

**Advent III – Joy ~ Celtic Christmas  
“Living Into the Dream”  
Sermon by Karen Hilfman Millson  
St. Paul’s United Church, Orillia  
December 13, 2009**

One of the good resources  
that I have come across  
that captures the transition  
that Joseph moves through  
from being afraid,  
then shifts  
from choosing to conform  
and choosing life ...  
is the song  
that Peg has Joseph sing  
in the play  
that is a letter to Zechariah.  
I’ve asked Peg to sing it  
as a part of my sermon this morning...

“Dear Zachariah”

In the play  
“Birth of Hope”  
that Peg Eberhard wrote  
that UCW #2 is doing this Wednesday evening –  
the focus  
is on the transition  
each of the key characters –  
(Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph)  
go through  
as they move from hopelessness,  
fear and despair  
to the birth of hope within them...  
as each one makes room  
in their hearts  
for the message of the angels to be lived...  
a message that is clear –  
“do not be afraid”.  
And a quote on courage that I love is  
by Rollo May:  
“The opposite of courage in our society,  
is not cowardice, it is conformity.” (repeat \*)

1. The message “Do Not Be Afraid”  
came to Zechariah  
when the angel arrived  
to tell him his prayers had been answered  
and his wife of older years  
would bear a child  
and he would name that child John.  
Zechariah did not trust the words of the messenger  
and instead was filled with fear...  
and his fear silenced him  
from all the months of waiting for the birth  
until the day he confirmed the message of the angel  
and wrote upon the tablet after his son was born –  
his name is John –  
and then he could exclaim with joy –  
silenced no longer.

The message  
“Do Not Be Afraid”  
comes to Mary  
in the moment when she is being asked to give of herself –  
and make a difference  
that has the potential to profoundly effect the world. –  
Do Not Be Afraid – for God is with you.  
– Every child – a beloved child of God –  
– everyone of us – wrapped in a cloth ... of love.  
– And yet –  
– our minds continuously fill with fear.  
And so the mythical messengers keep coming  
and say “Fear Not”.

2. The words “Do Not Be Afraid”  
were spoken to Joseph in a dream –  
“do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife”  
... and Joseph  
– who thought  
he had chosen the proper path  
of quietly dismissing Mary as his betrothed,  
changed directions  
and chose a different path...  
a path which placed him in a collision course  
with ridicule and dishonour  
but a pathway that aligned him with God’s dream,  
aligned him with honouring the wisdom within  
and the message of the dream ..  
living into the dream was the choice he made.

Do Not Be Afraid –  
the angel messengers keep coming and sharing.  
“Fear Not”.

Ralph Waldo Emerson  
is credited as saying:  
“Whatever you do,  
you need courage.  
Whatever course you decide upon,  
there is always someone to tell you that you are wrong.  
There are always difficulties arising  
that tempt you to believe your critics are right.  
To map out a course of action  
and follow it to an end requires courage.

Soren Keifbegaard noted that:  
to dare is to lose one’s footing momentarily.  
To not dare is to lose oneself.

Ambrose Redmoon notes:  
courage not the absence of fear,  
but rather the judgment that something else  
is more important than fear.

And as Mary Ann Radmachten wrote –  
Courage doesn’t always roar.  
Sometimes courage is the little voice  
at the end of the day  
that says “I’ll try again tomorrow.”

Courage  
was the topic at the November Sunday Morning Women’s Group.  
Courage was defined as :  
- the ability to confront fear,  
pain, risk, uncertainty, or intimidation;  
the ability to act rightly in the face of popular opposition,...  
or discouragement.

A quote on courage was given to define course:  
“to go against the dominant thinking of your friends,  
of most of the people you see everyday,  
is perhaps the most difficult act of heroism you can perform.”  
(Theodore H. White).

Then we were asked  
to reflect on two questions in our small groups:  
1) What stories do you have of times of personal courage?  
2.) Can you think of a time when you regret  
not having had the courage to speak up?

Courage.  
Anais Nin wrote that  
“Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one’s courage.”

Erica Joy wrote:  
“I have not ceased being fearful,  
but I have ceased to let fear control me.  
I have accepted fear as part of life –  
specifically the fear of change,  
the fear of the unknown;  
and I have gone ahead despite the pounding in my heart  
that says: turn back... turn back.

Think about those two questions  
in your life just for a moment:  
1) What stories do you have of times of personal courage?  
2) Can you think of a time when you regret  
not having had the courage to speak up?

Though I can now think of moments of courage –  
which are usually ones that fit the quote –  
“courage is fear that has said its prayers”  
*(Dorothy Bernard)*  
In moments such as –  
when I walked in to be with a family  
in very tragic circumstances  
filled with anxiousness –

but on that Sunday morning  
I could think of far more stories of times  
I regret not having the courage to speak up.

The one I shared that morning  
goes back to the fall of 1977.  
I was doing my degree in drama.  
We had a professional director  
for our full length play that semester  
and I was in it.

At the very first class  
we were told we would fail if we didn't show up for rehearsal  
and that if we had any conflicts with the schedule  
we needed to declare them now.

I checked the schedule.  
I had two major conflicts –  
I told him about the first one –  
I was co-ordinator for the show for the Miss Acton Fall Fair –  
“Can't you get out of it?”  
“We've been working on it for a year.”  
“Let someone else do it.”  
“It's done by all past Miss Acton's and I'm one of them.”  
Okay – but just the Friday night not the Saturday.”

Well that request had taken so much out of me  
that I clammed up about the second one  
as the director glared around the room  
and defied anyone to speak up.

The one I did not name –  
was that my family was going with my sister to Washington, DC  
to be with her as she prepared for her wedding...  
and to be outside after  
to greet them and celebrate with them  
after she and her husband were married in the Mormon Temple.  
We would have been gone for the Friday night rehearsal  
and the all-day Saturday rehearsal  
and I simply couldn't find the courage to speak.  
When the weekend arrived  
I was so conscious of my whole family leaving,  
conscious of when they would arrive  
and all the details that followed.  
I was walking around feeling sick  
but also thinking I was being a “good” student..  
and I always wanted to considered committed and good at what I did.  
But then I arrived at rehearsal on the Saturday morning ...  
(to sit there for most of the day  
in my bit part of four lines  
acting like a ditzy secretary playing with her hair all day) ...  
to find out that Simon, the lead actor –  
wasn't going to be there that day.  
His dad was coming into town unexpectedly.  
I felt like someone had kicked me in the stomach.  
His Dad was from Toronto.  
We were in Guelph  
and he got permission to take the day off

with no apparent trouble! ...  
I have learned from that moment –  
again and again and again  
and my daughters have as well.  
We need to find the courage to speak  
so that together  
we can make decisions based on all the information.  
That doesn't mean that just because we speak –  
we're going to get things the way we want it –  
but at least its part of the mix as the decision is made.