it—that gives us strength to keep working for what we believe in, to advocate for ourselves and others. We teach courage by living it in whatever ways present themselves, by getting off the sidelines and letting ourselves be seen.

Ruby Bridges says she remembers that her dad didn’t want her to go to the white school. Her mom did. She thought it would give Ruby better opportunities later on and she thought it would matter to other black children and families. She said her parents talked all summer about it and finally her dad was persuaded by her mom. I have no doubt that her mom’s courage, her parents’ courage, and that of the families that stood with them, and the teacher who taught and came to love Ruby, all helped her develop courage—a courage that stayed with her throughout her life.

We teach courage by modeling it. We grow our courage by being able to name our own vulnerability—connecting with others by sharing our truth, but not getting stuck there. We grow our courage by holding to our agency, our sense of worth and our own power to shape our lives. And we grow our courage by living our values, even at the testing point. May we all grow courageous hearts, and may we teach courage to our children. ■

Courage for the Resistance...and the Relationships



BY AMANDA POPPEL, SENIOR LEADER AT THE WASHINGTON ETHICAL SOCIETY, WASHINGTON, DC

I was a fearful child.

And frankly, most of those fears stayed with me into young adulthood. I was scared of...let’s see: Dogs. The dark. Matches (that was a hard one for someone training to be a minister—lots of candle lighting involved). Driving on highways (*that* was a hard one when I moved to the DC area...it took several years and a lot of early morning practice on the George Washington Parkway).

In fact, I had a whole understanding of myself as Someone Who Was Afraid of Things. A fearful person. Someone without a lot of courage, I guess. Of course, eventually I got wiser than that. You are probably already that wise: you realize that being afraid is in no ways counter to having courage.

Really, most people who act courageously do so full of fear; frankly, if you weren’t afraid, I’m not really sure it would count as courage. For me, that realization came when I decided that I could be near a dog and be afraid and not run away (which, incidentally, isn’t a great choice if you don’t want the dog to chase you). I learned I could stay there and just sit with, and hold the fear. That was the courageous thing for me.

So how do we manage this? How do we find the courage to be *with* our fear, to face it by walking alongside it, to do the hard things in our lives and in the world?

Because the world seems to require a lot of courage these days, doesn’t it? We are called to work against oppression and injustice all the time, and I know that some of the courage we

may be looking for is the courage to respond to the world around us, to go to the march, to shut down the traffic, to resist hate speech, to intervene and de-escalate. Or maybe just the courage to go on, to feel as though there are reasons to bother fighting, rather than hiding away with our heads in the sand. We need a lot of courage these days.

I find that courage is contagious. Consider penguins. Penguins line up, you know, at the edge of a cliff of ice, to jump into the water below and fish. But the thing is, none of the penguins want to be first. They all waddle forward—you can just imagine their little waddles—peering over and pulling back, jostling for position, wondering who will take the dive. Eventually, one of them loses their footing and...*swoop!* They dive down to the water below. Their penguin friends watch, and wait, and finally see them, surfacing in the water, full of fish. Then suddenly *all* the penguins want to go, tipping themselves forward to fish together. Sometimes, courage is like that: like penguins, unsure who will be the first to fall, waiting until someone tips over and then...*swoop!* They find the courage together.



This is what we do for each other, in a community like this

one: we inspire each other, we face fears together, we convince each other that we have the power to be courageous. Courage is contagious.

But is courage to resist the only kind of courage there is?

My congregation hasn’t been shy in its criticism of the policies enacted by this US administration, or the values that the administration and some of its supporters espouse, and I don’t regret that. To my mind, that’s not being overly political; that’s continuing our values, including our core value, the

idea of the worth of every person.

But how does that value—the worth of every person—come into play when we are fighting for justice...fighting, perhaps, *against* those we think are creating injustice in the world? It seems to me sometimes that being courageous for the resistance is the easy part. Having the courage to also stay in relationship, to honor our deepest value of inherent worth, is harder...and if I'm being honest with myself, I'm not always sure I want to have that kind of courage.

