

Search for the Wizard: Brains, Heart & Courage for the Journey
 A sermon delivered at the Lakehead Unitarian Fellowship
 Thunder Bay, Ontario on Sunday, May 24, 2015

Reading #1: “I Think Over Again My Small Adventures” Old Inuit song

I think over again my small adventures, my fears:
 These small fears that seemed so big,
 for all the vital things I had to get and to reach.

And yet there is only one great thing,
 the only thing:
 To live to see the great day that dawns,
 and the light that fills the world.

Reading #2: “The Journey” by Mary Oliver

One day you finally knew
 what you had to do, and began,
 though the voices around you
 kept shouting
 their bad advice – – –
 though the whole house
 began to tremble
 and you felt the old tug
 at your ankles.
 ‘Mend my life!’
 each voice cried.
 But you didn’t stop.

You knew what you had to do,
 though the wind pried
 with its stiff fingers
 at the very foundations – – –
 though their melancholy
 was terrible. It was already late
 enough, and a wild night,
 and the road full of fallen
 branches and stones.

But little by little,
 as you left their voices behind,
 the stars began to burn
 through the sheets of clouds,
 and there was a new voice,
 which you slowly
 recognized as your own,
 that kept you company
 as you strode deeper and deeper
 into the world,

determined to do
 the only thing you could do – – – determined to save
 the only life you could save.

Sermon: “The Search for the Wizard: Brains, Heart & Courage for the Journey” by the Rev. Suzanne Wasilczuk

Summer is a time of journeys. Lake cabins. Canoe trips. Visiting friends and relatives. Seeing someplace you’ve never been to before.

In a couple weeks a group of you will journey down to my home, Duluth, to meet with UU compatriots from the congregation there.

We are each of us on multiple journeys – individually and collectively. On somewhat different paths but, because we are human, our journeys encompass many of the same themes. We are looking. We are looking – for the information we need along the way; for the tools to make the journey as smooth and gentle as possible; for the inspiration and the strength to go on when the going gets rutted, bumpy, full of hazards.

And often we look for a Wizard – the one who will magically impart all this knowledge, all this motivation, all these emotional guidelines to make sense of our questions. Our wizard will be part god, part guru; a religious figure, a shaman, magician; teacher, therapist; maybe a bit of a con man.

The questions we ask of this figure will be much the same: What is life on earth for? Why am I here? What is **my** life for? How in the world do I interact with all these others: these wonderful and strange and helpful and abrasive folks I meet upon the way? How am I to be whole in this world? Why did I find myself coming from this particular family? Where is my home? What is the way home?

I am on this same journey. So, I don’t have many more answers than you do yourself. I do have lots of questions, and just a few observations.

When I began seminary my class went through a week-long orientation – tips on how to navigate more easily through our first year of classes, descriptions of the various professors we would encounter, the ins and outs of our new neighborhood, and a warning about all the feelings that might arise over the loss of our previous homes and lives, the general fears and sadness we might experience because of all the changes in our lives, and the anxiety that would inevitably be produced by all the demands soon to be placed on us.

The theme of the orientation – the metaphor for our seminary journey – was **The Wizard of Oz** – a story of journeys undertaken alone and together: Dorothy wants to return home to her beloved Kansas and her family; the scarecrow wants a brain; the tin man, a heart; the lion, courage. [The previous class had adopted Harry Potter & Hogwarts as their trope – their metaphor.]

As you might remember, each character in The Wizard of Oz finds that he or she has has the power within them to effect the change that they want:

Dorothy need only tap together the ruby slippers to return home;

the scarecrow, who has exhibited a discernment and intelligence throughout the journey, receives a diploma telling the world that he truly has the brains that he's shown all along;

the tin man, tender toward one and all, gets a clock, a "ticker" heart to represent the emotions inherent in his every action along the Yellow Brick Road;

and the lion gets a medal, the outward proof that he has truly and nobly and consistently sacrificed his personal safety for the good of his companions, for the benefit of all.

We are all on a journey in search of this holy trinity: Brains; heart; courage. What helpful hints might we get from scarecrow, tin man, and lion?

Brains

(Sung)

*"I could while away the hours,
conferrin' with the flowers,
consultin' with the rain.
And my head, I'd be scratchin'
while my thoughts were busy hatchin'
If I only had a brain."*

*I'd unravel any riddle
For any individd-el
In trouble or in pain
With the thoughts I'd be thinkin
I could be another Lincoln
If I only had a brain*

*Oh, I could tell you why
The ocean's near the shore
I could think of things I never think before
And then I'd sit and think some more*

*I would not be just a nothin
My head all full of stuffin
My heart all full of pain
Perhaps I'd deserve you
And be even worthy erve you
If I only had
If I only had a brain*

The scarecrow is the first of Dorothy's companions on her journey to Oz. Nature is where the scarecrow searches for a framework as to what he would think about and how he'd go about thinking it. His song suggests that we delicately open our minds to wonder; allow the trickle of our thoughts to blossom in our minds, open our hearts and enlarge our spirits.

