

**“She Was Warned.... And Yet She Persisted”**  
**A Sermon by**  
**The Reverend Bill Clark**

She was born on July the twelfth in Mingora, a small town in the Swat district in southwest Pakistan. Her father was an educator who loved learning and ran a school in Swat adjacent to the family's home. He was known as an advocate for education in Pakistan, which has the second highest number of out of school children in the world, and became an outspoken opponent of Taliban efforts to restrict education and stop girls from going to school.

She was named after Malalai, a Pashtan heroine – and a true heroine young Malala turned out to be! She became an advocate for the education of girls – even after the Taliban forbid it and were destroying all the girl schools. Malala and her father received continual death threats. Despite all the dangers she wrote a BBC blog under a pseudonym about fears her school would be attacked and the increasing military activity in Swat. Television and music were banned, women were prevented from going shopping and then her father was told that his school had to close.

Later, Malala was featured in a documentary made for The New York

Times and was revealed as the author of the [BBC blog](#).

In 2011, she received Pakistan's first National Youth Peace Prize and was nominated by Archbishop Desmond Tutu for the International Children's Peace Prize. In response to her rising popularity and national recognition, Taliban leaders voted to kill her.

On October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012, as Malala and her friends were travelling home from school, a masked gunman entered their school bus and asked for Malala by name. She was shot with a single bullet, which went through her head, neck and shoulder. Two of her friends were also injured in the attack.

Malala survived the initial attack but was in a critical condition. She was moved to Birmingham in the United Kingdom for treatment at a hospital that specializes in military injuries. She was not discharged until January, 2013 by which time she had been joined by her family in the UK.

The Taliban's attempt to kill Malala received worldwide condemnation and led to protests across Pakistan. In the weeks after the attack, over 2 million people

signed a right to education petition, and the National Assembly swiftly ratified Pakistan's first Right To Free and Compulsory Education Bill. In 2014 Malala went on to win the Nobel Peace Prize at the age of 17 — the youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner in history. *She was warned – she was shot – and yet she persisted!*

This was the first example, which came to my mind after I wrote the title to this sermon. (story of title first)

I mean there was the obvious one, which we will get to – but for this young, young girl after being shot in the face – still and continues to persist on the education of women and girls in a country where ones life is threatened for taking such a stand.

Where does the courage come from taking such a stand – especially at such a young age?

"Courage, wrote poet and author, Maya Angelou, is the most important of all the virtues, because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently. You can practice any virtue erratically, but nothing consistently without courage."

Does living under such oppressive regimes and restrictions organically bring that courage to the forefront? Does the passion for education and equality help to give rise to this courage? Or is courage the result of Newton's law stating a body at rest stays at rest unless it is acted upon by an external force. Isn't oppression and discrimination the external force that gives rise to the courage needed to survive?

Because clearly courage like this is an internal force – the results of oppression and forced submission.

Gender equality has long been a tremendous issue in this country for decades. Look at the Suffragettes movement in gaining the right to vote. Unitarian's own Susan B. Anthony's story of her arrest in walking into a polling booth and casting her vote for the next President of the United States. When called before the judge and asked how does she plead her response was: "Guilty! Guilty of trying to uproot the slavery in which you men have placed us women. Guilty of trying to make you see that mothers are as important to this country as are the men. Guilty of trying to lift the standard of womanhood, so that men may look with pride upon their wives awareness of public affairs."

She paused only a moment.

“But your Honor, not guilty of acting against the Constitution of the United States, which says no person is to be deprived of equal rights under the law. Equal rights! How can it be said that we women have equal rights, when it is you and you alone who take upon yourselves the right to make the laws, the right to choose your representatives, the right to send only your sons to higher education. You, you blind men, have become slaveholders of your own mothers and wives.”

The judge sat dumbfounded.

“I am forced to fine you \$100.00.”

“I will not pay it! Said Susan Anthony.

“Mark my words the law will be changed.” And with that she stormed out of the courtroom.

“Shall I bring her back?” asked the court clerk.

“No, let her go,” answered the judge. I fear that she is right, and the law will soon be changed.

Anthony died in 1906, 14 years before the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote, was ratified in 1920.

**She was warned – and yet she persisted!**

Herstory is full of stories of women at the forefront of courage, and persistence. In past year I think of Cecile Richards, President of Planned Parenthood. After the Center for Medical Progress released heavily-edited and misleading videos about Planned Parenthood’s health care practices in 2015, Planned Parenthood President Cecile Richards was questioned by the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, where she stood her ground against anti-abortion lawmakers on behalf of the health care organization that millions of Americans rely on every year for treatment.