Does it even take courage? I think so, because I know at least for me, I carry plenty of fear when I think about talking with relatives and friends who believe very differently than I do. I'm afraid I won't be able to maintain the relationship at all...or that I'll maintain it, but I'll do so by betraying my values and not speaking up when they say something I disagree with...or that I'll try to talk with them and it will all go horribly wrong...or, worst of all, that I won't want to maintain the relationship, and I'll decide they aren't worth the relationship and walk away.

The word courage comes from Latin, by way of Old French, and the word for heart. Hidden in that root may be the key to facing the fears that come with relationships, the courage that is needed to stay connected with all, to be a space where “only love is welcome.” We hold on to those fears with heart.

For me, heart, and courage, are about faith, too. One of the things we say in Ethical Culture specifically is that we don't find worth in all people (sometimes, indeed, it's really hard to see it there!) but rather we attribute worth to all people. We believe it's there, even when we can't see it.

My colleague Jone Johnson Lewis says it this way:

Here in this community, we value the actions that come from beliefs, more than we value the beliefs. We have

no common creed. We have some commitments to act...We say...that we will attribute worth to every person. We admit that we don't know whether there is such a “thing” as worth, but we will take an action, anyway—attributing worth.

That action, that attribution, is a kind of courage to me.

I'd like to end with a story, one about the football player Colin Kaepernick. I thought he had one kind of courage, the standing up to injustice kind—which he did, and faced harsh consequences for his career. It turns out, though, that Kaepernick also has the other kind of courage, the using your heart as you approach relationships, and seeking to bring out their best.

I find that courage is contagious.

I found this on Facebook, so I don't know the author—but I did verify that the story is true:

Why Kaepernick kneels instead of sits:

Do you wanna know how Kaepernick came to the decision to #Kneel #TakeAKnee?

Aug 14, 2016—Colin Kaepernick sat for the national anthem. No one noticed.

Aug 20th, 2016—Colin again sat and again, no one noticed.

Aug 26th, 2016—Colin sat and this time he was met with a level of vitriol unseen against an athlete.

Then on Aug 30th, 2016 Nate Boyer, a former Army Green Beret turned NFL long snapper, penned an open letter to Colin in the Army Times. In it he expressed how Colin's sitting affected him. Then a strange thing happened. Colin was able to do what most Americans to date have not... He listened.

In his letter Mr. Boyer writes:

“I'm not judging you for standing up for what you believe in. It's your inalienable right. What you are doing takes a lot of courage, and I'd be lying if I said I knew what it was like to walk around in your shoes. I've never had to deal with prejudice because of the color of my skin, and for me to say I can relate to what you've gone through is as ignorant as someone who's never been in a combat zone telling me they understand what it's like to go to war. Even though my initial reaction to your protest was one of anger, I'm trying to listen to what you're saying and why you're doing it.”

Mr. Boyer goes on to write “There are already plenty of people fighting fire with fire, and it's just not helping anyone or anything. So I'm just going to keep listening, with an open mind. I look forward to the day you're inspired to once again stand during our national anthem. I'll be standing right there next to you.”

Mr. Boyer showed empathy and understanding...and Mr. Kaepernick reciprocated. Colin invited Nate to San Diego where the two had a 90-minute discussion, and Nate proposed Colin kneel instead of sit.

But why kneel? In a military funeral, after the flag is taken off the casket of the fallen military member, it is



smartly folded 13 times and then presented to the parents, spouse or child of the fallen member by a fellow service member while kneeling.

The two decided that kneeling for the flag would symbolize his reverence for those that paid the ultimate sacrifice while still allowing Colin to peacefully protest the injustices he saw.

Empathy, not zealotry under the guise of patriotism, is the only way meaningful discussion can be had.

