

## **Homily – Cultivating Courage**

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**Good Friday, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023 – St. Barnabas Episcopal Church**

*Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"*

On our first date, my husband brought up the subject of Jesus. He asked me about my beliefs and tradition. During that conversation, more than once, he proclaimed that "Jesus was the bravest man to ever live." His reasoning was because of Jesus' willingness to give up his life on the Cross.

I agreed with him. But, you know...Jesus was not only brave. He also had great courage. In truth, he cultivated courage throughout his life.

According to Merriam Webster's online dictionary, "*courage is the mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.*"<sup>1</sup>

Jesus' courage was motivated by his love for God whom he identified as his "Father in Heaven", and by his love and compassion for the people victimized by the Roman government's occupation of Israel and the Jewish religious leader's complicity with the Romans. He desired above all things to bring God's love, in the flesh, to give hope to those who were oppressed.

Jesus could be brave--in that moment--because he had prepared for the probability that his ministry would lead to his crucifixion. Yet, there is more than the crucifixion that we must consider here.

Going back to the beginning of Jesus' ministry, it was going to take great *courage* to stand before the people of Israel and proclaim: "Repent! The Kingdom of God has come near!"

We know his knowledge and understanding of the power of the God of Israel was instilled in him from an early age, else he would not have been at the Temple at age 12 wowing the teachers there.

But, then he spent time on a wilderness journey fortifying his faith. And finally, he presented himself ready to follow the course, the way of the Cross, at the waters of the Jordan.

Throughout his ministry Jesus strengthened his mind and heart to persevere in all difficulties that might arise through prayer and sharing the Word of God wherever he was--including in the synagogues and at the Temple in Jerusalem. Through his own works he saw the power of God in the healings and the raising of the dead that he performed.

Having prepared well for his departure, Jesus spent one last night with his faithful disciples. He now turned his attention to their needs. He taught them to love one another as he loved them. He washed their feet and broke bread with them. He took them to a favorite garden and asked them to stay awake and pray with him. This was as much for them as it was for him; praying together that they would all have courage to face what was to come.

This did not mean that he did not feel the pangs of fear as the time grew closer to giving up his earthly life--his human life. Once again, he strengthened his courage through prayer. Praying that his Father's will be done, he was ready.

But, sadly, his disciples, faithful though they meant to be, were not ready. They did not understand.

As the soldiers, police, chief priests and pharisees surrounded Jesus and arrested him, the disciples did not know what to do. And it seemed that Jesus wasn't doing anything!

Attempting some form of bravery Peter decides to take up the sword and defend Jesus. And Jesus says: *Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?*" I think he was really saying: "Don't worry. I got this!"

In all the time that they had spent with Jesus the disciples had never once witnessed him take up a sword against anyone; never once did he throw someone across the room or take out a weapon with intent to harm or worse. Never once did he suggest that he would ever do so.

Jesus is lead away secure in his faith with the courage to fulfill God's will for him to: *"be Love in all times and in all places--even to death"*; though falsely accused, beaten, and scorned.

But where did the faithful disciples go as Jesus is lead away? They dispersed! It seemed that they had lost their courage. They forgot, in that moment, everything Jesus had taught them. They went all human on him.

But Jesus did not get mad or yell at them that they were cowards.

I am convinced that Jesus wasn't worried about them. I am convinced that he knew that, because they were human, they needed time to collect themselves and had not really left him.

I believe **that** is exactly what they did. In fact, we know this, because soon after, they are showered with Holy Spirit and begin preaching the Good News that the "Kingdom of God is near." Those disciples are our example!

And aren't we, here tonight, so very grateful that Jesus' disciples mustered up their courage and did just as Jesus asked?

Don't we want to sit at the foot of the Cross and weep for the atrocity perpetrated on an innocent man who wanted nothing more than to bring people back to the love of God?

Aren't we filled with Holy Spirit and love for Jesus our Lord who taught us how to have courage and still be human?

Do we have faith that even though we falter sometimes, Jesus loves us, comforts us, and rekindles in us our own courage to follow him on his Way of the Cross which leads us to the promise of life everlasting?

Do we not feel a renewed sense that Jesus is calling us to continue his ministry to bring the love of Our Father in Heaven and his Son our Lord Jesus Christ to those who are downtrodden and oppressed in our time?

Let us fortify our own faith through prayer, feasting on the Word of God, and in communion with one another, build one another up that we may have the courage to boldly stand before the rulers of this world with nothing more than the voice of love and proclaim:

"Repent, the Kingdom of God has come near".

<sup>1</sup><https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/courage#:~:text=%3A%20mental%20or%20moral%20strength%20to,withstand%20danger%2C%20fear%2C%20or%20difficulty>