

Cascade UU Fellowship
Fire Communion Service

Call to Worship

By Tim Haley

Amid all the noise in our lives,
we take this moment to sit in silence --
to give thanks for another day;
to give thanks for all those in our lives
who have brought us warmth and love;
to give thanks for the gift of life.

We know we are on our pilgrimage here but a brief moment in time.

Let us open ourselves, here, now,
to the process of becoming more whole --
of living more fully;
of giving and forgiving more freely;
of understanding more completely
the meaning of our lives here on this earth.

Come, let us worship together

[Story for all ages](#)

Special Music-The Stranger by Billy Joel

Fire Communion Part 1

I think we can all agree that our world is filled with Spiders, and critics, and innocent children, and each have important lessons that guide us. Let's take a moment to look deeper into this thought.

This week I heard a Mr. Rogers quote on the radio and was gently reminded of the wisdom and truisms he shared with children everywhere on his weekly television show Mr. Rogers Neighborhood. I reflected on how Mr. Rogers' neighbors continue to turn to his wisdom whenever tragedy, catastrophe or life challenges strike. February 2018 will mark the 50th anniversary of the debut of Mr. Rogers Neighborhood and USA Today published a story about how one particular neighbor had a once-in-a-lifetime encounter with Mr. Rogers. Here are the highlights of the story:

Alex Breznican was a college student from Pittsburgh who was not adjusting well to college life and was living in darkness; he was lonely and struggling, with many broken pieces of himself. One day when he was feeling particularly bad, as he was walking out of his dorm he heard a familiar song coming from a TV in an empty common room and Mr. Rogers voice was there, asking him what he does with the mad he feels. After standing in front of the TV, mesmerized by the transcendent moment, Breznican left the dorm feeling better. Days later, he was waiting on an elevator and when the doors opened, who was there? Yes, you guessed it!! Mr. Rogers himself! The two acknowledged each other with a nod and then just as Mr. Rogers was turning to walk away, Breznican turned and said “Mr. Rogers, I don’t mean to bother you, but I wanted to say thanks.” What happened next was not what he was expecting to happen. Mr. Rogers stopped and smiled and asked, “Did you grow up as one of my neighbors?”, then opened his arms, lifting his satchel for a hug and added “It’s good to see you again neighbor.” After Breznican humbly responded, “Thanks for that.”; in true fashion, Mr. Rogers nodded, motioned toward the window and went and sat down and invited Breznican into conversation with a question, “Do you want to tell me what was upsetting you?”

I often find myself turning to wisdom from well known such as like Mr. Rogers, and others. In fact, I have several books on my bookshelves holding on to their wisdom, patiently awaiting for a time when I need a little boost, and yes, this little book “The World According to Mr. Rogers” is definitely one of the books on my shelves.

I first stumbled upon a Theodore Roosevelt quote in one of the many Brene Brown books sit on my shelf of wisdom. On April 23, 1910 Roosevelt gave what would become one of the most widely quoted speeches of his career, the Citizenship of the Republic. The following passage from that speech became known as the Man in the Arena quote. It goes like this:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; [...] who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who

at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.

I read Roosevelt's quote for the first time in Brene Brown's book, *Rising Strong*. I was stepping into my own arena of sorts. I had learned about the social scientist's newest Living Brave online course and had signed up to take it with three friends at coincidentally the same time I was stepping into a new and unfamiliar role at work. The goal of the workshop was to become comfortable with being vulnerable, showing up, being seen and living brave. In the very first exercise we were tasked with identifying an arena in our life where we wanted to show up and be seen. I of course picked my new position.

Take a moment and think about a place you want to show up, be seen and live brave in 2018.

Maybe it's

- building a stronger relationship with a friend or relative
- seeking the courage to run for a political position
- starting a new business
- asking for a promotion
- taking a new class at the local community college

How does it feel to think about stepping into a new arena in 2018?

Now, if Brene Brown had asked me this question, or maybe if Mr. Rogers asked me the same question he asked Alex Breznican, "Do you want to tell me what was upsetting you?" my response to either would have been about my feeling scared of the new arena and the need to be perfect when I arrived there, I would have told them I couldn't let the critics see my fear when I stepped into the new arena. I needed armor to protect my vulnerable self and my armor was perfectionism.