We are reminded to remember beauty, pay attention to it, and work to preserve the beautiful.

And we are told to recognize and acknowledge that intellectual growth is a lot of continuous, slow, fraught-with-setbacks hard work.

The slow and steady process as we use our brains, acquire knowledge and maybe even turn some of that knowledge into wisdom, is important, transformative work. We all hope our brains will make us worthy.

Brains are important stuff, but they are only part of the picture.

Reading #655: Change Alone is Unchanging

Whosoever wishes to know about the world must learn about it in its particular details.

Knowledge is not intelligence.

In searching for the truth be ready for the unexpected,

Change alone is unchanging.

The same road goes both up and down.

The beginning of a circle is also its end.

Not I, but the world says it: all is one.

And yet everything comes in season.

Heraklitos of Ephesos

[c. 484 BCE; an enigmatic Greek philosopher concerned with the changing nature of the world and with humans' attempts to order it through reason,]

Heart

(Sung)

*"I'd be tender I'd be gentle
and awful sentimental
regarding love and art.
I'd be friends with the sparrows
and the boy that shoots the arrows
If I only had a heart...*

*Just to register emotion,
Jealousy, Devotion,
And really feel the part.
I would stay young and chipper,
and I'd lock it with a zipper
If I only had a heart."*

On our journey we're also looking for heart: For emotion. Satisfaction. Nurturance. Ways to be with one other. Ways to be with one another.

Another way of saying this is that we are looking for "right relationship." Fredric Muir, in ***A Heretic's Vocabulary***, writes: "If we expect to enter into relationships that are going to make more kindness in our lives, if we wish to be treated well, if we want out of the hells we may live in, if we seek to create a better place in which to live and worship, then we must understand and practice what we want, what has come to be called right relations. Right relations is about putting people first, not rules and regulations ... Right relations means not doing to others what you wouldn't want done to you. It sounds so simple, it makes so much sense... Be kind to others who are kind to you; be kind to others who aren't kind to you."

In this congregation – as members in covenant with one another – we intentionally take this journey together: a journey toward wholeness, a conscious and committed and

hard effort to be a beloved community. We listen. We support one another. We provide space for both the longtime member and the new-time seeker.

This is hard work, work that transforms us, work that transforms our religious community – and our world community – into a beloved place.

Caring, and caring constructively, is darned hard work.

One of the reasons it is so hard is that we are all, even the strongest and most intelligent among us, such wounded souls – beset by not-always-so-fine people skills; arguing when, indeed, there is nothing of substance to argue about; arguing poorly when there is indeed something of substance to argue about.

We always carry our fears and failures and sadnesses with us.

Heart work is hard work.

[Caring, and caring constructively, is hard work.]

It is darned hard work to discern – to distinguish – what sort of care is called for. A listening ear. A kind touch. A visit and a hotdish? Some actual advice?

Or is another kind of care called for? Tough love? Hard truths? The need to acknowledge and deal with conflicts? Confront actions truly destructive to the beloved community? Provide firm guidelines? [Let go of what we want for the greater good.] These are all ways of showing care.

No easy or ready answers exist.

What Dorothy and her companions tell us: speak your truth, as you know it to be, gently and firmly. Acknowledge that you cannot speak for another. Be ready to ask forgiveness when you've gotten something all wrong. Poppies may make us forget our goal – for a while – but our friends will help us remember what is important. And those flying monkeys may come after us but, once again, it is our companions who will help us.

Reading #662: Strange and Foolish Walls

The years of all of us are short, our lives precarious.

Our days and nights go hurrying on and there is scarcely time to do the little that we might.

Yet we find time for bitterness, for petty treason and evasion.

What can we do to stretch our hearts enough to lose their littleness?

Here we are – all of us – all upon this planet, bound together in a common destiny.

Living our lives between the briefness of the daylight and the dark.

Kindred in this, each lighted by the same precarious, flickering flame of life, how does it happen that we are not kindred in all things else?

How strange and foolish are these walls of separation that divide us?

A. Powell Davies

[1902-1957; born in England; originally a Methodist minister; in 1944 became minister of All Souls Church in Washington, DC.]

