

Finding Courage with Harry, Ron, and Hermione
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First Lesson of Courage

Pam: This morning, we will explore courage in the book series, Harry Potter. To give everyone a context for this series, I will share a synopsis of the series from the Scholastic Books website:

Imagine a school in a castle filled with moving staircases, a sport played on flying broomsticks, an evil wizard intent on domination, an ordinary boy who's the hero of a whole world he doesn't know. This is the story that comes to life in the marvelous Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling.

The Dark Lord, Voldemort, tried to murder Harry when he was just a baby—but he failed, killing Harry's parents but leaving him with a lightning-bolt scar. After Voldemort's disappearance, Harry is sent to live with his nasty aunt and uncle, far away from any hint of magic.

But at the age of eleven, he is invited to attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and a magical world opens before him.

Each of the seven books in the series chronicles one year in Harry's adventures at Hogwarts and his battle against Lord Voldemort. Harry makes two marvelous best friends named Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. He studies topics like Transfiguration and Potions under wise headmaster Albus Dumbledore and the malevolent Severus Snape. He becomes expert at a game called Quidditch; encounters incredible creatures like phoenixes and dragons; and discovers an entire Wizarding universe hidden just out of sight, as prone to the darker aspects of human experience as our own, but brightened by a quirky original magic.

And slowly, Harry unravels the mysteries of his original confrontation with Voldemort: why the Dark Lord tried to kill him, how he lived... and what he must do to survive another encounter.

Andrea: In the second book of the Harry Potter series, Harry has entered a chamber of secrets to find the sister of his best friend. The young girl was taken into an underground tunnel beneath Hogwarts by a huge snake. As Harry tries to rescue the girl, he encounters the Dark Lord, Voldemort. However, Voldemort is in a ghost form and in the form of his younger self. Harry tries to wake the young girl, but she won't move or wake up. He starts to lose hope, when all of

the sudden a bird flies into the tunnel and lands on Harry's shoulder. The bird also drops a raggedy old hat next to Harry.

These were sent to Harry by Dumbledore, the headmaster at Hogwarts and a very powerful wizard.

The younger Voldemort starts to laugh and yells at Harry:

“This is what Dumbledore sends his defender! A songbird and an old hat! Do you feel brave, Harry Potter? Do you feel safe now?”

Harry didn't answer. He might not see what use [the bird] or the [hat] were, but he was no longer alone, and he waited for [Voldemort] to stop laughing with his courage mounting.

Rev Laura: According to philosopher Tom Morris, “Courage is doing what's right, not what's easy. It's doing what seems morally required, rather than what seems physically safe or socially expected...A courageous person properly perceives when there is danger and then overcomes the natural urge for self-preservation, self-protection, comfort, and personal gain.”

Aristotle, another philosopher, teaches courage is a midpoint between two extremes in our reaction to danger: the extreme of too little, which he characterizes as cowardice, and the extreme of too much, which he labels rashness.

Courage allows us to act thoughtfully and even if we are afraid.

Harry Potter encounters many challenges, which allow him to be courageous. However, most of these challenges would have been unmet, if it were not for the support of the community that surrounded Harry. To add little more context to this story, the first 11 years of Harry's life were spent with an Aunt and Uncle who did not like him. His room was a cupboard under the staircase. He had no friends or people he could turn to. When he entered the Hogwarts School, he gained a community that believed in him. He gains two friends immediately in Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. Teachers that loved him. It was this community that continued to boost him and believe in him that allowed Harry to face each challenge with confidence and courage.

This community did not just become an automatic support. It built because Harry encouraged and supported others. A continuous and one of the most important themes throughout the books is the great value of friendship. Everything Harry is able to accomplish is rooted in the collaborative efforts of many.

Many of you came into this church the first time searching for a community, looking for those like minded people. In many cases each of you have found a similar community here that Harry found at Hogwarts. You have found support, encouragement, and love. This does not happen automatically in any community. It takes collaboration on the individual's part and the community's part. It takes each party to nurture the connection. Once the connection is made, then the community and individual become entwined and essential to each other.

It is this connection, this support, we need when we face personal or community challenges. It may be an illness, the death of a loved one. Or it may be change within our church community due to growth. Or it may be taking a stand to protect the rights of others. By knowing we are a part of this community and by knowing we are supported by this community, we have the courage to meet those challenges when they come our way. Not only do we have the connection and the support, but we also understand others affirm their belief in us. We know in this community we are valued and important.

One of my favorite readings in our hymnal is from Wayne Arnason:

Take courage friends.

The way is often hard, the path is never clear,
and the stakes are very high.

Take courage.

