

# Courage

Welcome by Rev. Dr. Carter Hayward

***Love [Courage] is a choice—not simply, or necessarily a rational choice, but rather a willingness to be present to others without pretense or guile. Love [Courage] is a conversion to humanity—a willingness to participate with others in the healing of a broken world and broken lives. Love [Courage] is a choice to experience life as a member of the human family, a partner in the dance of life.***

Before I begin, a caveat: This summer we are taking our subjects from The Book of Virtues. I found the book rather old-fashioned, and the readings I decided to use talk only in masculine terms. Please, let's make it clear: Courage is not purely a masculine quality!

Brave men and women are not born that way; they become brave through their actions. A portion of Rudyard Kipling's famous poem:

IF—

If you can keep your head when all about you  
    Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;  
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
    But make allowance for their doubting too;  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
    Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,  
    And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;  
If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
    Or walk with kings—nor lose the common touch;  
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;  
    If all folk count with you, but none too much;  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
    With sixty seconds' worth of distance run--  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
    And—which is more—you'll be a man, my son.

“Courage” means strength to face danger or take on challenges. It is the ability of a person to face the unexpected challenges with bravery. It is a quality of spirit that enables you to face danger or pain without showing fear. This virtue isn’t present in a person since birth but can be developed and nurtured gradually with time. This virtue helps a person to be strong enough to face all the lows of life boldly.

We become brave by risking—by deliberately taking the “right” stand rather than the “popular” one. Standing ground against threatening things is not to be confused with fearlessness. Being afraid is a perfectly appropriate emotion when confronted with fearful things. Courage is a settled disposition to stand one's ground, to advance or to retreat as wisdom dictates. True COURAGE takes listening to one's inner voice, facing the peril and fear inside our own hearts, and then moving through our doubts and insecurities to right action.

Now please sit back and listen while I tell you the story of the Little Kite who learned how to fly...

#### HOW THE LITTLE KITE LEARNED TO FLY

“I never can do it,” the little kite said.  
As he looked around at the others high over his head.  
“I know I should fall if I tried to fly.”  
“Try,” said the big kite, “only try!”  
Or I fear you never will learn at all.”  
But the little kite said, “I'm afraid I'll fall.”

The big kite nodded: “Ah well, goodbye;  
I'm off,” and he rose toward the tranquil sky.  
Then the little kite's paper stirred at the sight,  
And trembling he shook himself free for flight.  
First whirling and frightened, then braver grown,  
Up, up he rose through the air alone,  
Till the big kite looking down could see  
The little one rising steadily.

Then how the little kite thrilled with pride,  
As he sailed with the big kite side by side!  
While far below he could see the ground,  
And the boys like small spots moving round.  
They rested high in the quiet air,  
And only the birds and the clouds were there.  
“Oh, how happy I am!” the little kite cried,  
“And all because I was brave, and tried.”

**For centuries, the most common response to conflict has been violence: emotional, physical, interpersonal, and international culminating in the ritualized murder we call war. Many of the stories in the Courage chapter of our Book of Virtues spoke of terrible wartime situations—David & Goliath, Julius Caesar's Crossing of the Rubicon, Patrick Henry's “Give Me Liberty or Death”, and the brave men of the Alamo. But today I want to talk about courage in another setting—your own life.**

**We all face conflict in our lives; it's inevitable. Our friends want us to do something to help them while we would rather enjoy our peace and quiet. One person wants loud music while another wishes it would be gone. Tempers flare. Facing conflict is how we learn; it's the basis of all thinking, problem solving, creativity, and personal development.**

**Always it takes courage to choose the more ultimately harmonious path. In the short run, the non-violent path may seem to be the least peaceful. For instance, you may have to cause a few hard feelings to be true to your inner core. There may be a flare-up or resistance to your non-violent message. The ultimately harmonious way is not always apparent—or the easiest to achieve.**

**Sometimes the most difficult step to take is to let others rise or fail. Sometimes we must lend a helping hand. It's**

**this everyday facing of our limitations, choosing to be true to inner selves, deciding to go the extra mile, staying in there—or leaving—when called upon by some deeper level of Peacemaker that I call COURAGE.**

**It is not conflict itself but how we respond to it that produces a violent response or a non-violent one. Courageous people over the years have practiced nonviolent action, using compassion and concern for truth to neutralize the cycles of violence and social injustice. Before taking action, moral leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi asked their followers to investigate the facts, negotiate with opponents, and prepare themselves to act in the spirit of nonviolence. Much of this involves listening—to ourselves and one another, clarifying our perceptions, articulating our needs, seeing each other as partners in a powerful process of ultimate discovery.**

Closing Words

## **THE CIRCUS**

**The circus is surrounding me.**

**I stand high upon the platform  
Sweaty palms pressed tight against my thighs.  
I fill my lungs up slow and deep before stepping on the  
slender wire stretching out before me.**

**I look to see if there's a net spread somewhere down below  
me  
As I place my foot so gradual and tentative.  
Touching first, then bearing weight,  
Stretching arms well out to feel for balance.**

**With heart inside my throat  
I suddenly expel my breath**

**Realizing only now that I have held it  
Even knowing how I've fallen from this height in times before  
I steady for the second step.**

**The crowd inside me cheers.**