Courage

(Sung:) *Yeh, it's sad, believe me, Missy
When you're born to be a sissy
Without the vim and verve*

*But I could change my habits
Never more be scared of rabbits
If I only had the nerve*

*I'm afraid there's no denying
I'm just an awful dandy-lion
A fate I don't deserve*

*But I could show my prowess
Be a lion, not a mouse
If I only had the nerve*

*Oh I'd be in my stride
A king down to the core
Oh I roar the way I never roared before
And then I'd rrwuff
And roar some more*

*I would show the dinosaur
Who's king around the fores'
A king they'd better serve*

*And with my regal beezzer
I could be another caeser
If I only had the nerve*

What are we scared of?

Probably not rabbits. Maybe snakes. Or spiders.

Scared of not being seen. Of not mattering. Scared of failure. Loss of loved ones.

Scared of death.

Are we scared of words or ideas?

Afraid of conflict?

Afraid of being told what to do?

Afraid of losing our individuality – maybe by joining a faith community?

Afraid of making changes, or taking risks?

Afraid we have lost our way.

The courage we need is both the courage to face the consequences when we're wrong, and the courage to face our obligations to act when we think we're right.

We need the courage (along with the brains, and the heart) to recognize and accept when we have failed, and the courage to try over again.

And we need the courage to own our leadership, and speak our truth, and make our judgments – not on people, but on unjust or insensitive personal acts, as well as unjust or insensitive systems of power and abuse of power.

Just being a liberal person of faith is an act of courage these days: We accept the responsibility to build our own theology – our belief in what is of supreme worth, of what human nature is, our beliefs in how the world works and what sort of world we want to see,

and how we humans need to act in it. These are all pieces of our theology. We accept the responsibility to both fashion, to delineate, our beliefs; and the responsibility act on our beliefs.

We face our fears, so big, so small.

We live to see the great day that dawns,
and the light that fills the world.

To stand on the side of love. To change ourselves. To change our world.

The way leads on.

Reading #670: The Way

Friend, I have lost the way.

The way leads on.

Is there another way?

The way is one.

I must retrace the track.

It's lost and gone.

Back, I must travel back:

None goes there, none.

Then I'll make here my place –

The road runs on –

Stand still and set my face –

The road leaps on.

Stay here, forever stay.

None stays here, none.

I cannot find the way.

The way leads on.

Oh, places I have passed!

That journey's done.

And what will come at last?

The way leads on.

Edwin Muir [1887-1959; Scottish author and critic.]

The way leads on. Forever changing. Forever one. The way leads on.

So, first, during this journey of life, we work on ourselves. Change begins at home. This culling and refining of head and heart and spirit is a life-long endeavor. As is the case for Dorothy, the tin man, the scarecrow and the lion, in this journey we are to recognize and refine and intentionally use the talents and strengths that have been inside us all our lives. Part of our journey is the transformation of self – from rough and raw material, uncultivated emotions, blind spots of various magnitudes, sore spots of various intensities – the transformation of one's self into calm, effective, loving and whole persons.

But, the work doesn't stop there. As a Unitarian Universalist and as a congregation, we choose to do this transformative work not by ourselves, but in community. We try to make ourselves into a beloved community – a community in which all are heard and, to some extent understood – not necessarily followed or agreed with, mind you – but a place where all are heard.

In ***Freethinking Mystics with Hands***, author Tom Owen-Towle writes: “The Reverend Gordon McKeeman reminds us that the derivation of the word *community*, although related to communion and communication, comes literally from the Latin *munio*, meaning ‘to arm.’ Therefore, with the prefix *com*, meaning ‘together,’ community happens wherever there is shared growth and security, a context of mutual succor and vigilance. Authentic Unitarian Universalist religious community consists of compassionate arms engaged in firm, fair, friendly wrestling matches rather than in bloodbaths of backstabbing.”

“Arms huddle together in times of sorrow and swing open in moments of rejoicing. Arms reach outward in justice-building and peace-making, not merely inward in narcissistic embrace. Arms offer forgiveness, the gift of a second chance. Arms defend against arrogance and shallowness, outside agitators or internal saboteurs.”

Finally, even though this journey of transformation spans as long as our lives, the equally important transformative work of the church – of the beloved religious community – is to transform the world into a just and compassionate place for all its peoples, to transform the world into a balanced and flourishing home for all beings.

In this work, we truly come home.

If we only had a heart, a brain, the nerve. A home.

May we stride deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing we can do – – – determined to save
the only life we can save.

Vision, justice, mercy by our guides as we seek our way
Lead us into this tender day.
Speak through us in all we do and say.

With the brains, the heart, the courage.
May we use them wisely and well.
May your summer journeys lead you to both new places, and old.
May it be so. May we make it so. Blessed be. Amen.