

“What Do You Need the Courage to Do?”

Matthew 26:36-46

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
Smoke Rise Baptist Church
Stone Mountain, Georgia
February 10, 2008

Communion Devotion

This is one of the most dramatic scenes in all of scripture. It is the kind of script that a film director loves and that was certainly true for Mel Gibson. He directed the 2004 film, “The Passion of the Christ,” and opened the movie with the gripping events that occurred in the garden of Gethsemane.

You recall that Jesus took his disciples to this garden on the edge of the Kidron Valley on the Mount of Olives immediately after the Last Supper in the Upper Room. It was a place they frequented often for solitude and prayer.

This night was different, though. They were not going to the garden to gaze at stars, rest or reminisce. Jesus’ heart was heavier than usual and his whole demeanor showed it. “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me” Matthew 26:38.

It was on this dreadful night and in this solemn place that Jesus was arrested by the authorities that were threatened by his message of justice, hope, peace and love. While others slept, Jesus was beaten and tortured and the next day he died a painful death on a cross not far from this garden. No wonder his heart was so heavy that night. He knew what was coming.

The part of this tragic story that captures my attention this morning is found in the last verse of our text. “Rise, let us go!” Jesus said to his disciples. “Here comes my betrayer!”

Can you imagine the courage that took? Instead of escaping in the dark or hiding behind rocks and trees, Jesus took the initiative and confronted his accusers.

Who is in control in this scene? You know, and it is not the ones with evil hearts and clinched fists.

This leads me to ask you a question. **What do you need the courage to do?** What intimidating challenges are you facing that require more courage than you have ever summoned?

Do you need to redefine a relationship, deal with an addiction, become a better student, go back to school, begin a new career or invest more money or energy into an existing business?

Do you need to change your attitude, confront your biggest fear, get out of your comfort zone, get on with your life after losing someone you depended heavily upon, reach out to a struggling friend or share your faith with someone that has none?

Do you need to walk into a new Sunday school class or down this aisle to place your membership in this church? Do you need to go on a mission trip or become a team leader on one of our trips?

For what are you waiting? Do you lack the courage to begin?

From where does courage come? How do you think Jesus would answer that? Don’t you wish the disciples had asked him and his answer had been recorded by one of the gospel writers. In some ways it has been revealed to us through his life and ministry. Let me tell you how his example speaks to me.

Courage comes from deep convictions. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me 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.

These were the words that Jesus read upon his visit to the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth after his baptism. “This day this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,” he told his audience. This was his mission in life and he embraced it and was passionate about it.

Courage comes from faith. What did he go to the garden of Gethsemane to do that night? He went to pray as he often did there and elsewhere. Jesus was a man of prayer. The relationship with his Father, whom he addressed as “Abba,” according to Mark, was intimate, meaningful and indispensable. It was from his Father that he found the strength he needed to do the difficult.

Courage comes from friends. Did he go to the garden that night alone? No, he took his disciples, with the exception of Judas. Even though they underperformed that night and did not watch and pray with him as he hoped, their very presence strengthened him to do what was right.

Let me recycle the opening question. **What do you need the courage to do?** Will you take the first step? While the bread and cup are passed, talk to God about clarifying your convictions, strengthening your faith and developing a support group. If you do, you will walk out of here a different person.