May we all be so courageous. ■



From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

I have been thinking about the courage I encounter every day in our far-flung religious community. What Paul Tillich called “the courage to be,” as well as the courage to do—the courage to believe, the courage to hope, the courage to fight for justice, the courage to feel. I encounter courage every day as I interact with you. I’ve been reflecting on all the ways you’ve shown me how to be courageous:

You show courage when you embrace Unitarian Universalism, a faith without certainty, a faith which includes doubt, a faith which offers no easy answers.

You show courage when you claim this spiritual or religious identity which is not easily understood—in fact, is easily misunderstood—and still work to find understanding.

You show courage when you claim, with compassion and pride, identities

Thank you for showing
me your courage,
so that I may better
know my own.

you have been taught to hate: physical, emotional and/or mental identities which you have been told are inferior, and yet which you inhabit with a whole heart.

You show courage when you continue to have your heart broken by cruel and inhumane systems, by systemic abuse and mistreatment, rather than numbing out or shutting down.

You show courage when you are willing to face history, even difficult history, rather than believe propaganda or lies.

You show courage when you acknowledge the pain that your privilege has brought to others, when you use your privilege to open doors for others, when you recognize that others suffer more even as you experience your own, real, suffering.

You show courage when you face illness, even chronic or terminal illness, with compassion for yourself and your loved ones.

You show courage as you age, when you let go of life as it was and accept life as it is today, relinquishing control and independence and surrendering to what is possible.

You show courage when you get out of bed when every cell of your brain, or body, or spirit aches, going through the motions when it is all you can do.

You show courage when you refuse to fulfill the negative expectations that others place on you, clinging instead to your knowledge of yourself as a spark of the divine.

You show courage when you acknowledge mistakes you’ve made, even terrible mistakes, without equating yourself with those actions, or believing that you are a mistake.

You show courage when you sink into the storm of deep grief, believing that you must go into its depths even as you fear you will never re-emerge.

You show courage when you insist on maintaining self-respect in relationships which diminish you.

You show courage when you are vulnerable with other people, even when you feel shame or inadequacy.

You show courage when you love yourself after being told you are unlovable, and this allows you to love others who have been equally insulted or demonized.

You show courage when you face your final days with no assurance of life everlasting, only the steady relinquishment of life on this earth.

You show courage when you do some-

thing you’re not great at, but try it anyway—writing, or playing an instrument, or allowing yourself to love someone new.

You show courage when you speak up in rooms where no one will agree with you publicly, even if they do so privately.

You show courage when you walk away from security, let go of the familiar and accept that you must change.

You show courage when you watch vulnerable ones you love, be they children or friends or partners or parents, move out into a world which is often cruel and capricious, breathe deeply and allow them to go.

You show courage when you live. Every day. Thank you for showing me your courage, so that I may better know my own. ■

Would you like to represent the Church of the Larger Fellowship at General Assembly (GA) this summer? The CLF is entitled to 22 delegates at the UUA’s General Assembly in Providence, Rhode Island, on June 24-28, 2020. You will also be able to attend workshops, concerts, programs and worship services galore, while meeting Unitarian Universalists from near and far. As a delegate you will be able to vote during general sessions. You can also meet our minister, Rev. Meg Riley, and members of the CLF Board and staff.

Our delegates are asked to attend, set up, usher and clean up at the CLF Worship Service and to volunteer an additional two hours for CLF during GA. CLF delegates vote their conscience in general sessions and are responsible for their own expenses. If you’d like to participate in GA 2020 in this role, please fill out the online application at clfu.org/delegate-application. Visit the UUA’s General Assembly website at www.uua.org/ga for details. ■



REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR,
MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN
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The other day my dog started doing something odd. Just as I was about to get into bed he shoved himself into the narrow space between the two banks of drawers that hold up my captain's bed. Um...OK. He managed to get himself out again, and I turned off the light. Then I heard him rustling about in my closet. Which is very much *not* a walk-in closet. It's narrow, and the floor is littered with shoes and luggage and what-have-you. But he managed to shove himself inside somehow. But why? Why would a dog choose to check under a bed and in the closet at bedtime? The only possible explanation I could think of was that he was checking for monsters. Having verified that all was well, he hopped up on the bed and went to sleep.

