

Sermon: “Let it Be a Dance” (Laurel)

I wonder what comes to mind when you think of dancing. Or, more specifically, when you remember yourself dancing.

Maybe it was at your wedding, or a friend’s, maybe it was at a club or a house party when you were in college, maybe it was in church. Or maybe it was watching your child dance, learning how to inhabit their body, how it could move.

I suspect, in those memories when you were truly dancing - without restraint - I suspect in those moments you felt full. Full of life and abundance and possibility, or maybe the dance was one of deep longing, maybe it was a moment filled some other feeling, but I suspect you weren’t numb or checked out.

We’ve been talking about courage this month, that practice of living from your center, returning to the guidance of your heart. But courage is hard, dare I say impossible, when we’re emotionally numb or checked out or guarded by cynicism.

So then what? How do we begin to feel warm again, begin to know our own hearts.

We do the things that return us to ourselves. Spiritual practices - those acts that help us to attune to our inner worlds. We often think of things like meditation or prayer when talk about spiritual practices, things that are associated with religious traditions, but I think that’s limiting. Maybe prayer is a big part of your inner world, or maybe it’s just not. The question is what helps you feel fully present and attuned. Maybe it is meditating or yoga, or maybe it’s gardening or painting or writing, maybe it’s dancing.

We UUs can be guilty of being so in our thoughts and our brains that we forget about the body - intellectualism runs deep in our history, after all. But being alive is defined by embodiment - there is no life without a physical form. So I want to invite us all to find a little more fullness in our bodies, a little more playfulness or curiosity, a little more buoyancy.

And I want to honor that attuning more fully to our bodies can be daunting, especially for anyone who has experienced trauma. Our bodies hold those experiences and are trying to keep us from being flooded, so let’s employ great gentleness and self-compassion around how and when and with whom we choose to express our embodiment.

Because true courage means that we're paying attention to our inner world, to our intuition and our limits, to our pain and our desires. Bypassing our own truth is the opposite of courage.

Maybe you love to dance, or maybe you wish you did, or maybe something else entirely helps you feel more fully alive and in your body. I want to encourage you to find those things, to make space for them. Maybe, like Phyllis, that means signing up for a dance class decades after you stopped dancing, or maybe it's something else altogether. Maybe it's starting to sing again or learning tai chi or going back to a yoga practice you used to love.

Or maybe it means being gentle and checking in with yourself to serve your body's needs in this moment. Maybe your embodied practice is listening to the wind in the leaves or smelling the crisp earthiness of the autumn air. Maybe slowing down is the thing that will best nurture you, even if you can only find a few moments of true presence.

The practice of courageous living is driven by a desire to know oneself and live in attunement with your deepest needs, values, and knowing. Finding our way back to the place of courage in the busyness of life is an imperfect dance, and yet might be one of the most important practices for a well-lived life.

I hope you find the things that bring you back to yourself.

Amen.

I'll invite Dan and Phyllis up for another and everyone is invited to join in however you feel moved.