

## Encouraged to Be Brave

God is with us. God is good. God loves me even more than I know. I thought it would be good to start this way this morning. Could you repeat this after me. God is with us. God is good. God loves me even than I know. And while all of this is the case.

We have reasons we could be afraid. Can we be real. This week we heard the plans change. Governor Pritzker has ordered stay-at-home until April 30th. And so what was once thought to be a couple weeks of lifestyle change has become a month. Some wonder what this extended stay means for companies and schools alike. Michigan and Indiana have called off the rest of the school year. There are rumblings over the amount of small businesses and restaurants that will close. The same rumblings about church life and churches that will close as people won't come or support. What will COVID-19 lead to the closing of? And because of this people are referring to the month that has just begun as Anxious April.

So today I wanted to talk about things that will inspire our courage and activity. And to begin. I wonder were you ever afraid to do something until someone went first. I remember in high school being in Lake Mills, WI. And as spring time had just begun the water in the Rock Lake was cold. But it was the bright idea, late at night with some friends to do our equivalent of a polar plunge. But believe you me I was not the first one to go. I hate the cold. I didn't think it was a good idea. So I observed others who went first, they jumped in the water and...they didn't die. So I could do that. Just needed someone to go first. Show me it was ok. In fact that's most of my life as the youngest sibling. Watch older brother and sister go first to go to college, get married, have kids. Alright they didn't die - let's do this. Do you know what I'm talking about? Maybe not a polar plunge but perhaps trying something different at work because you heard others had - we've never done it that - no let's go. Maybe it was a lifestyle change and you were inspired by that friend who tried that diet that work out that new way. They did it. Maybe it was the really radical like bungee jumping, skydiving, or the blazin challenge at buffalo wild wings.

I love pictures like these. (George Washington leading troops into battle) Here we go. And if we were scared before all we have to do is follow our leader who is going into the same circumstances.

There is one who has gone ahead of us to battle greater obstacles cold water, a bungee cord, or even an enemy army. I wanted to welcome you if you are new to church or don't consider yourself a Christian. So glad that you found us and you are welcome among us. But today if you grew up in church is called Palm Sunday. It's the day we remember Jesus coming into Jerusalem to face the most terrifying week of his life. He is going to be betrayed, arrested, falsely accused, mocked, tortured, and crucified. He knows he is going to die and he goes anyway. And I just want to consider with you that if our leader, our Savior, and friend can ride into Jerusalem bravely knowing what's ahead. No matter how bad it could get, no matter what we might go through, no matter what COVID-19 brings you can be brave to get through it. To wake up each day, and take every next step, to navigate all change. *Jesus can inspire our courage.*

So we are in this series called Not Afraid. And we make such a bold declaration because we know who is with us right now. We know he is holding us firmly in the palm of his hands. We know the one who handled death and the grave through a resurrection is enough to get us through this.

And as mentioned today we are going to be considering Palm Sunday. This is the day Jesus rides into Jerusalem along with many others to celebrate the Passover. It is Sunday and on Friday he will give his life on the cross. Yet he rides anyway knowing what's in store. Today we get into the disciple John's account of it. Something we do in honor of the word of God is stand. So if you are at home feel free. Say out loud or to family at home. Make way, Jesus is coming.

One of my favorite quotes about courage is from former President Franklin Roosevelt. He said, "Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the assessment that something else is more important than fear."

I think of how much this applies to people. I remember hearing of a church organ player who every time she was about to play got terrified, hands shaking sick to her stomach. And her kids asked her why she did it. Something more important than her fear, the worship of God. I consider other people who look calm in front of crowds like Jennifer Lawrence who admits to anxiety over what people think. Or Harry Styles who gets sick before singing. I consider all the people who said that I look comfortable and not scared as a preacher. But my family will tell you of how every week like clockwork the nervous energy catches me, I'm scared almost every time - but sharing God is important.

As we look at Jesus. He has reason to be afraid. The church rulers are so jealous they want to kill him and not only him but anyone who has anything to do with him. v.10-11, "So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him." And he knows their plans will culminate with his cross. But it's not just their threat, it's the weight of sin on his shoulders. It's the devil striking his heel through the pain. It's the Father turning away. Jesus rides in on Palm Sunday knowing this all - and he goes anyway. Because there was something more important than anything that could make him afraid.

And that was you, and that was me. It was the plan of salvation he had worked out long before. To make a way for sinners to become righteous. To make a way for wretches to be redeemed, and for slaves of sin and death to be set free. There is this incredible passage, "For the joy set before him he endured the cross." (Hebrews 12:2) You and I were that joy. The plan that had been worked out. And this Holy Week isn't about the absence of things to be afraid of, it's about the something far more important than those fears.

What more important than the fears we face during COVID-19. I guess for those in leadership it is the people around us. Parents who lead at home, it's loving your kids to tell them it's going to be alright. Leaders in work and government. To have a steady hand for all of you who are tone setters. But if you're in Christ, what's something that can drive us. It's the testimony of our God. It's the confession that we give right now. To tell others as we remind ourselves he is still good and he is still God. See God has made us to be lights. He said, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16) So a takeaway is this. *Be courageous for the sake of your confession.* Acting as if God didn't exist, or as he is reigning.

But how can we be so bold to confess his goodness? What great things does he do?

