

Walking with courage rather than fear - 20 March 2022 – Lent 3

BIBLE READINGS

Psalm 27 (responsively)

The Lord is my light and my salvation –
whom shall I fear?

**The Lord is the stronghold of my life –
of whom shall I be afraid?**

When the wicked advance against me to devour me,
**it is my enemies and my foes
who will stumble and fall.**

Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me,
even then I will put my trust in the Lord.

One thing I ask from the Lord,
one thing I seek:
**that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,**
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord
and to seek him in his temple.

For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
**he will hide me in the shelter of his tent
and set me high upon a rock.**

Even now he lifts up my head
above the enemies who surround me.
Therefore I will make an offering with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make music to the Lord.

Hear my voice when I call, Lord;
be merciful to me and answer me.
You speak in my heart and say, ‘Seek my face’
Your face, Lord, I will seek.

Do not hide your face from me,
do not turn your servant away in anger.
You have been my helper.
Do not reject me;

Do not forsake me, God my Saviour.

Though my father and mother forsake me,
the Lord will sustain me.

Teach me your way, Lord;
**lead me in a straight path
because of my enemies.**

Do not hand me over to my adversaries,
**for false witnesses rise up against me,
making malicious accusations.**

I remain confident of this:
**that I will see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.**

Wait for the Lord;
**be strong and take heart
and wait for the Lord.**

[Luke 13:22, 31-35](#)

Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching, as he made his way to Jerusalem. ... At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, 'Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.'

He replied, 'Go and tell that fox, "I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal." In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day – for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!

'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

MESSAGE [Walking with courage rather than fear](#)

While we were away in Tasmania recently, I spent some time reflecting on the last two years. For many people it's been a time of **fear, anxiety, loneliness and uncertainty.**

The **fear element** has been very real – Covid is a virus you can't see that is very



infectious, and until vaccines were rolled out, there was little protection against it other than keeping your distance from other people.

Covid has killed a lot of people around the world – six million and counting. [That's nearly as many people as the population of Victoria and more than the whole population of NZ]

So the last two years have been very challenging, living with all the uncertainty and change. **Fear** has deeply affected some who are still struggling to have the courage to rejoin community life. We've also learned that **kindness** and **generosity** really do matter and that we **can** and **do** care about the elderly and vulnerable members of our community – which is why so many of us complied with all the restrictions and lockdowns. We are all on this journey together but sometimes it feels as though we are on our own.

While we hope that we are on the downward slope of the pandemic, at least in Australia ... it's still way too early to say that we've seen the back of Covid with new variants even now emerging. As we slowly get used to 'living with Covid', each of us has demonstrated **courage** to again mix with other people and resume meeting with family and friends and indeed meeting here at church. It's taken courage because the risks have not disappeared. There is still lots of Covid circulating in the community – especially among younger people – but we feel confident in the protection that vaccines and masks provide. So we are choosing courage over fear.

When we read the stories of Jesus' life, we are used to Jesus being the **hero** so we often don't appreciate that Jesus faced his own set of fears. We hear his story from the perspective of his followers and so often ignore the varied and often quite open **opposition** to Jesus – until we get to Good Friday – when we suddenly realise that many people felt so threatened by Jesus that they wanted to see him killed.



In today's reading we get an unusual angle on this opposition and Jesus' response. Some **Pharisees** seek Jesus out to warn him that **Herod** wants to kill him. Herod's malicious intent is not to be doubted – he has already imprisoned and executed John the Baptist and is an evil presence right up to the events of Good Friday.



What's unusual is the action of these Pharisees – normally they are **arguing** with Jesus and questioning why he seems to **flout** so many of the rules around the Sabbath and food handling. But in this instance they demonstrate kindness in going to **warn** Jesus about Herod.

I'm not sure what **our** response might be to such a death threat. We might go to the police or bunker down at home as we did during covid lockdowns or we might even contemplate moving elsewhere for a while until the threat passed. Jesus takes none of these approaches. He will continue his ministry just as before – healing, teaching and setting people free – today, tomorrow and the next day. Nothing will change in his approach. He will also continue his journey to Jerusalem.

