Courage

Courage is the second of the cardinal virtues we are considering in January. For Aristotle, courage is the virtue that steers a middle course between cowardice on one side and recklessness on the other. When faced with dangers and risk, cowardice will shy away from them and recklessness will take no account of them: courage will weigh the risk, face the danger, and take the right course of action. As Martin Luther King put it, ‘Courage faces fear and thereby masters it. Cowardice represses fear and is thereby mastered by it.’

What dangers and risks do we encounter as Christians today? Are there situations in which we need to be courageous? When it comes to showing courage, what hinders or helps you?

What about us as a church? What dangers or risks do we face? What does it mean for us to face the challenges that lie ahead of us with courage?

‘Be strong and courageous’ is a double command found eight times at the end of Deuteronomy and the beginning of Joshua, as Israel face the dangers and risks of entering the land of Canaan. Looking at these references, who encourages whom, and what basis do they offer for their encouragement (Deuteronomy 31:6-7, 23; Joshua 1:6-9, 18; 10:25)? How good are we at encouraging each other? Who could do with a word of encouragement from you this week?

Put yourself in Joshua’s shoes. What reasons did he have for being anxious or afraid? Can you identify with how he felt? How do God’s words to Joshua speak into your situation?

The double command to be strong and courageous is also found in 1 Corinthians 16:13. The accompanying commands to stay alert and to stand firm sound a bit like orders issued to troops in a combat zone as they prepare for an enemy attack. Do you think it is appropriate to see some kind of allusion to spiritual warfare here? If so, then we don’t look out for the enemy coming over no-man’s-land to attack us. What kind of spiritual attack should we be prepared to resist, and what is the best way of defending ourselves? Dwight L. Moody said, ‘True will-power and courage are not on the battlefield, but in everyday conquests over our inertia, laziness, boredom:’ anything to add to his list?

In the ancient world, courage was perceived as a distinctly masculine quality, since it was the men who went into battle, and this is reflected in the ESV translation of 1 Corinthians 16:13: ‘Act like men.’ Let’s try and redress this imbalance: are there ways in which women show as much, if not more, courage as men? The North American Medical Mission Sister Miriam Therese Winter said, ‘The ability to find joy in the world of sorrow and hope at the edge of despair is woman’s witness to courage and her gift of new life to all.’ Would you agree?

The double command to be strong and courageous is also found at end of Psalms 27 and 31. What situations did the psalmists face that required courage of them (Psalm 27:7-14; 31:11-24)? What helps them to face their situations with courage?

Gamers debate the difference between courage and morale factors in their fantasy characters. One gamer on Reddit suggests this distinction: ‘I see the difference being that Courage is used to determine how easily you can do something dangerous without having fear hinder you, like going into an unlit basement of a serial killer's house or sneaking into an enemy army's camp at night, while Morale is for determining how readily you can stand and fight when you are already in a fight and things are starting to turn against your favour.’ Which quality do you think matters more to us as a church? How would you rate our levels of courage or morale? If we lack either quality, why might that be the case, and what could we do to improve our courage or morale?

‘Lord God, help me always to remember, that you go before me and you will be with me; you will never leave me nor forsake me. Help me to know I need never be afraid; I do not need to be discouraged even in the face of what seems dangerous or risky.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.’ (biblestudytools.com)