

Easter Sunday Sermon: *Courage*

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Bible Readings

Luke 24:36-49

Romans 8:9-21

It would be the world's wildest understatement to say that the disciples were having a big day. From the encounters at the tomb to wild reports, through their grief, despair and terror, impossible hope, you name it, they went through it all that day, that first Easter day. And then, suddenly, as they are all there together, all those who knew and loved Jesus, all those who had followed him, whose lives had been turned upside down by him, they were all squashed together into a Jerusalem house as the sun set and lamps were lit and a meal was served but no one felt much like eating it ... into that room full of totally confused people, Jesus suddenly was there right in the midst of them. He didn't knock on the door and walk in, he was just there. Don't ask me how.

And in his time with them that evening the followers of Jesus together moved from terror to boldness. They were beside themselves with fear, and then Jesus showed them himself, and showed them the truth of the gospel and they understood more and more as their minds were opened, and they trusted more and more as their hearts were opened, so that they were even more filled with joy than they had been filled with anxiety.

The followers of Jesus received that evening the greatest courage, direct from the risen Christ. So this is my theme for this morning. Courage.

What is courage? We don't find it easy to recognize in ourselves, but sometimes we can see it looking back that something we did took courage, because our fears were large and the obstacles we faced seemed pretty big, at the time, but looking back we can sometimes see that we found strength and got through.

We find courage easier to recognize in other people. I get to see it all the time, people facing up to cancer, people pushing into their fears for their husband, or grandfather, and despite how hard it feels keeping on showing up, caring, doing what needs to be done.

In Christchurch we have seen amazing courage over these past 5 weeks from people literally taking a bullet for someone else, people finding words of forgiveness instead of hate.

Has there been a story that touched you in particular?

Is there someone who has held for you in your life a model of what courage looks like in action? Is there a time in your own life when you can say, yes I found courage in that moment, to make that decision?

Talk to the person beside or behind you: When have you recognized courage?

The word Courage comes from the French, 'cuer', for heart. Courage literally means strength of heart. It's not just sheer will power, not just blind obedience or grim determination to power on through no matter what. Courage comes from the heart. We talk about taking your heart in your hands, feeling the fear and doing it anyway.

Here's how Paul puts it: Romans 8:15-17: *You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption; the Spirit makes you children of God, and by the Spirit's power we cry "Abba! Father!"*¹⁶ *God's Spirit joins with our spirit to declare that we are children of God.*¹⁷ *and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. If we share Christ's suffering, we will also share his glory.*

We are not abandoned to fall back into fear, but in our hearts our spirits are fused with the Holy Spirit, and in that influx of strength, the same strength that raised Jesus from the dead, in that influx of strength we know ourselves as daughters of God, sons of God. The heart becomes strong as we know who we are, we know where we stand.

Courage is an inheritance we receive as heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. Courage is a fusing of our hearts with Jesus, both in his suffering and in his glory.

Big stuff from Paul. I do love Paul's theology. He layers up big idea upon big idea. It's not light reading, but it's solid, amazing stuff.

Courage is needed now, in our world. It is needed now, here in Christchurch. Problem is, none of us feel very brave. We don't think of ourselves as courageous. We think of ourselves as just getting by, doing what's required to get along. I figure that I'm just here to be me, and sometimes, including the past month, it's all I can do to truck along doing what has to be done, with little energy or headspace for anything beyond the urgent. I don't feel particularly courageous. But I do know that courage is there, lying there ready, waiting for me to grasp hold of it.

That's where Paul's theology is so strong and simple in essence. It's right there in verse 11. *The Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you.*

This is our strength. This is our courage.

I wonder if you could join me in closing your eyes for a moment, and asking God in this moment to show you what this looks like, that the power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in you. Enlarge your mind for a moment and fill your mind with the possibility that the power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in you.

Death-defeating power. Hope-sparking power. Warm totally accepting adopting power.

This is the spirit of the risen Christ. And it is in you. Can you feel it? Can you see a mind picture of it?

Breathe it in, this Easter day, this resurrection courage.

Courage is needed now. We have to face the problems of our world square on, and this takes guts. Our Kiwi 'she'll be right' attitude does not help us to deal with the long-term pollution of our rivers, and the huge challenges of climate change and sea-level rise. Our cheerful optimism is not enough.

Neither is our 'you do your thing I'll do mine' attitude. It is not enough for each of us to get by in our own corner, not impinging on each other's space, not daring to offend. The huge challenges of right-wing nationalism, racism and prejudice thrive when we are afraid to speak out.

Thankfully we have a simple phrase, planted deep in our nation's soul. It is this: "Kia kaha".

These are words we have heard a lot this past month. Kia kaha, Christchurch. Be brave. Have courage.

This is what Jesus says to us, risen from the grave - Kia Kaha!

The energy, power and strength that burst Jesus out of death, this is his Spirit, the same Spirit that breathes in you and whispers in your heart - Kia kaha!

When you don't think you have much to offer - Kia kaha!

When the problems of the world seem overwhelming - Kia kaha!

When you are trying to find words to express what you believe to people who don't share your faith - Kia kaha!

When you feel prompted to pick up the phone to call someone, or to sit down and write to someone - Kia kaha!

When you face your own limitations, pains and frustrations - Kia kaha!

This morning we share in Communion. May you take courage as you take the bread and the cup. May the body and blood of our crucified and risen Lord strengthen you heart. May you know ever more and ever more that the Spirit that raised Jesus from the grave lives in you. Amen.