My dog's odd protective foray reminded me of two things: 1) He's an odd creature (a fact that I had never really forgotten) and 2) I'm actually no longer afraid of monsters under my bed or in my closet. Come to think of it, there are a wide variety of things that I'm *not*



afraid of. I think spiders and snakes and bats are cool. I enjoy public speaking. When my daughter was younger she walked

to school and to her friends' houses without my being particularly concerned that she would be abducted. While I'm certainly aware of the potential dangers of international terrorism, it also isn't really something that appears as a blip on my emotional radar.

Which is not to say that I in any way think of myself as a courageous person, or even someone who is not fearful. I am in no way adventurous. I can't re-

gale you with any tales of daring deeds or bold escapades—daring and bold are pretty much not in my nature. And if I don't worry about spiders, I do fret the extinction of species and about climate change. I don't concern myself with whether my daughter will be abducted, but I do worry about whether she will ever be fully employed.

So while there are a variety of things that fail to get my adrenaline pumping, I do really wonder how it is that people work up their courage to take on the really huge, terrifying things. What drove Malala Yousafzai to risk her life to advocate for education for women and girls? What pushed Greta Thunberg to become an international activist

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battling climate change? How is it that students at Stoneman Douglas High School managed to turn their devastating experience into a powerful movement for gun control? How is it that people who are seemingly without power—young people, people of color, people inside deeply oppressive systems—how do these folks rustle up the courage to speak and to act in the face of death threats or actual violence?

Of course, I can't know the answer for any of these folks. But my best guess at understanding comes from the words of Audre Lorde:

*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

At some point the cost of remaining in the wholly justified fear of what threatens you becomes more painful than the reasonable fear of speaking out, fighting back. Death threats are not more terrifying than people who have actually shot at you. Crossing the ocean in a sailboat to attend a summit on climate change becomes an insignificant risk compared to climate catastrophe.

Perhaps the way into courage is through fully embracing fear, through admitting to the things that genuinely threaten us, that legitimately terrify us. Maybe we have to walk all the way into our grief and fear—all the way under the dusty bed and into the crowded closet—to find the motivation to change what scares us rather than hiding from it. Even when the monsters are real and dangerous. Especially when the monsters are real and dangerous.

That doesn't really feel like good news to me. I am someone who would happily sidestep as much grief and fear as possible. In a world full of devastating problems, it's certainly easier to turn away, to numb out, to seek out any form of distraction that will keep the feelings at bay. Which is why I look to heroes like these young people who are out to change the world. I need them to remind me that on the other side of fear is power, and the deep gladness that comes from shifting the world in whatever ways, large or small, offer hope and possibility and change for a brighter future. ■

The CLF is serving over 1,080 members who are currently incarcerated. Live out our Unitarian Universalist values by becoming a pen pal and sharing letters and words of encouragement with a CLF member behind bars. You can find more information at worthynow.org/pen-pals



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Being Superheroes

by **DIANA K. McLEAN**, MINISTER OF THE PETERBOROUGH UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH,
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We see them on big screens and small ones
In comic books and in toy stores
Wearing their fancy outfits
With capes or masks or armor

They save the world
In big dramatic ways
Fighting the bad guys
Defending the helpless
Always on the side of good

Isn't that what we do, too,
Or at least what we hope to do?
Together we work for a better world

Speak out against tyrants and bullies
Use our privilege
In service of those with less power
Trying always to answer the call of love

And this is where we learn to do it
Or learn to do it better
Or teach others to do it

This is superhero school
And we are all invited to enroll,
To choose the path of good
And become the kind of superheroes
Our world needs.