The special music this morning, *The Stranger*, is about how, when we think we know somebody, we often hardly know the person at all. The song is about the collective, unknown things about the people we think we know and love. According to Billy Joel, the song's writer, the song can also relate to how we don't always know ourselves. He says his half hearted suicide attempt at age 21 was an inspiration for the song as it revealed a dark side of his

personality that wasn't readily apparent. When I hear the lyrics "we all have a face that we hide away forever", I think of a mask, or a shield or some sort of armor that is donned to protect us from the critics as we step into an arena. Masks and shields and armor while seemingly protecting us from the mean spirited critics or personal emotional attacks made by others, or even our own self talk, also mask our vulnerability, protecting our authentic selves. The more we shield, the greater the chance of losing the courage to be vulnerable and living brave.

What do you do when your world is dark or you are lonely and struggling? Who do you turn to? How do you prepare to face the critics in your arena?

"There isn't anyone you couldn't love once you've heard their stories." The words of Mr. Rogers that echoed over my car radio this week. I spent time sitting with them. I asked myself, like the child in our story this morning, am I quick to judge others, just as she was quick to judge the spider without knowing their stories? And, like the critic behind the mask, do I prevent others from knowing the true me by the masks I wear?

This morning in our annual Fire Communion ceremony we are going to use the transformative powers of the flame to bring about personal transformation in a ritual of courage, illumination and truth.

Author and lover of life, *Jonathan Lockwood Huie* once said, "*I feed all my troubles to the cleansing fire.*" As Kumchu plays a musical interlude I invite you take a few moments of contemplation and consider your 2018 arena and the armor you use to protect your own vulnerabilities. What masks are guarding you and preventing your whole, authentic self from showing up, being seen and living brave? On the piece of paper you received, write down your thoughts.

All who wish to participate in the Fire Communion are welcome to do so, or if you wish you are welcome to remain in your seats and simply observe. When you are ready, those who wish may come forward and feed your thoughts to this cleansing fire. I ask that you form a

single line and approach the altar from the right aisle, returning to your seats via the center and left aisles. If you prefer to observe from your seat and have a paper you'd like burned, please raise your hand and one of us will gladly bring your paper forward. These papers will burn until there is nothing left but ashes. Let the ashes serve as a reminder of your own awakening.

Fire Communion Part 2

Another of Mr. Rogers often quoted truisms, "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping." We've heard these words shared in response to tragedy and catastrophe that strikes our world. Like Mr. Rogers, the spider in our story this morning was a true helper. Acting much like Mr. Rogers may have acted, the spider helped the child, in a vulnerable time, seek refuge without having to don a mask or falsely shield her own vulnerability. The child, in her purest authentic self was able to sit inside the dark cave shielded from the critics and when she emerged, she had brightened with the realization that spider had protected her and wasn't so bad after all. The child could continue out in her own arena, continuing to live brave as we all can.

Fire has the power to illuminate, to warm and to protect us. It can provide us the light and the courage we need to show up and be seen. We all have hopes, visions, and blessings ahead in the New Year. The Rev. Sara Eileen LaWall's wrote these words:

Out of the flames of fear
We rise with courage of our deepest convictions
to stand for justice, inclusion and peace

Out of the flames of scrutiny
We rise to proclaim our faith
With hope to heal a fractured and hurting world

Out of the flames of doubt

We rise to embrace the mystery, wonder and awe
of all there is and all that is yet to be

Out of the flames of hate
We rise with the force of love
Love that celebrates our shared humanity

Out of the flames we rise.

I now invite you to come forward and light a candle of illumination for yourself, for someone else or for the world. With hope to heal a fractured and hurting world. Again, as Kumchu plays the musical interlude we will follow the same process of approaching the alter from the center aisle and return to your seats via the two side aisles. If you prefer to observe from your seat and wish to have one of us light a candle for you, please raise your hand and we will gladly assist you.

Benediction:

Our benediction is from Marianne Williamson:

As we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence actually liberates others.