

# What does it mean to be a people of **Strength**?

## To Share our Strength in Fellowship



The Rev. Kok-Heong McNaughton writes: “I am but a drop of water. Alone, I would disappear, dried up by the scorching sun or sucked up by the dry, thirsty earth. But together we can wear out stones. Carve out the Grand Canyon, make streams and rivers, and find our way to the sea.”

These words remind me of both the intensity of the heat and sun at this time of year, but also a piece of our congregation’s covenant *to share our strength in fellowship*.

What is strength and what makes us strong? Historically, we often celebrate courageous individuals and the acts they took, but that rarely reflects the whole story. History celebrates Rosa Parks’ courage in refusing to give up her seat on the bus in Montgomery, Alabama. What is not often retold is that Parks was a leader in the NAACP in Montgomery. Her act was not an isolated act of courage. It was planned and organized. She was acting with the support and efforts of community. Parks was also not the first to take this action. Previous efforts had been made, but this one was successful. It kicked off the Montgomery Bus Boycott which led to the desegregation of buses – and eventually public services – in the U.S.

The story that history is made by courageous individuals can disempower people and movements. When history remembers only the individual, not the communities, strategists, and families that are part of the story, we are led to believe “we could not be like

those leaders.” Or, we may think that our individual voice, gifts and vision are all that is needed to make change. The truth is *strong* is what we make each other. Love, relationship, community, and knowing that others support and care for us gives us courage and strength to keep on moving forward through the joys, and sorrows, the fears and challenges of living.

Given this, there is symmetry in our covenant that begins with love (*Love is our doctrine*) and ends in the strength we find in community (*to share our strength in fellowship*). During this month as we ask what is strength and how do we develop it in our lives, let us think about the ways that community and loved ones have given us strength. The ways we have found ourselves strengthened by community.

Slowly, a shift is occurring in our society. This turning point is the recognition that in our hyper focus on individualism, we have come to be increasingly disconnected. Loneliness and isolation are real factors affecting our well-being, our health and the quality of our communities and democracy. To this, the strength that is found in fellowship offers a new path—one that I hope we can continue to embrace, walk and celebrate. As summer arrives and some will say goodbye for a time, let us remember that even across distances, we are a community of courage and care, compassion and strength and strong is what we make each other.

*Rev. Susan*

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## Living the Theme: Peace

Choose one of the exercises below to engage the theme. Come to the meeting prepared to share how you tried to experience the theme and what you learned from the practice.

**A Be Someone's Hero**  
From Rev. Vanessa Rush Southern's book [This Piece of Eden](#):

“So, certainly we ought to hold up the lives of Martin Luther King Jr. and the heavenly host of saints and martyrs whose lives were courageous and bold. And certainly there are times to ask ourselves what we are willing to die for as a way of getting at what is worth living for.

Yet, on those days when we don't feel up to being the David against the Goliath of injustice or cruelty or ignorance, we can ask ourselves what small steps we are willing to take. We can build up our courage by taking our place as a snowflake (for good) and find solace and strength in the mounting pile of snow that builds as others do the same. The fact is, were we all to commit to a couple of small acts, done with great love, in the name of causes or concerns that worry us sick, the avalanches of this world would take care of themselves. And heroism would cease to be the realm of the few.”



Here's the exercise:

- Choose one situation in your life where your continued small acts of courage and love can make a difference.
- Take small but continuous action this month to affect that situation. It can be phone calls to a suffering friend, compassionately caring for a family member, volunteering for those in need, conscientious recycling, or sending letters to legislators.
- Keep a journal about your actions and how you felt as a result.
- Consider making this your next New Year's resolution.
- Be ready to share your experience in your Small Group

**B Family Activity: *The Power of Growth***  
Download the story, *Putting Dreams into Action*, by Lynn Ungar at <http://tinyurl.com/dreamstoaction>

Read the story, *Putting Dreams into Action*. Discuss with your children the story and the power in things that grow in the garden, whether vegetables or flowers or fruit on trees, as well as the power of ideas.

