

## UUCMC Covenant Circle Session

February 2018: Perseverance

### Opening Words & Chalice Lighting

Let it hurt.

Let it bleed.

Let it heal.

And let it go. - Nikita Gill

### Reminder of our Covenant

### Check-In (3-4 minutes each)

### Topic: Perseverance

### Word Roots

While perseverance literally comes from Latin per (thoroughly) + severus (severe), we could also turn to sustain, from the Latin roots sub (up from below) + tenere (to hold) or persist per (thoroughly) + sistere (to stand).

### Readings

"This morning I have been pondering a nearly forgotten lesson I learned in high school music. Sometimes in band or choir, music requires players or singers to hold a note longer than they actually can hold a note. In those cases, we were taught to mindfully stagger when we took a breath so the sound appeared uninterrupted. Everyone got to breathe, and the music stayed strong and vibrant... So let's remember the advice of music: Take a breath. The rest of the chorus will sing. The rest of the band will play. Rejoin so others can breathe. Together, we can sustain a very long, beautiful song for a very, very long time. You don't have to do it all, but you must add your voice to the song." - Michael Moore

To sustain a stay in a dry and barren desert, it is necessary to be about something great enough to be worth a lifetime of unrewarded effort. There are simply some divine cravings in life—the liberation of the poor, the equality of women, the humanity of the entire human race—that are worth striving for, living for, dying for, finished or unfinished, for as long as it takes to achieve them. No single capital campaign will do the trick. No one speech will change the climate. No single law will undo eons of damage. It will take a million lives dedicated to the long haul and heaped on top of one another. That's why the Zen saying "O snail, climb Mount Fuji, but slowly, slowly," is so important. If we are to persevere for the long haul, we must not overdrive our souls. We must immerse ourselves in good music, good reading, great beauty and peace so that everything good in us can rise again and lead us on beyond disappointment, beyond boredom, beyond criticism, beyond loss. Then life has vision again; then going on seems both possible and necessary. - Joan Chittister

I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can only rest for a

moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not ended. - Nelson Mandela

Success is a little like wrestling a gorilla. You don't quit when you're tired. You quit when the gorilla is tired. - Robert Strauss

If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito. - The Dalai Lama

She stood in the storm, & when the wind did not blow her away, she adjusted her sails.  
- Elizabeth Edwards

The universe always falls in love with a stubborn heart. - Anon

Big shots are only little shots who kept shooting. - Christopher Morley

The road to success is dotted with many tempting parking places. - Unknown

Maya Angelou turned forty on April 4, 1968. She had planned a big party in Harlem, with many of the day's black intellectual elite among the guests. History had other ideas; Dr. King's assassination sent Angelou into a weeks-long depression. It was fellow writer James Baldwin who helped her dig out of it. Angelou recalls Baldwin's assistance in her book *A Song Flung Up to Heaven*, where she writes that laughter and ancestral guidance got her through:

"There was very little serious conversation. The times were so solemn and the daily news so somber that we snatched mirth from unlikely places and gave servings of it to one another with both hands...

I told Jimmy I was so glad to laugh. Jimmy said, "We survived slavery. . . . You know how we survived? We put surviving into our poems and into our songs. We put it into our folk tales. We danced surviving in Congo Square in New Orleans and put it in our pots when we cooked pinto beans. . . . [W]e knew, if we wanted to survive, we had better lift our own spirits. So we laughed whenever we got the chance."

- Kenny Wiley, from *Nights Can Be Tough*

"Heartbreak is how we mature; yet we use the word heartbreak as if it only occurs when things have gone wrong: an unrequited love, a shattered dream, a child lost before their time. Heartbreak, we hope, is something we hope we can avoid; something to guard against, a chasm to be carefully looked for and then walked around; the hope is to find a way to place our feet where the elemental forces of life will keep us in the manner to which we want to be accustomed and which will keep us from the losses that all other human beings have experienced without exception since the beginning of conscious time. But heartbreak may be the very essence of being human, of being on the journey from here to there, and of coming to care deeply for what we find along the way... If heartbreak is inevitable and inescapable, it might be asking us to look for it and make friends with it, to see it as our constant and instructive companion, and even perhaps, in the depth of its impact as well as in its hindsight, to see it as its own reward.

Heartbreak asks us not to look for an alternative path, because there is no alternative path. It is a deeper introduction to what we love and have loved, an inescapable and often beautiful question, something or someone who has been with us all along, asking us to be ready for the last letting go."  
- David Whyte

Optimism

Jane Hirshfield

More and more I have come to admire resilience.

Not the simple resistance of a pillow, whose foam returns over and over to the same shape, but the sinuous tenacity of a tree: finding the light newly blocked on one side, it turns in another. A blind intelligence, true. But out of such persistence arose turtles, rivers, mitochondria, figs -- all this resinous, unretractable earth.

Pause.

Breath.

Repair your universe.

Proceed.

- Anon

Be soft.

Do not let the world  
make you hard.

Do not let pain  
make you hate.

Do not let bitterness  
steal your sweetness.

- Kurt Vonnegut

Long-Haul People

Rev. Rudy Nemsler, UU minister

You find them in churches  
when you're lucky;  
other places too, though I mostly  
only know ecclesiastical varieties.

Long haul people  
upon whose shoulders  
(and pocketbooks and casseroles  
and daylight/nighttime hours)  
a church is built and maintained  
after the brass is tarnished and  
cushions need re-stitching.

