



*Courage to be Vulnerable*

**February 2, 2025**

“I will take it! I will take the ring to Modor. Though I do not know the way.”

Frodo’s famous moment. His famous line from Fellowship of the Ring. Where he decides he will undergo this crazy dangerous journey because it is the only way to defeat evil.

This moment reveals the depth of Frodo’s courage because as a young Hobbit from the Shire, he is the first to volunteer for this suicide mission. Even though he was surrounded by others who were bigger, stronger, and more seasoned to do the task.

And underlying his courage, in a moment of deep vulnerability, he offers to do this dangerous task even though he doesn’t know where Modor is. And then did you see how his courage to be vulnerable, drew out the courage and commitment of all the rest.

A small and directionless hobbit stood up and turned the typical pattern of courage on its ear. Whether you are a fan of Tolkien, his books and movies or not; tuck that little gem in your heart for the next time you need courage to act but feel too weak and too small to make a difference.

Because the world often tells us that to be courageous requires physical strength, bravery and courageous acts.

You have to be bigger than life, with armor and weapons, muscles, loud, certainly bigger than a hobbit. But Frodo vulnerability was that he didn’t have any of those qualities.

Today we begin Courageous, a new sermon series based on the book of Philippians. Where we will explore each week what real courage looks like. For today, how real courage requires vulnerability too, as we follow the example of Christ in our text. So...

Do you have the courage to join this month-long quest?

Do you have enough courage to be vulnerable?

There are all kinds of ways to be courageous and vulnerable.

For me...ah...leading worship, preaching, facing the kids in Early Word are all tasks that requires more courage and vulnerability. It is so open up here, feel exposed, and then recorded. Why is the podium so small!

But the pairing of courage with vulnerability is like that. We know courage makes us feel uncomfortable, courage is taking a risk without any guarantees which in turn makes us feel vulnerable.

I keep thinking about last Sunday. Year of Jubilee...?

The sound of the shofar signaling a new beginning for us. We leaned into courage and vulnerability in starting the two new task forces. Courage was on display. People stepped up courageously but also becoming vulnerable a little...we don't know exactly how these two adventures will turn out.

Most people think courage is being strong and resolute, and it is. But there must be vulnerability too...otherwise, you might just be unhinged, right? Just not dealing with reality very well.

We can probably all think of someone in our lives who has shown courage by being vulnerable. Frodo asked for help, he needed direction. Pastors need help. So grateful for the courage and vulnerability of the two task forces but they still need our prayers!

I shared about the courage and vulnerability of the all-black, all-female battalion 6 triple 8's. Facing the daunting task of rerouting 17 million pieces of mail with bombs dropping all around, in just 90 days.

I found out that our country finally acknowledged their courage. Our nation awarded the battalion the Congressional Gold Medal on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Since 1776, only 184 people or institutions have been given this highest of civilian honors. They deserved that medal!

Maybe someone or maybe ourselves...we have also shown courage. Faced with disability, cancer, chronic pain or health concern, that takes incredible courage and vulnerability.

Stepping in to a new church, starting over to build relationships and get involved...incredible courage and vulnerability to become known.

Facing our own emotional brokenness, dealing with grief over the loss of a loved one, rebuilding our lives after a divorce, a move, or a job loss.

Yet, the world often tells us that to be truly courageous means being tough or hard. That real courage requires a head band and machine gun or a cape and superhuman strength. But Jesus showed us a different way. Jesus showed the ultimate courage through ultimate vulnerability in surrendering his life...all without any weapons or capes.

But first, let's set the stage a little by talking about Philippians as a whole.

Paul wrote Philippians to a church in Philippi while in prison in Rome, a thank you note for sending money and Epaphroditus to care for him. And then Paul shows us following Christ is a deeply personal, transformative experience that sets before us a path and pattern for our lives that actually requires courage and vulnerability on our part.

Philippi was a Roman colony, full of retired soldiers. Think where Navy Seals go to retire. Well-known for its patriotic nationalism.

So, Paul faced significant resistance there for announcing Jesus as the true King of the world. Paul was putting the government in its place, under God. Tricky, because Ceasar was seen as a god to be worshipped. But Paul put his life on the line, shortened his life actually, proclaiming that only Christ is worthy to be worshipped.

The rest of Philippians revolves around the letter's clear and powerful center of gravity, this poem, our text in Philippians 2:5-11. Its structure suggests it was initially a hymn sung by the early Church, a clever technique of Paul's to put it in his letter.

