



Courage to Be Last

February 16, 2025

Are we willing to become just a little bit more courageous?

Are we willing...just a little bit, to become just a little bit more courageous?

If ever there was a day for more courage to shine forth... to rise up in courage... If ever there was a day for us to become a little more courageous that's today. As I hear the news, I think the world needs us to become a little more courageous.

Because often the world tries to tell us what courage is, what it looks like, what we have to do so that others think we are being courageous. That courage is about being kind of showy, loud and larger than life, with superhuman strength, lots of bravery and heroic acts. But that definition makes courage rare, out of reach, and the world is wrong.

When I listen to the world's definition of courage, plenty of thoughts and feelings rise up in me, "**Well, I could never do that!**" I don't have any muscles. But which kind of take me off the hook, right? Whew!

But thankfully the Lord, and then later the Christ-like figure of Frodo in the Lord of the Rings, dismantle the world's faulty definition of courage. And they replaced the world's faulty thinking with a vision of courage that is of God and the truth, more of a quite but steeper path, more hidden, of being humble, gentle, power under to lift others up.

Reminding us that opportunities for being courageous like how Jesus modeled courage, is as close as our elbow, truly a daily occurrence, and actually takes more courage. **So, Lord, be our strength and courage today!**

Last week, learning of the gracious courage of Paul dealing with his "thorn in the flesh", Sponge Bob SquarePants. Too funny!

The gracious courage of Ranch Ricky and Jackie Robinson in fighting racism, George Mueller and his work with orphans, Mother Theresa living and honoring the poorest of the poor, and Desmond Dobs, fighting evil in World War II without a gun AND winning the Medal of Honor. Love that!

They exemplified having the courage to be gracious in difficult times...sounded like you had a good Sunday. Much thanks to Pastor Victor!

And now, our third week in our Courageous series. Focusing on how sometimes, we are courageous for our own sake and to achieve our own comfort. **But how can we be courageous for the sake of others and their wellbeing?**

Well, I just came off a week of being courageous for my own sake and my own comfort. I had another lovely staycation! And found myself stirring up my courage to tackle some much needed chores...downsizing and organizing all my closets, my walk-in closet, main hall closet, second bathroom closet and office closet and my sock drawer.

I needed courage to face the mess. That is a real type of courage! Well acquainted with the hours of dropping off items at Goodwill.

Oh, and I had fun! Shopping, eating out and then guilt at the cost...more cooking at home. I picked up another book, The Rose Code about World War II. A time when England and the world was exhibiting courage left and right, about Bletchley Park, the efforts and success of the British to break the enigma code, Nazi's and Italy's encoded war plans.

Kate Quinn's book is a master's class in how normal citizens made choices every day, forgoing their own comfort...for butter, chocolate, coffee, nylons and physical safety. Women courageously joining the work force for the first time, for the sake of the war effort, for the sake of others, so that others could live, survive, and come home.

Sometimes, we are courageous for our own sake and comfort. Yes, we need that kind of courage. But the deeper question and maybe the more important question...with so much suffering in the world these days, **is how can we be courageous for the sake of the wellbeing of others...so they can live, survive, and have a home?**

Because there are points in life where there are clear **"This is NOT about me"** moments. That we need to put ourselves second or third or even last. To find the courage to go to the end of the line, to be last, as we advocate for others, value others above us.

Some people's lives are centered around those other-focused moments. When you think of firefighters putting their lives at risk each day to save others...they are the last out of a burning building.

Or the staff in hospitals and nursing home whose purpose is to make sure the needs of patients are being met and they are getting the proper care they deserve. Who go home with their “dogs burning”. They are the last to sit down with feet and legs so tired, burning and cramping from being on their feet all day.

And then there are moments in our own lives when we get the opportunity to put others before us, to show mercy and compassion. Those moments arise sometimes in a parking lot, or on the job, making hygiene kits, dropping off soup at the neighbors or Northwinds. Others in the wake of rising oppression, when we lift up a quiet prayer, “**God have mercy.**”

Sometimes it’s in our own families or communities. In my family, I remember a time I fought for my brother’s life, to advocate for him with his addiction to alcohol. Like convincing my dad this was a real crisis, for the police to do wellness checks and for the hospital and doctors to override his free will and get him committed and into the system, and in to rehab.

Other times it’s with perfect strangers. Like when we give to UMCOR or to our local food shelves. These are the moments where we make decisions to have the courage to put others first, and our own wellbeing comes last.