In fact he feels **compelled** to continue his journey because his fate awaits him **in Jerusalem** not from the hand of Herod. The small word **dei** in the Greek indicates a **divine imperative** or **necessity** – Jesus **must** go to Jerusalem because this is God's plan for him although he fully expects to be rejected there – like many prophets before him – for daring to speak God's word openly and boldly.

His personal fate seems to be closely tied to the fate of Jerusalem, which was the centre of Jewish faith and worship. If the people will accept him as **one who comes in the name of the Lord** – quoting from Ps 118 – and as chanted by his followers when he finally enters the city on Palm Sunday – then he will protect the people like a hen protects her chicks. But if the people will **not** accept him and his message – as seems likely – the fate of the city is

destruction, as occurred some 30 years later when the Romans totally destroyed the city.

How was Jesus able to demonstrate such courage in the face of danger and likely rejection and death?

As we noted last week, Jesus is very focused on his mission and good at avoiding distractions.

But how did he remain so calm? Was he not afraid?

*There's something important about **courage** that we need to recognise – it is not the opposite of fear - but rather is the **choosing to act despite our fear.***



The opposite of courage is probably **cowardice**, backing away from situations of potential danger or pain. Some might call that being **sensible** or an act of **self-preservation**, but if that's our usual response to fear then it's going to be hard to make much impact on those around us.

The psalm we read gives us a clue how we might overcome our fear.

The author faces enemies, adversaries and false witnesses – liars – who threaten them. They are most likely afraid of these people.

Yet they choose to **seek God** and choose to **wait on God** in prayer.

This gives them a different perspective.

They will trust in **God's** goodness and mercy, which will enable them to face their enemies with confidence – and to overcome their very real fears.

Jesus has a similar perspective. He would be foolish indeed not to fear Herod and to keep out of his way. He also has understandable fears about what will happen in Jerusalem ... yet he chooses to continue his journey and his ministry despite these fears.

We can see plenty of **contemporary** examples of courage if we look for them.

- I think of Grace Tame and Brittany Higgins going public with their stories and insisting that they be heard and that changes be made to protect women.



- I think of journalist Marina Ovsyannikova who risked imprisonment by holding up an anti-war placard in the studio of the official Russian television news



- ... or the people of Ukraine continuing to resist the Russian invasion of their country



- ... or the many people in small boats who risked the floodwaters to rescue others during the recent floods



- ... or the children who stand up for their mates against the schoolyard bully



Courage can be loud and direct ... but it can also be quiet and persistent. Think of climate activist Greta Thunberg sitting alone outside the Swedish Parliament with her sign for months before anyone paid her any attention.



That took courage to deliberately miss school for what she felt passionately about ... and also persistence.

Where might choosing the pathway of courage be needed in our journey with Jesus and in our ministry in the church and in the world? ...

*Courage is needed to **confront injustice** ... and in trying to change political outcomes. Now is actually a really good time to be speaking with Federal politicians as they gear up for an election ... they're listening quite closely to voters at the moment. But it takes courage and persistence.*

*Courage is needed to **open our mouths and speak about Jesus** ... because doing so makes us feel vulnerable. It's one of the challenges of my role – being faithful to the message of Jesus even when it's an uncomfortable message for people to hear.*

*Courage is needed to **do new things** ... or do old things differently. Whenever we make changes or do something new there is an element of risk which can often make us afraid*

*We need courage to have **difficult conversations** ... whether about the future of our church, or our government's treatment of refugees, or about the future of people who work in the coal industry. These are all complex issues that people have widely differing viewpoints about ... so it takes courage to have such conversations.*

Having the courage to follow Jesus along the way does not mean that we will stop being afraid. But it does mean making a decision – each and every morning at the start of a new day – that we will **dare** to be known as **followers of Jesus** – that we will rely on God's Spirit for strength and wisdom for what to say and what to do – and that we will choose to act and speak for Jesus.