

**Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ**

**Sunday, February 20, 2022**

**Seventh Sunday after Epiphany**

***“Courage: When Love drives out Fear”***

**by**

**Rev. Roger L. Brown**

**Last sermon in a series on the UCC Statement of Faith**

**Christian Scripture: Esther 8: 3-8; 15-17**

FOCUS STANZA OF THE UCC STATEMENT OF FAITH

You promise to all who trust you forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, your presence in trial and rejoicing

INTRODUCTION

I'm very pleased to finish out Scott's little sermon series on the UCC Statement of Faith. The statement is a very rich and tightly worded summary of our faith. This morning, I'm only focusing on a small portion of the final stanzas. Indeed, the statement is so rich, that I hope Scott will revisit it sometime with another series.

The portion of the faith statement which I'm focusing on today, I am rephrasing as follows for clarity:

God promises to all who trusts God ...courage in the struggle for justice and peace, and God's presence in trial and rejoicing.

While my intended focus is on JUSTICE and PEACE, I extended it to include "God's presence in trial and rejoicing," for especially in peace and justice work, there is both trial and rejoicing, and we need a constant sense of God's presence.

My goal this morning is to examine COURAGE in action, and to discover how it works in an individual's life and in the life and work of the church. (P)

## WORD ORIGIN

When we look at the origin of the word, Courage, We find that it comes from Old French Corage, and earlier, from the Latin Cor for heart. So, as we shall see, all good acts of courage are motivated by the heart, and a deep felt sense of caring. But there's more to a courageous action than just love from the heart.

## A PERSONAL EXAMPLE – VIDEO FROM TED TALK

Because so often courage is lived out in our personal lives, I first want to share with you a short excerpt from a TED talk by Cara E. Tar Khan. In this TED talk, Cara talks about the importance of courage, and how it has changed her life. VIDEO HERE

(Link to the TED talk: [https://www.ted.com/talks/](https://www.ted.com/talks/cara_e_yar_khan_the_beautiful_balance_between_courage_and_fear?language=en)

[cara\\_e\\_yar\\_khan\\_the\\_beautiful\\_balance\\_between\\_courage\\_and\\_fear?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/cara_e_yar_khan_the_beautiful_balance_between_courage_and_fear?language=en)

## SLED DOG EXAMPLE

Recently, through my Wild Spirituality course, I was led to a podcast interviewing Kara Swisher. The podcast was entitled "Lessons on Resilience from Dogs and a Dogsleder. Kara is a dogsled racer, writer and adventurer. In this podcast, she talks about doing the Iditarod dogsled race across Alaska. The Iditarod is a thousand mile race from Nome to Anchorage. The race must be done alone, and by rule book, no one can help her. There are locations to drop off tired dogs to be cared for until the race is over. But nothing could inspire fear and challenge her more than this race. Kara says it is the fear that makes her brave. And it is that sense of bravery that keeps her mushing on mile after mile, day after day. But in making that journey what makes it all possible is the dogs. The dogs love the running and drive forward with out of sight exuberance. The dogs work seamlessly together, and they run because of a long and deep relationship between each dog and Kara. Indeed, it is the dogs' love for Kara and Kara's love for the dogs that keep them together and motivated in the journey.

Another concept that is operational here is great goals and great dreams require great courage,

## HUNGER AND BREAD FOR THE WORLD

Choosing to eradicate world hunger might easily be a goal as far away as Nome to Anchorage. This week I became part of the hunger mushers team to get the summer lunch program funded in a revised version of the Build Back Better legislation. Because being motivated by the heart of care for children, takes a team approach, a couple of Mission & Service members joined Cheri Andrés, a Bread for the World organizer, and a member of Senator Leahy's DC office on Zoom. Can we help the legislature line up like a team of mushing dogs, to move in a positive direction. It takes courage to try, and it's a challenge since once I saw a book about a lawmakers time in Congress entitled, Hearing Cats. And, as you know, cats are very independent minded!

## ESTHER

The story of Esther saving the Jews which we read this morning , shows how the power of love drives out fear.. It also shows how the presence of supportive partners activated the courage possessed by Esther to save the Jews. ADDITION

At this point it is important to know how this palace intrigue came about. Esther is the adopted daughter of Mordecai. Both Mordecai and Esther are Jews. After the King divorced Queen Yashti, and began a search for a new queen, Mordecai, advanced Esther into the competition. We could she won the competition and became Queen Esther. Now when Haman gains great status, and on occasion when he passes Mordecai at the gate, Mordecai refuses to pay him respect. So Haman figures if he can gain an edict wiping out the Jews, that will take out Mordecai as well. It is also important to know the palace protocol for an audience with the King. Only if the King raises his scepter, may a person enter the throne room to visit with the King. Entering without permission has a penalty of death. So, even though she is Queen, Esther can't just sashay in to see the King. This is why it is of great risk for Esther to approach the King to plead for the Jews.

In our story, Haman the Agagite, a palace favorite of King Ahasuerus , has plotted to kill all the Jews in the kingdom. Queen Esther, wife of the King, pleads with the King to get rid of Haman, and lift the edit to kill the Jews. The King agrees. Haman is hanged, and the edict is lifted.

However, Esther took on a great risk in asking these things of the King. For no one argues with the King, not even the Queen, especially in those days. Just how risky Esther's plan is can be well illustrated by her words in Esther, chapter 4:

“Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.”

Now let's see what's going on in the wonderful happy ending story. Esther shows great courage in taking her request to the King. But that is because of her love for the Jews, and so even if she came to the King with fear and trembling, her love would drive out the fear and she would take the risk. She also knew that God was with her and that the Jews were God's people. In the end, the King does as Esther requested, and we like to think it was the love of the King for I that motivated his decision.

Indeed, when visions and dreams for building God's Kingdom on Earth, are at hand, it is likely that risk of failure may also be great as well. Then it is time to be brave and soldier on. For bravery is the brother is courage that says, "let's keep going."

## THE CHURCH

Now let us look at the Courageous Church, for that is what my paraphrased stanza is describing. Here again is the paraphrased stanza:

“God promises to all who trusts God ...courage in the struggle for justice and peace, and God's presence in trial and rejoicing.”

If we follow and believe in even this stanza, I believe we are a Courageous Church belonging to a Courageous denomination. For we contribute and work toward many dreams and goals of peace and justice. They are big dreams, but they require

many dreamers working together. So we are part of the team of mushers moving forward. As a church we are a team working together on many levels using many talents. We let our caring hearts guide our work, and our worship program and spiritual care ensures that we know God's presence both in trials and in rejoicing. Scott's pastoral letter in this weeks eNews includes a very good list the the peace and justice work our church as been doing in recent years, so I need not repeat it here.

However, in the last several months, the hearts of many in Centre Church have been reaching out to prepare to welcome an Afgan family to Brattleboro. We can well imagine that this family has put to use a great deal of courage as they made their journey to the United States and soon, to Brattleboro.

We, as a church are blessed, and we bring many blessings to heal the world!

Amen.