From our text, Paul teaches us how to have the mindset of Christ, this courage to be last...produces fruit, fruit for others and ourselves, and fruit for all our relationships.

Immediately in the first verse Paul reminds us that whenever we step out to serve, whenever we take that first step and put ourselves last...we do so from abundance, a full tank, and the fullness of life that the Lord gives us.

In his genius, ironclad, rhetorical logical argument...Paul asks IF God has ever been good to the Philippians. And God had been good. THEN out of that goodness, already received, they had the courage and responsibility to be last, just like Christ did.

In verse one and then verse five, “**...IF you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, IF any comfort from his love, IF any common sharing in the Spirit, IF any tenderness and compassion, ² then...⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.**”

Paul lists the benefits they had received...encouragement, comfort, love. Benefits they received in knowing and loving God. And the joy in living and loving as a Christian. And we share in those same benefits as the Philippians.

So then, let us strengthen that Christ mindset, to have the courage to be last. And remember throughout Christ's ministry, it was his MO, Jesus was constantly making it his business to see the overlooked, to show mercy and compassion to the outcast and downtrodden, to break the social norms and even religious laws just to love, heal and save people.

Paul speaks to us today, loudly and clearly from this text, that there is not only encouragement, comfort and love but also unspeakable joy that comes from loving like Jesus. Fruits born of courage.

When we push past the pressures of society and the busyness of life and take time to actually see people and to show them some genuine compassion, when we choose not to be afraid to stand up for people, to celebrate others. There is fruit for all.

There is fruit the courage to be last produces. Fruit for the giver and the receiver, fruit for the observer and the one who overhears stories told later. Because in God's economy, by the Spirit's work, no one goes home hungry, depleted, or burned out.

We are to feast on fruits of this kind of courage, they are for all, every tank is filled to overflowing, all are satisfied and their joy is made complete.

This courage is again, not about us. Paul stresses in verses 3 and 4. **“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”**

We could live all year in to these two verses and not fully plumb its spiritual depths or live into all its implications. The importance of doing for others, but making sure that when we do, that it's not about us.

We've seen how some give money, do community service, help others...for personal or political gain. That manufactured photo op meant to communicate one thing and it ends up flopping...

Instead, let us have the mindset of Christ and Ranch Ricky and Jackie Robinson, the mindset of Christ and George Mueller, Mother Theresa and Desmond Dobb...**“Just one more Lord. Just one more.”**

Paul reminds us blessings come to us as we serve others with humility and as we, “**...value others above yourselves.**” The Lord is faithful and will pour back into us with blessings, replenishing every ounce we pour out.

Lastly, how this courage to be last is what it means to have the mind of Christ. It is our way to thinking and doing like Christ did. The last verse, verse five, calls us to, “**In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:**”

Christ’s mindset...remember the downward trajectory, to service and humility, power under? According to Paul, this is a mindset that we should all aspire to have, to serve with joy and humility, to boldly stand up for, speak up for and show compassion and mercy for others.

It is a mindset, a way of life for all ages. It is a mindset that is meant to influence all our relationships, all our conversations, all our interactions, with all people, in all places.

There is room for all of us to grow in this mindset. And there is room for all of us to be blessed, both by serving and thereby deepening our relationship with God.

But I want to say and maybe even need to say, I am so proud of us as it relates to having the courage to be last. This church has a proud history of serving others with the mindset of Christ, serving this community, and having relationships that are rich in acting just like Jesus.

This church, in one form or another, has lasted for the last 138 years. That’s a significant amount of time, a significant witness for Christ to others.

I am proud/we can be proud of those who have said yes to being on the two new task forces...for Outreach and for Youth. Working on behalf of the needs of others....material and spiritual.

We are proud of the Adult Discipleship team offering this church a consistent and conscientious variety of Christian educational materials. As they work on your behalf, for your spiritual growth and personal rootedness to Christ.

Proud of the SPR committee, working hard to prepare us for staff changes coming this fall.

Proud of all of you who give faithfully to the mission of this church and are praying for this church to continue to adapt and thrive. Very, very proud of all of

you who serve quietly, consistently, with excellence...without the need for applause or accolades or thanks.

I am proud of this church, in the many ways you are displaying the courage to be last, maybe...in the eyes of the world. But first in God's heart.

Let us close, not with a Time to Reflect, but in prayer.

Let us pray...

Holy Spirit, we thank you for your presence, as we strive to have the courage to be last. We pray that we may live together in spiritual unity and harmony. Help me to value the needs and concerns of another more than my own and keep me humble in heart and mind. Amen.