

Opening Words

“Resilience is really a secular word for what religion was trying to say with the word faith. Without a certain ability to let go, to trust, to allow, we won’t get to any new place.” -Richard Rohr

Morning Music

Jules, Mitch, & Emmett Craft: “I Am Not Okay” by Jellyroll

Chalice Lighting

The Wisdom that Hums Beneath *

Rev. Michelle Collins

We light this flame for the wisdom that hums beneath thought in our heartbeat, our breath, the subtle flutter that says: you are still here. We light this chalice to remember resilience begins in the body’s quiet language, whispering us along.

Hymn

#100, *I’ve Got Peace Like a River*

Story for All Ages

Parts! By Tedd Arnold

Meditation

I would love to live
Like a river flows,
Carried by the surprise
Of its own unfolding.
-John O’Donohue

Message

Embodying Resilience

When I was a young lass, I watched a lot of WWE with my older siblings. (For those unfamiliar, WWE is World Wrestling Entertainment. This organization brought us such heroes as Stone Cold Steve Austin, Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson, and Hulk Hogan.) One wrestler we adored was named Ric Flair. Watching him wrestle was one of the first times I heard the word *resilient*. I remember he was hit in the back of the head with a folding chair. In response, he got back up, chokeslammed his opponent, and the announcer marvelled at his great resilience. Being 10 (or so) years old, I assumed this word “resilience” referred to Mr. Flair’s great strength or perhaps his keen ability to lift a grown man by the neck and deliver a TKO after sustaining a head injury. He was unbreakable.

Come to find out, it was not his unyielding nature that gave Ric Flair the distinction of being resilient, but instead his unwillingness to stay down. The fact that he could use the time face-down in the ring to plan his next move and rest up is what made him such a champion. Ric Flair came to embody resilience in my mind. Many years down the road, this month’s theme has given me a chance to make some important connections and consider what resilience looks like in my own life.

I have never been hit with a folding chair, but, like many of you, I’ve experienced religious trauma, family woe, and even physical setbacks. And what phrases do we hear when we experience times of emotional exhaustion? I’ve been given advice telling me to *push through, don’t give up, tug harder on those bootstraps*. These words are kind-hearted and encouraging and have certainly been phrases that I’ve used to prop myself up. I would not say,

however, that these are complete pieces of advice. It seems that our emotional exhaustion is less about being down or giving up, but is more often the result of gripping too tightly.

Do you remember those religious, familial, and physical troubles I referenced a moment ago? Well, my response to those experiences was to become a certain kind of girl. The persona that best served me earlier in life was to be tough, and independent, and a person who should not be trifled with. That abrasiveness saved me from being eroded by those challenges. The real issue for me came when I clung to that persona long after it had ceased to serve me. When I was experiencing the worst of my rheumatoid arthritis flairs, I had to make a very difficult shift: let down my defenses and ask my family to accommodate me so I could attend to my pain and listen to my body. And wouldn't you know it? They delighted at the chance to help me and share their love. And while I can still be tough, abrasive, and quite independent, it has been a relief to have the chance to set the bravado down sometimes. In fact, sometimes I'm quite dainty and in need of TLC. Gripping that emotional defense that I created was exhausting. Letting it go has freed up energy that I didn't know I was hemorrhaging. What are some other things we cling to besides past versions of ourselves? Expectations? Fairness? Control? Being understood? A particular future? Letting go of all that noise is not the same as giving up. It is not defeat. It's simply a realignment, orienting oneself to become adaptable. Resilience for me isn't so much measured by what I take on, but what I have the wisdom to set aside. Perhaps the encouragement of *don't give up* could be altered to *let go of this thing so that you have the energy to take care of what is most important*.

Psychological flexibility is a term that was coined in the early 2000s in relation to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. It is shown to be one of the best predictors of long-term wellbeing. *Psychological flexibility* is defined as the ability to be present, open to experiences, and capable of adjusting behavior to align with personal values, even when facing difficult thoughts or emotions. Being psychologically *inflexible* would be to say, "I will not be okay if the outcome is anything other than what I'm expecting." An adaptable, resilient mindset would instead say, "I will meet whatever comes next." That shift in alignment comes from letting go of expectations and control. Being tough and untrifle-able served me well ...until it didn't. I could not have the depth, trust, and vulnerability I have with my family if I had insisted on clinging to the old idea of myself. Allowing them in has not made me less independent or tough. In fact, it has helped me establish new ways to explore those traits. Adjusting that behavior to align with evolving personal values has led to the deepest and most supportive relationships I have ever had.

The world at this moment is chaotic and frightening. I find myself clinging to the way things used to be, channeling too much energy into conjuring a past reality that I wish we could get back to. But this chaotic world needs my energy *now*, and I know that if I can stop negotiating with what is uncontrollable, enormous energy becomes available for what is. Resilience is not the art of holding on at all cost, but of figuring out what needs to be carried forward and what can be set aside.

As we learn in the coming weeks about resiliency practices from Matt and past examples of resilience from Naomi and Sonja, I hope you will challenge yourself to embody resilience. Think about the weights you carry, the ideas about yourself or your world that you're clinging to. What aspects must be carried forward and what can you release to liberate the energy that was being used? When the universe hits *you* in the back of the head with a folding chair, will you stay down? Will you continue with the same old moves? Will you cling relentlessly to anger toward your opponent? Instead, I hope you'll take the opportunity to reevaluate, get back up, and deliver the universe your own version of a graceful chokeslam. May it be so.

Hymn

#86, *Blessed Spirit of My Life*

Closing Words

To live in this world

you must be able

to do three things:

to love what is mortal;

to hold it

against your own bones knowing

your own life depends on it;

and, when the time comes to

let it go,

to let it go

-Mary Oliver