Courageous Love

Today I want to preach on the topic of courageous love. In fairytales, the courageous knight battles the fire breathing dragon to save the princess. It is the lion in the wizard of Oz who is able to confront his fears and help his friends. Peter Pan standing up to captain hook and taking him down.

In real life we recognize courage in our service men and women who put their lives on the line and give them a Purple heart when they are wounded in recognition of their courage. We recognize courage in the police officer who puts on their uniform each day to protect their community. We recognize courage in the fire fighters who run into burning building. We saw it in civil rights activists who risked their lives to subjugate oppression There is no shortage of courage in this world to look toward.

Courage. It’s a desirable quality to have and an empowering way to be. Courage is a defining characteristic that tends to rise to the top, it is one we wish to emulate ourselves. We are told throughout our life to “be courageous,” but that isn’t always easy. In fact, courage is often one of the most difficult qualities to truly integrate into our lives.

Why is being courageous not as easy to embody as the heroes make it look in the movies? I believe the reason is because being courageous means being willing to face fear and embrace uncertainty and we don’t like not knowing what is ahead, we hesitate to put ourselves at risk.

Think of something that you are scared to do. Perhaps it’s a conversation you are nervous to have, a job change you are afraid to make, or relationship you are afraid to change. You are feeling fear, hoping that one day you will feel courageous enough to finally do it (whatever your “it” is). You don’t like not knowing what is on the other side of a choice. In fact, it is petrifying. Staying in the known, however undesirable it may be, feels a lot cozier.

This is why I love the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is a parable that is just so rich in meaning. It can be an allegory where we are the person beaten up and the priest and Levi are the law and commandments that could not save us and Jesus is the Samaritan that saves us and takes care of us and brings us to paradise with him. It can simply be about our neighbor and how Jesus is redefining who our neighbor is, and it can be about someone who puts it all on the line for the sake of someone else, someone who is courageous.

In the time of Jesus, the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was notorious for its danger and difficulty, and was known as the "Way of Blood" because "of the blood which is often shed there by robbers". Martin Luther King, Jr., in his "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech, on the day before his death, described the road as follows:

And I Quote “But I’m going to tell you what my imagination tells me. It’s possible that those men were afraid. You see, the Jericho Road is a dangerous road. I remember when Mrs. King and I were first in Jerusalem. We rented a car and drove from Jerusalem down to Jericho. And as soon as we got on that road I said to my wife, ‘I can see why Jesus used this as the setting for his parable.’ It’s a winding, meandering road. It’s really conducive for ambushing. You start out in Jerusalem, which is about twelve hundred feet above sea level. And by the time you get down to Jericho fifteen or twenty minutes later, you’re about twenty-two feet below sea level. That’s a dangerous road.

In the days of Jesus it came to be known as the ‘Bloody Pass.’ And you know, it’s possible that the priest and the Levite looked over that man on the ground and wondered if the robbers were still around. Or it’s possible that they felt that the man on the ground was merely faking, and he was acting like he had been robbed and hurt in order to seize them over there, lure them there for quick and easy seizure. And so the first question that the priest asked, the first question that the Levite asked was, ‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’” end quote

Courage is not the absence of fear, it is acting in spite of fear, and so the question we must ask is how was the Samaritan man able to stop worrying about what will happen to me and instead ask the question, If I do not stop and help this man, what will happen to him?

The Samaritan did not stop fearing for his life, he just took the focus off himself and saw this person on the side of the road as his neighbor, you see neighbor in the Greek means near man, not necessarily a proximity but someone who is like me and the difference between a neighbor and an enemy is perception.

He saw this man as someone with worth just for being a human and I know this because the Samaritan didn’t know him, didn’t make sure the person agreed with him theologically or politically, didn’t examine the color of his skin, his education level or his sexuality, he simply saw a neighbor and committed a courageous act in heading over to him.

I want to share several attributes I learned about being courageous.

1. Feeling fear yet choosing to act. I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear — Nelson Mandela
2. Following your heart, the root of courage is the latin word “cor” which has the meaning of bearing all of ones heart. We must listen to our heart and intuition whom both direct our courage.
3. Standing up for what is right. Sometimes standing against evil is more important than defeating it. The greatest heroes stand because it is right to do so, not because they believe they will walk away with their lives. Such selfless courage is a victory in itself ― N.D. Wilson, Dandelion Fire
4. Leaning on your faith. We must lean on the fact that we possess something greater in heaven than anything here on earth, we can act more boldly and selflessly.

Jesus in the parable of the Good Samaritan is calling us to live and act with a courageous love, a love that helps us to act selflessly, helps us to cross the road and help out our neighbor who has been beaten up by life one way or another. Courageous love gets us to move to compassion.

Courageous love gets us to stay on the side of the road as the person who is hurting and giving of ourselves so that they get the care that they need as we share the love of Christ with them.

For me the most important line in the Gospel reading is this, “go and do likewise.” We have to heed the command of Jesus to go and do likewise and it starts with using our eyes and our minds in order to observe and think about our community and who is suffering. Then we think about what are our talents, and our passions, and we deduce how they sync up with the issues in the community.

The Holy Spirit is the one who tugs on our heart strings and we have to act upon it. We can’t wait for the perfect opportunity and for everything to be just right because the question we must ask ourselves is the one the Samaritan asked, what will happen to that person if I don’t act. When we ask that question the time to act is now, because we never know what can happen.

So where is God calling you to direct your courageous love to?