I think of two new US Congress women; Ilan Omar a Somali-American former refugee who was elected to the House of Representatives from Minnesota in the 2016 election. One month after being elected, a Washington D.C. cab driver threatened to rip off her hijab after calling her “ISIS.”

In October, she told The Huffington Post that “Our democracy is great, but it’s fragile. It’s come through a lot of progress, and we need to continue that progress to make it actually ‘justice for all.’”

And then there is Senator Tammy Duckworth. Senator Duckworth is the second Asian-American female senator, and is the first woman senator to have been in combat. She’s a decorated Army Veteran who won a seat in the Illinois Senate in

the 2016 election, but not before being on the receiving end of a racist comment about her Thai heritage from her GOP opponent.

**She was warned – and yet they all persisted.**

“Persistence has changed the course of history,” wrote Chelesa Clinton, author of a new book titled: “She Persisted,” thirteen stories of girls and women who changed the world.

“I’m so excited to share stories of girls & women who didn’t take no for answer.”  
The book is to be released on May 30th!”

In the research for this sermon the list of girls and women who persisted – again and again were numerous and on-going. One young girl on every list was that of Ruby Bridges. Most of you know the story, hopefully, of Ruby Bridges. She was the first young black girl integrated into an all white school. Marshalls had to escort into the school daily as young Ruby walked through crowds of angry protestors calling her all sorts of names and threatening her. Nevertheless, Ruby walked on. Not only did she walk on but she was known to stop and say a prayer for those who hated her.

*Dear God, try to forgive those people. Because even if they say those bad things, they don’t know what they are doing. So can you forgive them, just like you did those folks a long time ago when they said terrible things about you.*

**She was warned – and yet she persisted!**

And of course we honor and celebrate our own Senator Elizabeth Warren, who was silenced by Mitch McConnell, after trying to read a letter from Coretta Scott King on the Senate floor. I truly do not think poor ole Mitch had any idea what he unleashed with his statement; *“She was warned. She was given an explanation. And yet she persisted.”* Of course the very next day two male senators did the exact same thing with absolutely zero repercussions.

As today is mother’s day, the last woman I want to honor is my dear mum Ruth Clark. Mom’s persistence manifested in her refusal to accept

The no, Ruth you will not walk again, following a massive stroke at the age of 58. She persisted.

It was Christmas of 1979 and mom had been in recovery and rehabilitation following this stroke, which left her partially paralyzed and in a wheelchair. The doctor’s prognosis for her recovery were slim and we were told she would never walk again. My father hired a live in companion and nurse to help care for my mum. Gloria, herself recently recovered from a stroke had been working with mum for a few months prior to the Christmas holiday. Following the days spent

at the rehab center in physical therapy, mum and Gloria would return home and continue their own form of physical therapy. It was there Gloria would patiently and lovingly encourage and affirm my mother's slow movements. Under her guidance mum began, step by labored step, to relearn the simple art of walking. On the day before Christmas, unable to restrain her joy any longer, mum announced she had a Christmas present for us. Beginning at the corner of our long sunroom, with only her walker in hand, she moved patiently, courageously and for the first time in eleven months, singularly across the sun room. "Merry Christmas," she whispered.

If there was a pay-off for persistence the smile across her face was worth its weight in gold. She was beaming.

The gender gap is beginning to close in, slowly perhaps, but we are making equality in employment and history a priority. Movies such as, Hidden Figures, honoring the African-American woman behind our NASA programs is allowing the women in our nation to stand proud and finally being recognized.

Heck, within our own church community we have the; Mimi's, Dories, Doreen's, Diane's, Debbie's Judy's, Jenifer's, Jan's, Jeanne's, Joan's, Johanna's, Janet's, Emily's Esther's, Erika's, Nancy's, Sarah's, Sharon's, Susanna's, Sunny's, Sally's, Rita's, Rebecca's, Maria's, Mary's, Marriane's , MJ's, Chris's, Lucinda's, Leigh's, Lori's, Laura's, Celeste's, Pam's and sooo many more who help lead and guide this congregation with persistence, courage and catacombs of love.

To all the women who have been told NO,  
No you can't work here. No you can't be paid equally, No, you can't speak here,  
No, you can't control your own body, no, no, no – continue  
to stand your ground – be warned – listen to the explanation – and yet persist,  
and persist and persist and persist. This is the blessing for this day. *She was warned – and yet she persisted!*

Amen and Blessed Be