

Courage to Create, Nurture, and Sustain

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On this Fathers' Day, the three of us are reflecting upon the courage which it takes to create, to nurture, and to sustain. Darryl and Kim are certainly in the nurturing and sustaining stage as parents... and as a leader of a non-profit and a pastor of a church...so I'm going to first focus on courage to create...

Think about what we create: paintings, poems, children. . . But, what else do we create? We create community; we create avenues of caring; and we create meaning.

To create every single one of these: paintings, poems, children, community, avenues of caring, and meaning-- requires courage.

Rollo May, a psychologist whose ideas have meant a good deal to me, wrote that creativity is a **wrestling with the Gods of conformity**¹... It's easiest to think of this when we consider the attempt to paint or to write: the artist must begin by looking at a blank canvas or screen. That blankness exists...the artist has to wrestle with all the *status quo* of other art and poetry and all the *inertia of doubt* as the artist stands before the blank canvas or paper. **It takes courage to put something down, to make a mark.**

Those disciples who were on that mountain and saw Jesus appear to them were also wrestling with the Gods of conformity. They were hearing Jesus' call to go forth--courageously--to *create* community, to literally transform peoples' lives.

How scary is that?

I recall that Rollo May used this illustration to describe the courage required of someone who is beginning the creation process: "It's like being in a boat in the middle of the ocean and being told, 'The sky's the limit. You can go in any direction.'" We have so much freedom it's almost dizzying, whether we're trying to create a caring congregation, a prayer--in our own hearts, or even meaning in our lives. To head in *some* direction we need courage.

We're in a risky business here at Redlands First UM Church because we stick our necks out to extend ministry to people. We reach out with our love, our service, and our ideas on Sundays and most week-days--not knowing the results in the lives of those who are touched. Anything said or done can be misunderstood. Yet, we speak and act.

Father's Day... birth of children...as mother...I recall when I was pregnant I prayed that our child would be a "healthy intelligent red head." I felt a bit embarrassed before God to pray that, as I knew I would love a not-so healthy not-so-intelligent brunette. I think my prayer was really an attempt to *accept courage, no matter what*, to bring this child whom I had not yet formally met...into this world.

Jesus' disciples, as depicted at the very end of the Gospel of Matthew, needed a heap of courage. Jesus told them to go create love, peace, and joy in the world, to transform peoples' lives. Not too surprising, we are told, "some doubted." However, it has been pointed out that the *very same disciples who had faith were the ones who doubted*. In other words, the disciples had faith *in spite of* doubt--faith that they could have whatever courage was necessary to follow Jesus' call to love and act.

That is precisely what faith is. Faith is NOT the same as cocksureness; faith incorporates doubts within itself. This doubt is not a philosophical pondering but the very

risky wavering we go through when we must decide, especially when more than one possibility seems reasonable and right. To create anything is risky; it requires courage and virtually always includes doubt. We wonder whether a different time, an alternate route, a slight editing would make the creation better. Given the courage required, it's no wonder we hesitate to create--meaning in our lives, community, poems, or children! Think of political leaders.. courage to create peace treaties, to work for justice from as much knowledge they have available...

What *contributes to our courage* is a promise similar to the one Jesus gave his disciples when he assigned them their almost impossible task. To each other you and I might say, "Here's my card, call me if you need any help." What Jesus said was, "I am with you always... always... to the end..."

The only way out of writers' block, parental anxiety, or almost settling for meaninglessness is to *go through the doubt with courage* and to *hold boldly* to this promise that Divine Companionship would be with us always... that with our good intent what we create will be good enough.

¹ Rollo May was influenced by theologian Paul Tillich.