Embracing *Courage*

an invitation to a new program year

"Courage is the measure of our heartfelt participation with life, with another, with a community, a work; a future."

-David Whyte

The weight section of the gym used to scare me. *A lot*. To be more specific, what I thought people would think of me when they saw me lifting the small weights is what scared me. I was not well versed in proper lifting form, I was considered "scrawny" all my life, and I was terrified of making a fool of myself. I believed the lie that I didn't belong there. I really had to stretch myself to grow in the ways I was determined to.

It took me six months before my "gym-intimidation" began to fade. Every time I parked my car in the lot, I had to muster up any courage I could find to walk through that gym door.

A year and a half later, that feeling is fleeting and rare. Every time I park my car now, I am reminded of the courage I had to find to even unbuckle my seatbelt and go inside. What once felt like a sheer act of the will, is now folded into my life as a habit. My body now craves the movements I used to fear, and I no longer question my place at the weight bench (*not without some disgruntlement about my bench press….*).

This fall, I am inviting us to draw upon our courage as we enter a new program year at Redeemer. The word "courage" comes from the French word for heart; "*cœur*". Courage draws out of each of us a more heartfelt participation with our own life, with our families, with our community, with a future we will shape together.

We will have many opportunities to courageously follow Jesus together this year. The first thing

you discover when you're chasing after Jesus is that it will stretch your heart. The stretch we feel might be unfamiliar, risky, or a sheer act of the will. It will leave us sore.

Like any new gym routine, the muscles we will stretch in new ways will leave us sore. We might be uncomfortable at times. But the only way that new muscles, new capacities, new abilities, new habits are gained are through consistency and courage.

As we begin a new program year this Sunday, I want to invite you to allow your heart to be stretched in new ways. To go into a new heartfelt participation with our community. What are the ways we can flex our spiritual muscles a bit?

- **Order your week around Sunday worship**

  Church cannot happen without you. Participation and being present for the public worship of the church is a baptismal promise we affirm at our adult profession of faith in our Confirmation. Sunday attendance is not to boost institutional ego- but to build the "reflexes" of love into our spiritual muscles. Of course, it is not a sin to miss church. Life happens! But the Sunday Assembly is lesser without you there. And the world is blessed by your participation. What does building this habit look like for you?

- **Engage Learning and Formation**

  Ideally, church is the place for us to explore the big questions we have and provides a community to support our wondering. One of the gifts of our Christian Tradition is that fellow humans have been thinking about some of the same questions for 2000 years. There is great room to explore. Sunday Adult Forums and Seasonal Offerings are for you to go deeper than we can normally go in the Sunday Liturgy. Ongoing learning will stretch your mind and heart. What are you curious about?

- **Be Community**

  We enjoy a renewed sense of community and fellowship. Church is one of the last places left in society where we can gather together across differences and find common ground in love. Our coffee hour is alive and well. At a time of cultural division, we practice compassionate unity in the name of Christ. How can we become more connected?

- **Be People on a Mission**

  Nothing stretches our hearts more than service to our neighbors in need. Our liturgy ends with a sending. We are gathered to be fed and SENT to serve. We have several opportunities to serve others through our mission partnership with Darby Mission. Along

with collecting supplies and food for Chester Eastside. We are beginning to expand the accessible entrance to become a small food pantry. What are some other needs you see in your context?

- **Gathering in the Gifts**

  To celebrate our Centennial, we are launching our Forward in Faith Capital Campaign. Our goal is to raise $100,000 to move us forward into the next one hundred years of ministry. Redeemer's ongoing witness cannot happen without you. We are seeking partners to be a critical part of bringing Redeemer into the 21st century. Out of a place of strength, we hope to increase our capacity for new ministry and growth, to become a church of our time and place. How might you be invited to partner with us?

- **Development and Dreaming**

  As part of our ingathering of gifts, we are taking this opportunity to dream together about what kind of church we want to be moving forward. We have a great opportunity right now to shape our future. In this season of growth, we will be engaging tools and exercises as a community that will help us see ourselves, our community context, and our purpose more clearly. Our goal is to increase our capacity for new skills and increase our freedom to serve more widely. These will stretch us- but their aim is to help us become more faithful, healthy, and effective. What an exciting time to dream as a community about our future.

This is an invitation to you and your family to embrace courage. We have work to do. We have people to love. We have a community to put our heart into. But do not be afraid! The Good News remains Good- God gives the growth. And Jesus walks with us. We follow a Savior whose sacred heart was stretched as far as the cross to include you and me in his redeeming work. He does not abandon us. But leads us by the Holy Spirit.

I look forward to stretching and flexing new muscles together this year. I promise to put in the sweat and get sore alongside you. It is a privilege of my life to serve this community as your priest and pastor in this thrilling chapter of Redeemer's story. *We get to write this next chapter.* Let's write it together, with brave hearts and open hands.

With my whole heart,

Fr. Josh