Discuss with your children, what they would like to grow and buy and plant those seeds. Watch each day to see what happens. Growth is slow at first, but if you watch closely there are many changes. Imagine the power required just for the seed to break open and for the seedling to push upward.

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## Questions to Live With

Simply look over these questions and find one that “hooks” you. Live with it for a while. Allow it to regularly break into – and break open – your ordinary thoughts. Then come to your group prepared to share the journey.

1. **What kinds of strengths do you see in yourself?** How do you share those strengths in your community?
2. Who have you empowered with your strength? In what way? Or **who has empowered you?**
3. Have there been times where something you thought was a **weakness turned out to be a strength?** Or the opposite?
4. In what ways do you feel spiritually strong? **How would you like to strengthen your spirituality?**
5. Is there a time when you **held strong on an issue** despite pressure from others?
6. What are the characteristics of a strong community, family, or congregation?
7. What are some examples of **strength in nature?**
8. Masculinity is often associated with strength. In what ways is that changing? **How do you view gender and strength?**
9. **What are your sources of inner strength?**
10. Strength can take many forms. **What are some ways strength is demonstrated** (eg: control, stubbornness, determination, courage, resilience)? How do we reflect on ways that strength might be either helpful or harmful?
11. If you could have one **superpower**, what would it be?
12. Do you have a **role model or mentor** who helps you feel strong?



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# What does it mean to be a people of **Strength**?



## Wise Words

**Strength:** An inner determination and capacity that enables a person to deal with difficulties.

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The greatest demonstration of power and security is to actually make oneself defenseless, to become as comfortable with one's weaknesses as possible.

*Mark Manson*

Continuous effort—not strength or intelligences—is the key to unlocking our potential.

*Winston Churchill*

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.

*Lucille Clifton*

Perhaps I am stronger than I think.

*Thomas Merton*

What does strength mean to me? Strength of character; staying true to one's principles and purposes even when they are under relentless attack; persistence when the goal seems almost impossible; steadfast loyalty to each other; a firm belief that loving kindness will eventually triumph over hatred and prejudice.

*Small Group Facilitator*

Permanence, perseverance and persistence in spite of all obstacles, discouragements, and impossibilities: It is this that in all things distinguishes the strong soul from the weak.

*Thomas Carlyle*

Meditation is like a gym in which you develop the powerful mental muscles of calm and insight.

*Ajahn Brahm*

The measure of a man's estimate of your strength is the kind of weapons he feels that he must use in order to hold you fast in a prescribed place.

*Howard Thurman*

Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will.

*Mahatma Gandhi*

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# What does it mean to be a people of **Strength**?



## Wise Words

“Invictus”

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul.

*William Ernest Henley*

Growing older is like climbing a mountain: the higher  
you get, the more strength you need, but the further  
you see.

*Ingmar Bergman*

Should you shield the canyons from the windstorms,  
you would never see the true beauty of their carvings.

*Elisabeth Kübler-Ross*

Tina Turner is someone that I admire, because she  
made her strength feminine and sexy.

*Beyoncé Knowles*

All you need is deep within you  
Waiting to unfold and reveal itself,  
All you have to do is be still  
And take time to seek what is within,  
And you will surely find it.

*Eileen Caddy*

“Strength” makes me think of how excited little chil-  
dren are to get bigger and stronger. I'd probably en-  
joy spending a little time each day remembering  
how fully-grown I am, and thanking my body for all  
of the things it's done for me over the years.

*Worship Associate*

I love those who can smile in trouble, who can gath-  
er strength from distress and grow brave by reflec-  
tion. 'Tis the business of little minds to shirk, but  
they whose heart is firm, and whose conscience ap-  
proves their conduct, will pursue their principles un-  
to death.

*Leonardo da Vinci*

A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the  
strength to persevere and endure in spite of over-  
whelming obstacles.

*Christopher Reeve, Unitarian Universalist*

Skill to do comes of doing.

*Ralph Waldo Emerson, Unitarian*

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# What does it mean to be a people of **Strength**?



## Wise Words

To live life to the end is not a childish task.

