

“Compassion and Courage”

Luke 19:41-48

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Communion Devotion

Where did Jesus get this kind of courage? How was he able to walk into the eye of a storm and confront his enemies? What kept him from running for his life? What can we learn from him as we face stiff challenges and heavy responsibilities?

This is a Palm Sunday text. Jesus has joined a festive caravan headed to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. As he approached the city, he sent two of his disciples into a nearby village to get a colt that he could ride on the final leg of the journey. When they returned, Jesus mounted the colt and rode into Jerusalem as people waved palm branches and shouted encouraging words.

When Jesus topped the Mount of Olives, he did what was common to most pilgrims. He paused to look at the holy city.

He was overcome with emotion. “If you, even you, had only known what would bring you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes,” he said as tears flowed freely. It was obvious his heart was broken.

He did not turn, however, and head back to the countryside. Instead, he proceeded into Jerusalem and went to the temple. It was there that he overturned the tables of the money changers and drove out those selling animals for sacrifices. “My house will be a house of prayer,” he said, “but you have made it a den of thieves.”

He did not remain in seclusion the rest of the week, even though he was aware that the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. Throughout the week, he returned to the city and openly taught in the temple, this is until his arrest and crucifixion.

From where does this kind of courage come? If you asked the cowardly lion in the 1939 classic movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, he would tell you that it does not come from a con artist in the Emerald City. You recall that the lion joined Dorothy and her crew of misfits, a scarecrow and the tin man, on their search for those things they thought were missing in their lives. The lion could hardly wait to have an audience with the wizard and receive courage. How disappointed he was to discover that the wizard was no miracle worker, but merely a man pulling levers behind a curtain.

We know that courage doesn't come from a magician, but where can we find it? *I think it comes from within.* Hopes and dreams give birth to courage that compassion and deep convictions nurture.

I believe this was true for Jesus. One reason he was brave was because he had lofty hopes and dreams for this world and was passionate about pursuing them.

He dreamed of a world where “justice rolled down like a mighty stream” and people lived in peace. “Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven,” he taught his disciples to pray. His mission was to do his part to answer that prayer, whatever the cost.

He adopted this mission at the very beginning of his public ministry and never wavered. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,” Jesus read from Isaiah during his inaugural message in his hometown synagogue after his baptism, “because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” Luke 4:18-19.

Making the world a better place for all people to live was his purpose and overcoming evil trumped self-preservation. His compassion for the oppressed and strong convictions to help them never allowed him to take the easy way out and settle down in any number of villages that would have embraced him.

Are you in search of courage today? Dream noble dreams and aspire to reach them. Focus upon the people who need you to remain faithful to your calling and I believe you will find the same courage that Jesus did.

I also believe that courage comes from outside of us. Courage grows in the soil of encouragement. It blossoms as others reveal their confidence in us.

You may recall that all was not lost on the lion's trip to the Emerald City. His spirit soared when the wizard wisely pointed out that the lion's behavior revealed that he already had the courage for which he was searching. On several occasions, he acted courageously even though he was afraid. He just needed someone to recognize it and point it out to him, which the wizard did. As a result, the wizard gave the lion a medal of honor and bravery that he could wear around his neck as a reminder of his inner strength and courage.

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord," Jesus' fellow pilgrims chanted on Palm Sunday. They saw more than a Galilean carpenter or itinerant preacher that day. They saw a messenger sent from God to help them in their plight. This had to encourage Jesus.

Are you looking for courage today? Listen to family and friends that see your potential and believe in you. Courage grows in the soil of encouragement. Be an encourager and receive it from others.

Courage is also a gift from God. It is rooted in faith, the kind of faith that enabled Jesus to confront and overcome his fears.

Do you remember where Jesus was when he was arrested four days after Palm Sunday? He was in the Garden of Gethsemane praying. Faith and fear collided that night, as they had on other occasions, and his faith sustained him. God gave him the strength to do the difficult and He will do the same for you.

Do you need courage? Are you facing stiff challenges and heavy responsibilities? Are you grappling with complex problems or struggling with powerful temptations? Are you gripped with fear and wrestling with the desire to run away from those who need you or those who can help you?

Do you need to re-define a relationship, deal with an addiction, become a better student, go back to school, begin a new career, move in new directions after losing someone you depended heavily upon or become a bolder advocate for justice and peace?

How do you walk into the eye of a storm and face down your fears? Do what Jesus did. Listen to your heart. Dream noble dreams and pursue them passionately. Surround yourself with encouragers. Rely upon God and confront your fears with faith.

Talk to him about this as we gather around this table in his memory.