They pay their pledges full and on time  
even when the music's modern;  
support each canvass though the sermons aren't always short;  
mow lawns and come to suppers;  
teach Sunday School when  
there's no one else and they'll miss the service.  
Asked what they think of the minister,  
or plans for the kitchen renovation,

or the choral anthem, or Christmas pageant,  
or color of the bathroom paint,  
they'll reply: individuals and fashions  
arrive and pass.

The church—their church—will be here, steady and hale. For a long, long time. It will.  
For long haul people bless a church  
with a very special blessing.

Much protest is naive; it expects quick, visible improvements and despairs and gives up when such improvement does not come. Protestors who hold out longer have perhaps understood that success is not the proper goal... Protest that endures, I think, is moved by a hope far more modest than that of public success: namely, the hope of preserving qualities in one's own heart and spirit that would be destroyed by acquiescence. - Wendell Berry, "On Difficult Hope"

Defeat

Kahlil Gibran

Full poem found here: <https://wordsfortheyear.com/2014/11/01/defeat-by-kahlil-gibran/>

“Defeat, my Defeat, my self-knowledge and my defiance,  
Through you I know that I am yet young and swift of foot  
And not to be trapped by withering laurels.  
And in you I have found aloneness  
And the joy of being shunned and scorned....

Defeat, my Defeat, my deathless courage,  
You and I shall laugh together with the storm,  
And together we shall dig graves for all that die in us,  
And we shall stand in the sun with a will,  
And we shall be dangerous.”

Why do you want to shut out of your life any uneasiness, any misery, any depression, since after all you don't know what work these conditions are doing inside you? Why do you want to persecute yourself with the question of where all this is coming from and where it is going? Since you know, after all, that you are in the midst of transitions and you wished for nothing so much as to change. If there is anything unhealthy in your reactions, just bear in mind that sickness is the means by which an organism frees itself from what is alien; so one must simply help it to be sick, to have its whole sickness and to break out with it, since that is the way it gets better. - Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet

She who has not been tried,  
what does she know?  
She who has been surprised  
abounds with vigilance.  
Betrayed, she recognizes what is true.  
Scarred, she finds her resilience.  
Her illusions gone, she deepens.

- MJ Abell

Life's reality is that we cannot bounce back. We cannot bounce back because we cannot go back in time to the people we used to be. The parent who loses a child never bounces back. The nineteen-year-old who sails for war is gone forever, even if he returns. You know that there is no bouncing back. There is only moving through.

“What happens to us becomes a part of us. Resilient people do not bounce back from hard experiences; they find healthy ways to integrate them into their lives.

- Eric Greitens

The Long Haul

- prttybrd

I promise to love you through it all.  
Through all the pain and distance  
Through the emptiness and fear  
Through the nothing that feels like everything  
And through the everything that feels like love  
I will love you

I'm making my shoulders strong for the young to stand upon,  
stepping lightly on the backs of those  
who hold me up.

It's a chain of life unending,  
ever new and ever bending,

- Susan Osborn singer/songwriter

The Three Stonecutters - a parable about the secret to perseverance

A man came across three stonecutters and asked them what they were doing. The first replied, “I am making a living.” The second kept on hammering while he said, “I am doing the best job of stonecutting in the entire county.” The third looked up with a visionary gleam in his eye and said, “I am building a cathedral.”

won't you celebrate with me

Lucille Clifton

won't you celebrate with me  
what i have shaped into  
a kind of life? i had no model.  
born in babylon  
both nonwhite and woman  
what did i see to be except myself?  
i made it up  
here on this bridge between  
starshine and clay,  
my one hand holding tight  
my other hand; come celebrate  
with me that everyday  
something has tried to kill me  
and has failed.

**Silent Reflection**

### **Questions to prompt discussion (choose ones that work for you)**

1. The saying is widely known: “Trees that bend in the storm don’t break.” Are you trying to stand tall and remain immovable, when life is asking you to bend?
2. We all fall down. Very few of us pick ourselves up on our own. Perseverance is rarely a solo act. Who in your life needs a bit of help getting back up off the mat?
3. What if the way through your pain is to feel it?
4. It’s hard right now. The light at the end of the tunnel is still a ways off. You’ve remembered to just keep moving forward. But have you remembered to breathe? Have you remembered to be tender with and to take care of yourself, not just push yourself?
5. Are you sure your strategy of “grin and bear it” is still working? What’s the worst that could happen if you just walked away?
6. It is said that people who persevere don’t just struggle through their pain; they share and tell stories of their pain. Others then respond with their own stories of pain and struggle, leading to the discovery that we are not as alone as we thought. So is it time for you to be a storyteller, not just a survivor?
7. Have you made friends with defeat? Do you still resent it? Or have you figured out the hidden gift, lesson or blessing of your defeat?
8. So you think you’ve lost the struggle? Or could it be that you’ve just lost your illusions?
9. Yes, it is important to gratefully acknowledge the shoulders of those you stand on. But how are you doing with the equally important work of offering your shoulders to others? Could it be that perseverance is something we pass on?
10. It is said that mastery requires persevering through 10,000 hours of practice. If you are feeling like you are failing or not good enough, might it be time to consider that you are only 5,000 hours in?
11. What’s your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.

**Housekeeping Details** How goes your service project plans? Do you need ideas? Lisa, Michelle or Virginia are happy to help!

### **Check-out**

### **Closing Words**

When you feel like quitting, think about why you started. - Aly Juma