*Boris Pasternak, Hamlet*

I believe that whatever good or bad fortune may come our way, we can always give it meaning and transform it into something of value.

*Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha*

One day at a time.

*Alcoholics Anonymous*

Nothing is so strong as gentleness, and nothing is as gentle as true strength.

*Calvin Coolidge*

Where there is no struggle, there is no strength.

*Oprah Winfrey*

Fortitude is the marshal of thought, the armor of the will, and the fort of reason.

*Francis Bacon*

Back in the 80's, when we wanted to change the wording to eliminate sexist language, I suggested "share our strength with others" in place of "serve mankind in fellowship." I had just read at that time some sort of theological report (Alban Institute?) that claimed UU's, although small in numbers, had some of the wealthiest, most successful and most highly educated members of any denomination. I thought we ought to celebrate our advantages and call on our

selves to share them in ways that might be expected of a people so richly blessed—in other words, include in our covenant something suggestive of social justice. What I had in mind was sharing our strength with those *outside* our congregation, but another member had a slightly different take on it and proposed sharing our strength "in fellowship," which sounded to me like simply throwing more potluck dinners! Anyhow, a vote was taken at our annual membership meeting and a majority wanted the fellowship version. (But sometimes I still mutter *share our strength with others* under my breath.)

*Small Group Facilitator*

"A people of strength" consists of individuals of strength. We each have strengths and weaknesses. Knowing what they are allows us to develop the strengths and leave the weaknesses to fade. Being strong can either mean hanging on or letting go, and this is where wisdom comes in. Strength without wisdom is just force. Strength also involves the ability to be flexible, to adapt quickly to "Plan B" when necessary.

All of this individual strength starts with being centered. Acting from a strong personal core. But being "a people of strength" is a team effort. People of moral strength create strong congregations, and strong congregations mean a strong denomination. The whole is greater than its parts.

*Small Group Facilitator*

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# What does it mean to be a people of **Strength**?



## Wise Words

### “Still I Rise”

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?  
Why are you beset with gloom?  
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells  
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,  
With the certainty of tides,  
Just like hopes springing high,  
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?  
Bowed head and lowered eyes?  
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,  
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?  
Don't you take it awful hard  
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines  
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?  
Does it come as a surprise  
That I dance like I've got diamonds  
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame  
I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain  
I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear  
I rise  
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear  
I rise  
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.  
I rise  
I rise  
I rise.

*Maya Angelou*

### “Dreams”

Dreams bring hope  
Hope gives courage  
Courage builds strength  
Strength prompts determination  
Determination helps us  
Fulfill our dreams.

*Brenda Meier-Haus*

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# What does it mean to be a people of **Strength**?



## Recommended Resources

### **Books:**

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For Adults:

When Breath Becomes Air by Paul Kalanithi

Strength in What Remains by Tracy Kidder

For Young Adults:

The Boy in the Wooden Box: How the Impossible

Became Possible by Leon Leyson

For Children:

The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn

The Little Engine That Could by Watty Piper

The Changing Maze by Zilpha Keatley Snyder

The Mightiest Heart by Lynn Cullen.

### **Articles and Websites:**

The Science of Resilience

<http://tinyurl.com/science-of-resilience>

Gratefulness: A Source of Strength by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

<http://www.gratefulness.org/resource/source-of-strength/>

### **Videos and Music:**

The song "Standing" by Patty Griffin

<http://tinyurl.com/patty-griffin-standing>

The song "You Can Do This Hard Thing" by Carrie Newcomer

<http://tinyurl.com/carrie-newcomer>

The Weakness of Strength video by The School of Life

<http://tinyurl.com/weakness-of-strength>

Fortification: Join our intern minister, Emrys Staton, for a summer discussion and skill-building series using videos from Standing on the Side of Love. The group will meet every other Sunday after worship services to strengthen our justice leadership. For more info, contact Emrys at [emrysstaton@phoenixuu.org](mailto:emrysstaton@phoenixuu.org).

SPiritual SUSTENANCE FOR MOVEMENT

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