Chapter 2 artistically retells the story of how God the Son came in the flesh, lived as a human, died, and rose again and because he lived with humility and was fully obedient to the Father with vulnerability and courage, he was exalted by the Father as Lord over all.

Paul's main point is to know and follow Jesus. Jesus as our pattern for life, is the One who not only modeled courage and vulnerability but is the One to help us live courageously and vulnerably. As we remind ourselves of verse 13 from chapter 4 of Philippians, **"I can do all this through him (meaning Christ) who gives me strength."**

We can now more clearly see the contrast. First, how the Roman Empire gained and asserted power through strength, dominance, and war. And that typically being "courageous" meant winning out over one's opponents.

But then in stark radical contrast, Jesus does the exact opposite.

Jesus started with all the power in the universe but decided to lay it all aside, emptied himself of his rightful glory. Verse 6 and part of verse 7 states, **“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; <sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing...”**

Jesus who was God, equal to God, decided to become a vulnerable human being.

And this is where my brain stopped functioning last week. Jesus let go of his position and power and became human...intentionally? Buffering...

Jesus decided to not claim the protection and prestige of being God. But instead, verses seven and eight, **“by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!”**

Even if Jesus had just come to be the king of the whole world, it still would have been a huge step down for him. But he didn't stop there.

Through Jesus' courage to be vulnerable, he became like those he came to save, so that we could know the heart of God IS for humanity and not over or against it. Jesus courageously became vulnerable, as a human, as a servant. He was willing to die a torturous death for the sake of others, for all, instead of trying to overpower his opponents.

Paul is advising the Philippians to have everyone's interest in mind, as Jesus did, rather than trying to prove themselves right or better.

We see this focus of Paul's in our very first verse, verse 5, **“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.”** Paul is explaining how to be with others in all relationships. You may very well be...just like Christ, smarter and stronger and more right. But Jesus is imploring us through Paul - don't stop there!

Continue to humble yourself, become a servant, become fully obedient to God. We are not to stand on our rights. Nope, we are to stand in our identity as Christians...in vulnerability, courageously lowering ourselves, serving, being humble, risking and not protecting ourselves, risk being seen as less than.

Does not our flesh cry out like Frodo...**I do not know the way!**

How can we possibly live like Jesus did? Are we to take Paul seriously? Can this pattern of Christ's courage and vulnerability be a road map for our lives? It's a staggering thought.

What if we became more compelled by this road map of Jesus' way of living, what if that held more sway over our lives than whether we identify as Republican or Democrat? What if we replaced our political devotion with a deeper undivided devotion to Christ? And instead, sought to make this space more a corner of God's kingdom, spilling out to overflowing?

A kingdom marked by caring for others in renewed outreach efforts, knowing others in fellowship and small groups, knowing each other's names even, praying daily. How might church look different for us if we pressed into our relationships here...deeper...forcing the issue, requiring us to have to have the same mindset as Christ?

What relationships or groups are you a part of where your vulnerability might help someone else feel safe to be vulnerable too?

As we wrap up, we've looked at Jesus' radical courage and vulnerability. Jesus' courage in the face of unimaginable suffering and vulnerability in the choice to humble Himself to the point of death.

His courage wasn't the kind that strikes down enemies with power. It was the courage to surrender, to love us with the deepest kind of sacrificial love. Showing us that Jesus' vulnerability was not a weakness but rather a strength.

In our own lives, when we face struggles, fear, or uncertainty, in church or in our relationships, our work in the world...we are invited to look to Jesus and his example of courage and vulnerability.

And to remember, courage and vulnerability, doesn't always look like bold and fearless action. No, sometimes, and maybe mostly, it looks like the quiet decision to love and serve, even when it costs us.

Frodo didn't know the way.

And maybe sometimes we don't know the way.

But I believe that as we pull together here, walking in courage and acknowledging our weaknesses and limits just like Jesus did; God will help us find our way.

So...once again, I ask, **“Are you willing, do you have the courage and willingness to be vulnerable to follow God in this month-long quest, this mission, this thing?”**

Instead of closing with a Time of Reflection, let us pray in response to what we’ve just heard:

Jesus, we look to you as a model of humility and love. Give us the courage to be vulnerable. In whatever situations we find ourselves, we humble ourselves so that only you receive the glory. Amen!