

Noticing Courage

Texts: I Samuel 17:32-49, Mark 5:21-34

Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church – August 15, 2021

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Scott Turow begins his novel *Presumed Innocent* with the words of a prosecuting attorney named Rusty. Rusty is explaining his approach to the jury when he is in court. Rusty says: “This is how I always start: ‘I am the prosecutor. I represent that state. I am here to present to you the evidence of a crime. Together you will weigh the evidence. You will deliberate upon it. You will decide if it proves the defendant’s guilt. ‘This man’ – and here I point...If you don’t have the courage to point...you can’t expect them to have the courage to convict. And so I point. I extend my hand across the courtroom. I hold one finger straight. I seek the defendant’s eye. I say: ‘This man has been accused...’” (from Craig Brian Larson, ed. Contemporary Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, & Writers. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996. p. 134). If you do not have the courage to point, you cannot expect them to have the courage to convict.

We continue our study of the discipline of noticing this week by noticing courage. Courage is an amazing trait, and there are times in our lives when we display it well and proudly and other times when we run from our ability to be courageous. In our texts for this morning from I Samuel and from the Gospel of Mark, we will notice characters in Scripture who were faced with a situation where they made courageous steps in faith. In the Gospel of Mark, the text opens with Jairus coming to Jesus frantically and hurriedly, looking for Jesus to come and heal his dying daughter. No doubt Jairus is desperate and wants Jesus to drop everything He is doing in order to attend to his daughter immediately.

However, the large crowd that has gathered around Jesus makes it impossible for them to do anything quickly. And then, the woman approaches Jesus. We hear about a

woman who had been suffering from hemorrhaging for over twelve years. She had endured a great deal during this time. She had been to every doctor known to be able to help. She had spent her entire life savings. And she received no help and no relief from any of her attempts.

But wait. This woman should not even be here. There are laws against this woman being around other people, much less coming up to Jesus and getting help from Him. She was prohibited from contact with others because the hemorrhaging was thought to make her unclean. Anything or anyone she would touch would be contaminated too and have to observe the ritual for becoming clean again. Leviticus, chapters 12 and 15, are quite clear about the provisions that must be made.

Bruce Main writes that this woman has been “socially stigmatized for over a decade! That meant going to the market in the late afternoon when no one was there; drawing water during the hot part of the day, when no one else was around; standing outside the synagogue, never allowed inside, sure she had been cut off from God; and missing out on physical intimacy – no hugs and no touching. It meant living with shame, inferiority, and diminished worth every day” (Bruce Main. Spotting the Sacred. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006. p. 124). Her last hope is to reach out and touch Jesus, but it comes with some risks – both for her and for everyone assembled there. Did she have the courage to do it?

I read a definition of faith in Bruce Main’s book, “Spotting the Sacred,” that says that “faith is putting ourselves in situations where if God does not show up, we are in trouble” (Main, p. 126). That is such a great definition and really shows how we need courage in our walks of faith. That definition could be used for this suffering woman and

also for David in our Old Testament story. However, we can also use that definition today. Have you ever relied on your faith to prevent you from getting into trouble? When have you been put into a position that has tested both your faith and your courage? Maybe, if we did not respond, we would be in real trouble. Maybe the trouble would not be so bad.

Immediately aware that power had gone out from Him, Jesus searches out for the source. “Forget about it,” is the disciples reaction. But Jesus will not relent. The woman approaches Jesus, out of fear. There would be serious consequences for her and for Jesus, for sure, as well as the rest of the crowd. So, this woman tells Jesus what she did and why she did it. She told Jesus “the whole truth.”

And look at how Jesus handles the situation – the unclean woman. He reacts to her with grace. “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.” The woman’s courage in this moment leads her both to a deeper faith – she trusted Christ with her infirmities and illness and her whole life – as well as receive a blessing from God. She is healed, whole, and complete again after twelve long years. She stepped out in faith, not knowing the outcome but believing that God would show up. And God certainly showed up.

The Bible is full of people who display courage – this woman, David, Moses, Ruth and Naomi, Deborah, Joshua. They are normal people who have been chosen by God to step out in faith, show some courage, and be a witness to God’s awesome power and might. Bruce Main writes, “I do not believe we are necessarily born courageous. Courage grows each time we step out and do what is right, what is just, what is true. Courage means speaking out when we know that something is being done wrong. It

means acting in ways that make our communities and workplaces reflect God's intentions for all people. It means creating families and schools that provide nurturing and loving space in which children can grow and get a great education. It means caring for the world God has lent us during our brief earthly pilgrimage. Courageous acts are not limited to heroes in movie dramas. Rather, courage can be demonstrated every day by schoolchildren and stay-at-home parents, CEOs and plumbers, pastors, and struggling adolescents" (Main, p. 137).

Where do you have opportunities in your life to show how courageous you are? Where and when this week can you stand up and step out in faith and make a stand for Jesus Christ or share your faith with someone or show the love and grace of God as Jesus did to the bleeding woman? Where will you need to show courage in the days, weeks and months ahead? Be strong and courageous, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Let us pray...

Lord, help us not to be governed by fear; help us not to be bound by the expectations of others; help us not to live in the cage of untruth; We pray for courage; courage to speak out; courage to speak up; and courage to act in ways that embody truth, faith and love. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.