You know it is interesting the different crowds that can gather to watch something incredible. One person who was quite the A-list growing up was a man named David Copperfield. A master of illusion who escaped from Alcatraz. But I remember when it was live broadcast and he made a 7 ton airplane disappear. He put people all around it, walls so it couldn't be rolled. And wallah it was gone. He had a huge name.

You know the reason for Palm Sunday. It's not something David Copperfield had done, but something more amazing Jesus had just done. And Scripture tells us, "Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead." (John 12:9) And later it says this crowd was with him at the raising of Lazarus. See it was days before one of Jesus friends had died and been in the grave 4 days, and Jesus said Lazarus come out and there he was. And a vanishing plane or statue of liberty has nothing on raising a dead man. Jesus reminds us in that chapter he would do this to prove his power and his glory. John 11:4, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

And here's why we can confess his goodness during COVID-19. Because he's the God who gets his people through. He got his people through slavery in Egypt, and wandering in the desert. He got his people through countless battles with the Philistines, and captivity in Babylon. He helped individuals get through blindness, demon-possession, leprosy and lameness. And he is the God who got Lazarus through the grave. He is going to get you through COVID-19. *Be courageous God will get you through.*

But Palm Sunday always strikes me with an interesting dichotomy. And that is the difference between what the people want, and what Jesus wants for the people. See the interesting reality is that most of the people want Jesus to be an earthly King. I'm reminded of this verse, "Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." (13) So the people want a king who will use his power to raise Caesar off through the throne and release the Jews from earthly oppression. But they do not recognize the donkey's colt. This is no earthly king. But that's ok. Because what Jesus wants for the people is much bigger. He wants to throw the punishment of sins of their shoulders and release them from the oppression of the devil the accuser. He wants them to transcend this life and reign with him in his kingdom, not restore the literal kingdom of Israel. The people want an earthly king and Jesus is a spiritual one.

At this time do you want God to get you through COVID-19 merely for earthly circumstances to resume as normal? So the stocks can rise, and we can hop on the hamster wheel of happiness and success, and all the other carrots we were chasing. Do you want merely an earthly king? It's short sighted friends. And we have the opportunity to repent of that here and now. For He is so much more. What he wants for us is way bigger than anything the people on Palm Sunday had in mind. He wants to get us through with a peace the world cannot give, and a joy that economic downturns can't touch, and a hope that culminates not in a few months but for eternity. He's the king who releases us from guilt, shame and death - because of what he rode in Jerusalem to do. To die. And also to rise. To make sure you and I knew we will get through this life and be with him. *Be courageous the King wants something better.* First time... you have the right to be called a child of God simply through faith, and you will get through.

This account is all about the high point of popularity for Jesus. So much so that the Pharisees said, "Look how the whole world has gone after him!" (19) Jesus has attained A-list status. You ever met an A-lister. I remember meeting Tebow. It was a few years ago when he was still in the NFL. He had just led the Broncos to a Playoff victory. He was a sponsor for Jockey and we had the chance in Orlando to meet him. And I was so in awe I could barely hold it together. I was like ahhh. Tebow. Yeah. When I met him my mouth was going a mile a minute.

It reminds me of the crowd who couldn't wait to meet Jesus. Ahh there he is - let's through our coats down and palm branches. Let's have a parade it's Jesus. Everybody probably reaching to touch and talk.

Can you imagine if you were in the crowd about to see Jesus? And it reminds me of how we live in a time where faith in God, and Jesus could reach A-list status once again. Maybe the whole world will go after Jesus. Ahh Jesus. For I consider all the other A-listers we propped up. The March Madness victors we would be praising, the NBA playoff teams that would be charging, the new MLB stars that would gain attention. The financial gurus making promises. Gone. But what has happened to Jesus? His name has been lifted higher. Above all names. Ministries reaching thousands each week.

And honestly this is a time where faith in God means so much. It's a time where our faith culminates. It reminds us that every other avenue or person does not hold what our God and King holds. Reminds me of being a pastor at funerals, that is a time where faith in God culminates. If not for a God who conquers death what other hope would we offer. Reminds me of when called to forgive. If not for faith in a God who forgave me, what reasonable answer do I have to do this hard work. So right now. If not for faith in God who promises to be with us and get us through, what other true source of comfort might we have. And I'm so thankful that many people are finding hope and peace through Jesus during this time. I say with the hymn, "When every earthly prop gives way, he then is all my hope and stay." So *Be courageous our faith culminates at times like these.*

While were not there to meet the King as he came to Jerusalem. Do you know he is coming again. This is the picture hanging in my office from the Sistine Chapel, a picture of Jesus return. I don't know your end times theology but the signs are fulfilled. But consider what Jesus said about the sign of the end, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places." (Matt 24:7) The 4 horsemen of revelation war, famine, disease, and the conquest of the Gospel. The reality is that Jesus could return at any time. And how might we act. Ahh Jesus.

Might we in the meantime prep not the roads but our hearts. As we mediate this week on his passion. Might we in the meantime make sure we do not lose the perspective this period has brought us. And might we *be courageous knowing our King is coming.* And even though we don't know when this will be how great to consider it is then that he will take us home to be with him. To reign forever where this is no more sadness, crying, or pain.

Let me pray for us; Heavenly Father this broken world has always contained things to cause us to fear. But we ask for courage and strength during this time. Help us to see you reigning right now, and us reigning with you forever. We ask that the name of Jesus would be

lifted high right now, as the name above all names. The name that saves and brings peace and comfort. Help us to prepare our hearts today and always until we see you face to face. In Jesus name amen.