

## TAKE COURAGE!

Greg Renstrom, April 25, 2010

“In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world.”

St. John 16:33 (New American Bible)

There comes a time in life when we have to courageously go through life. And the key word is the word “courageously,” which means to be brave and strong and confident and resilient no matter what comes our way. Sometimes it may be a great adversity or even great catastrophe, when we have to summon up the courage to keep going and make the best of it. But sometimes it may be a great responsibility or even great opportunity, when we have to summon up the courage to make the most of it. And sometimes, in the vast majority of instances, it is just one of the great realities of daily life, when we have to summon up the courage to get up in the morning and go about our life and work as creatively and effectively and faithfully as we can. But whatever it is, the time comes when all of us have to courageously go through something that happens in life, good or bad. Courage is crucial to us all.

It shouldn't surprise us at all that it was also true for Jesus. He had to go through times like that too. And we turn today to one of the most incredibly courageous things he ever did or said. It is positively staggering. And when you read it, when you see its significance and its relevance right now, it absolutely takes your breath away. This is what happened

According to St. John, Jesus said, “*In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world.*” What a stupendous thing to say. Even more stupendous is that he said it to his disciples on the night before he died, when it seemed as if the world had conquered him. And yet, there he was, encouraging them all, saying, “Be brave. Be strong. Take heart. Take courage. I have conquered the world.” And he meant it. He had done it. No matter what the world did to him, he had finished the course and completed his ministry without compromise or capitulation. <sup>1</sup>The implication is clear. In the world, trouble. In Jesus, courage. “*In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world.*”

All of us know something about trouble. We see it on television or in the newspaper every day. But the courage Jesus spoke of, that's what we want to know more about. How did he remain courageous in the face of trouble? It obviously had to do with basic characteristics he brought to life. But it also had to do with three basic influences Jesus brought out of life. They were pivotal. And they apply to us all.

1 First, there was the influence of his commitment to God's purpose. Jesus was utterly devoted to the work of God. From the day he left home in Nazareth, it was the singular purpose of his life. It was the reason why he “*set his face to go to Jerusalem,*” to carry the good news of God's Kingdom and God's Love to the heart of the nation. He put everything he had into it. Paradoxically, and this is one of the great paradoxes of life, he got everything he needed out of it too. By pouring all his spiritual energies into this great purpose, he found the courage to fulfill it. Commitment was a decisive thing.

Edith Cavell was one of the bravest saints the twentieth century produced. She was a devout, and very dedicated, follower of Jesus. She was raised in an Anglican parsonage and became a nurse, stationed with the Red Cross in Belgium during the Great War. As a Red Cross nurse, she was supposed to be neutral. But she wasn't. She participated in an underground system to save Allied troops trapped behind enemy lines. She was captured by the Germans and convicted of aiding the enemy. In 1915, she was executed. On the night before she died, she said, “Standing as I do in view of God and eternity, I realize that patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness toward anyone.” Think of it. “I must have no hatred or bitterness toward anyone.” That is courage of supreme proportions. She had it because she had a higher purpose in life. Our purpose may seem small by comparison. It may be to become a good friend or good parent or good follower of Jesus. It may not change the world. Instead, it may only change our corner of the world. But focusing on God's purpose can make a difference for good larger than we ever conceived of. In the world you have trouble. But take courage, because of your commitment to God's purpose.

2 Also, there was the influence of his connection to God's people. Jesus had a group of men and women who accompanied him all along the way. They were not perfect. They made mistakes. One of them betrayed him. One of them denied him. All of them forsook him and fled from him when he needed them most. But foolish and fallible though they were, they were with him, sharing in his work and supporting him the best they could through the ups and downs of life. They strengthened and supported him to an enormous degree. Connection was also a decisive thing.

Susan B. Anthony was one of the bravest saints the nineteenth century produced. She was a Quaker who led the move toward universal suffrage. Think of what the suffragettes were up against. They had to work with Southerners who were anti-Black, Westerners who were anti-Asian, Northerners who were anti-immigrant, Easterners who were anti-labor. They had to face the biggest obstacle of all, how to gain the vote without already having the vote to vote for people who would help them get the vote.<sup>2</sup> But they did it. In February 1906, when Susan B. Anthony was eighty-six years old, they held a birthday celebration for her in Washington. They had not yet won. It would be fourteen more years before the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified. But in February 1906, they wanted to celebrate her life. She was very frail. But she got up and said, "With people like we have in this room, failure is impossible." It was her last public statement. She died the next month.<sup>3</sup> With people like her and connections like that, failure was not only impossible but success was inevitable! Maybe for us, it is connecting with people work with or study with or worship with. But connecting with someone makes a difference too. In the world you have trouble. But take courage, because of your connection to God's people.

3 And, most important of all, there was the influence of his consciousness of God's presence. He constantly nurtured an awareness of God through worship and scripture, study and prayer. He was a person of great piety. We don't talk much about piety. But it is that simple life of quiet devotion that enables us to draw close to God. He and his disciples were in Jerusalem, remember, to celebrate the Passover. They worshipped. They sang. They ate. They prayed. They experienced God deeply. Consciousness of God's presence was everything to Jesus. It was *the* decisive thing in his life.

In 1862, Lincoln became convinced that he had to address the issue of slavery directly by issuing the Emancipation Proclamation. Everybody was against it. Opposition was intense. But Lincoln's sense of God's Providence sustained him. There is a wonderful story, probably apocryphal but still very real, that captures Lincoln's spirit. In late 1862, he consulted his Cabinet. After discussing the subject, Lincoln called for a vote. He asked those who were opposed to the Proclamation to raise their hands. Every hand in the room went up. Every Cabinet member voted "nay." Lincoln then asked for a show of hands for those in favor of the Proclamation. Lincoln alone raised his hand. He paused and said, "The 'ayes' have it." And he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, prayerfully trusting that it was the right course. Can you imagine what it would mean if we spent just ten minutes each day praying, cultivating our consciousness of God? Can you imagine what it would mean to the world, to the whole world, if just a few prayerful people prayed for peace and reconciliation, prayed for goodness and decency and grace? Jesus prayed every step of the way. And the effects are still being felt. So might ours. In the world you have trouble. But take courage, because of your consciousness of God's presence.

Sermons should be announcements of truth. And the truth today is that there is courage to be found in the world. Sermons should also be practical applications of truth. If there are three things Jesus did, there are three things you and I can do to be courageous in the face of trouble. I can cite them in single sentences. Open your mind to God's purpose for you. Open your eyes to God's people beside you. Open your heart and soul and spirit to God's presence all around you. Keep committed. Keep connected. Keep conscious. If you can't remember it, then remember Jesus, how he said on the night before he died, "*In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world.*" Be brave. Be strong. Take care. Take courage. All will be well.

1. From an unpublished sermon by Reverend Theodore Parker Ferris.
2. Burns, *Workshop of Democracy*, page 442.
3. Lamb, *Book Notes (Life Stories)*, page 104.