For deep down, there is another truth:

you are not alone

Second Lesson of Courage

Pam: In the fourth book in the series, there is a Triwizard Tournament between Hogwarts and two other schools of magic. There was a student from each school selected. In the selection process, Harry was also picked to compete through a trick Voldemort created. Each of the students competed in three dangerous tasks. The first task was to obtain an egg in a nest guarded by a dragon. The second task was to rescue a close friend or family member from the bottom of a lake guarded by evil merpeople. The final task was to enter a maze full of magical obstacles to find the trophy cup placed in the middle. As Harry gets ready to face the final challenge, he steadies his nerves and readies himself for action by remembering his preparation:

Harry felt more confident about this task than either of the others. Difficult and dangerous thought it would undoubtedly be...Harry had managed to find his way past monstrous creatures and enchanted barriers before now, and this time he had some notice, some chance to prepare himself for what lay ahead...he was confident that, this time, he had done everything in his power to prepare for the task.

Rev Laura: Oftentimes, we are able to act with courage because we have taken the time to prepare ourselves. At one point in the Harry Potter series, the students realize they are not getting the education they will need in order to face an ever growing threat from the Dark Lord, Voldemort. The students, encouraged by Hermione, start to meet secretly to build their skills in defense against the dark arts. They learn new spells, new wand maneuvers, and, most importantly, they practice using them on each other. It is this preparation that allows them to face an attack on their school and allows them to be courageous when attacked individually. They carry with them the encouragement from the community they built and the confidence they gained through the preparation.

No matter what our age, we encounter continuous opportunities to prepare ourselves for challenges in our life. In school, we learn how to stand up to bullies and how to speak up if others are hurt. In our different professions, we learn to cultivate skills that allow us to move into situations where courage is needed. In church, we learn to ground ourselves, educate ourselves, and surround ourselves in supportive community to face challenges.

We are called in this time of turmoil and chaos in our society to not just help each other face challenges. We are called to step outside our comfort zone and step into places to help others face challenges. To let others in our larger community know they are not alone. By preparing ourselves in this community we are able to be more courageous in the larger community. We prepare by attending worship together to ground ourselves in our values and core beliefs. We prepare by being part of our social action team meetings, by participating in educational opportunities, and by building connections in the church. We prepare by building connections outside our church community with those who are vulnerable. We prepare by agreeing to support and show up for each other when we are called to do so in our larger community.

This preparation is not something we can do only on our own. There are aspects we can do as an individual. However, each of us carries knowledge or skills others could benefit from. I encourage you to share that knowledge and to share those skills with each other.

Think for a moment what you have to offer this community or the larger community in ways of preparation. Did you read a book that others might benefit from? If so, form a book discussion. Did you see a movie which sparks creative ways to respond to challenges? If so, we have a movie license here, plan a showing of the movie. There are many ways we can prepare ourselves and that preparation needs to come from all aspects of this community. If you want to be courageous, if you want people in the church to be courageous, then one of the paths to courageous action is through preparation.

Third Lesson of Courage

Andrea: In the last book of the series, there is a battle at Hogwarts, which happens towards the end. Voldemort is winning, Harry is dead, and there is a stand off between Voldemort's army of death eaters and the wizards of Dumbledore's Army. Voldemort is taunting the Dumbledore wizards with Harry's death and encourages them to come forward to join them. One of the students who has been at Hogwarts the entire time Harry attended is Neville Longbottom. Neville steps forward. Voldemort assumes Neville is stepping forward to join his ranks.

Voldemort declares: "You show spirit and bravery, and you come of noble stock. You will make a very valuable Death Eater. We need your kind, Neville Longbottom."

"I'll join you when hell freezes over! Long live Dumbledore's Army!" yells Neville

Rev Laura: What is important to know about Neville is he has been a quiet and extremely brave character throughout the series. He finds a particular skill in herbology or the cultivation of plants. He has been raised by his grandmother, because his parents were tortured by Lord Voldemort and are no longer mentally stable. He tends to be in the background, except every now and then, he shows up to offer the herb Harry needs to accomplish a task in the Triwizard Tournament. Or when he is the first to master a spell in the preparation of Dumbledore's Army. When he steps forward to face Voldemort, it is at the shock of all his classmates and teachers. They are further shocked by the courage he shows in challenging Voldemort and encouraged by this act.

We don't always have the preparation or the community surrounding us to be courageous. However, we have an understanding of what is right and what is wrong. We know in our seven principles we are called to be responsible for our

actions because they effect the interdependent web of life; we know to strive for justice and compassion; and we know to honor the worth and dignity of all. It is that grounding of understanding we take with us into the world. That calls us to act in unjust situations. That calls us to act when compassion is not present. That calls us to act when a person is not being seen.

It is this grounding we take with us when we encounter challenges in our day to step up courageously. It may be when we hear of a comment about the Latino/a people in our community. It may be when we see another person bullying someone. As Tom Morris reminds us, "sometimes when great values are at stake, you just have to take action, regardless of how you feel. That is the way of courage."

At youth group this past Wednesday, the teens watched the scene of when Neville stands up to Voldemort and discussed courage. They determined to be courageous a person acts with the intention of helping the greater good of humanity. There is no thought on what harm may come for them or what risk is being made. The act happens because it is what is right to do. Now, adults in the room, here is a question that is important for our younger people: Can you be afraid and still be courageous?

Fear does not disappear when you are courageous. As Nelson Mandela reminds us, "I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave person is not one who does not feel afraid, but one who conquers that fear."