

## Minister's Musings – October 2022 - COURAGE

**"Courage  
is the most important  
of all the virtues  
because without courage,  
you can't practice  
any other virtue  
consistently."**

~ Maya Angelou

I have always appreciated the definition of courage that is not built on the absence of fear, but recognizes it as present, even necessary, to any act of courage. To find the capacity for courage within ourselves is not to be fearless. It is to live with fear and find a way to not let it stop us. It's like the verb of courage is right-sizing fear, not wholly displacing it.

There was a period of loss upon loss in my life. After a decade, my first marriage ended (and not at my initiation). At the same time, but not in a cause-and-effect relationship, the children we had hoped to adopt, then I had hoped to adopt on my own, were returned by the courts to their birth mother. It was the darkest time in my life. Nearly every Sunday, I sat in one of the back pews (or better yet, up in the balcony of the old New England church) and wept through the Sunday service.

In this new life space of undesired alone-ness, I was given, over and over, choices to feed fear or to grow courage. And from those choices – sometimes feeding fear, and always trying to feed courage more, other textures besides loss and being lost emerged at that time. I sometimes call it the year of walking on water because I tried things that scared me. In the winter, I cross-country skied on a frozen lake. In the summer, I went skinny-dipping. The thing I am most proud of: I let someone teach me to balance on a kayak standing up. I don't think I could do that again – but, then again, I didn't think I could do it then, either.

Maya Angelou says that courage is the most foundational of virtues, because without it, we cannot consistently practice other virtues: integrity, truth-telling, compassion, being authentic in the world, balancing on a kayak in the middle of a lake, recognizing our limits.

Sometimes, it's hard to know if we have it in us to stop feeding fear (which can be such a hungry monster) and to start feeding courage. Sometimes, the very act of describing it can be just what courage needs to be nourished and strengthened. It's a vulnerable thing to do, to share our messy, uncertain-how-it-will-turn-out process with someone, but courage often emerges there – not after the fact.

I am blessed to be on this journey with you,  
~ Rev. Karen