

Reconciliation 3 Chrst the King Sunday, 24 November 2024	"Qualities of a Reconciler: Courage" Preacher: Canon Nitano Muller
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Focus texts:**Esther 4: 9-end/John 4: 1-15, 27-30**

Let us pray:

Draw near to us, Loving God, as we draw near to you. Now, O Lord, take my lips and speak through them; take our minds and think through them; take our hearts and set them on fire with love for you and one another. For Christ's sake. Amen

Introduction:

I must admit, preparing for this sermon was difficult. How does one speak of courage from a pulpit as a time such as this. 1000 days of war raging in Ukraine. Reports on abuse within the church, shaking it to its core. The climate crisis unfolding before our very eyes.

I would like to curl into a ball and come back up when its all over. I'm sure many of you do, too.

Nothing happens without courage. Courage is the opposite of the status quo. I want to name the courage in this space alone.

Without courage, our Ukrainian sisters and brothers would not have been here this morning. Without courage, that sign of radical welcome would not be hanging outside our entrance. Without courage, some of us would not have rolled out of bed this morning. Without courage, I certainly would not have been here today. Courage is the prelude to our calling, but it is the prelude to change.

It took courage for Provost Dick Howard, 84 years ago- the day after watching his Cathedral and much of the city burn to the ground, to speak of hope and resurrection, when all he could see was destruction.

To celebrate courage does not mean we praise every act of bravado regardless of motive or results. Many foolish things have been done in the name of courage. Some things seem courageous, because the one promoting it may be loud, convincing or charismatic. Courage is easily disguised as fear. When people are driven by fear they will do anything to protect their turf.

Courage is certainly not limited to grand and illustrious movements. The victim of abuse in the church coming forward to tell their story after years of trauma, is courageous. The trans kid who chooses to go to church at Christmas because God becoming human is significant for them, despite knowing the judgemental stares and whispers, is courageous. The mother who decides to flee her country with her children on an overcrowded boat, is courageous. The man who refuses to give in to the cancer but lives and loves fully, is courageous. The truth is that most of us are, who we are, because of a series of courageous people.

Courage Changes Things

Embodiment teacher and therapist, Prentis Hemphill, names courage as an essential element for positive change:

“As we look at the world around us, it is clear that we need large-scale change. But it will not happen without risking something of ourselves, perhaps by seeing ourselves honestly, by stepping up to lead, by speaking out, by feeling discomfort as we move outside our usual patterns. We shape change in such moments and transform ourselves in the process.”

Courage changes things and courage changes us. It’s how we become.

The courage we need, as Canon Mary reminded us, is the courage to be *vulnerable*, to fail and stay.

The courage, as Revd Su reminded us, to remember and then re-member.

The courage, as Dean John reminded us, to *reimagine* every aspect of our social relations.

The courage to relinquish grasping what was and build piece by piece a new structure for how and what we produce. To exit the safety of our dying delusions. To reach for one another. To be honest. To ask questions. To listen. To feel uncomfortable. To be a part of the circle, to be fed by and to feed. To surrender. To know when our time is over and our roles have shifted. The courage to love and be loved....

When we are courageous, we can do the unexpected and start to mold the world around a vision bigger than one produced by fear. Every inch of progress, every ounce of love, every truly meaningful action from here on out will happen through courage, not comfort.

Today’s scriptures, chosen for the final Sunday in our Season of Reconciliation, call us to see **courage** as the foundational for any reconciler, interwoven with vulnerability, and imagination.

1. Esther 4:9-end: The Courage of Faith and Revelation

Esther, moves from a passive participant in the royal court to bold advocate for her people, exemplifying the power of courage in the face of injustice. She risks her life by agreeing to approach King Xerxes, even though doing so uninvited could result in her death (vs.11). She rises to the challenge, after some careful consideration and some motivation by Mordecai that perhaps her ascension to the throne, as a Hebrew woman, may just have been “for such a time as this” (vs.14).

Esther embodies the qualities of a reconciler by standing in the gap between the Jewish people and the Persian king. She acts only after thoughtful and measured consideration of the implications of her actions or the lack thereof. And she unifies her people in solidarity by calling for a fast, but not only calls for a fast, she leads by example by participating in it herself. Reconcilers are called to embody courage by leading from their own vulnerability, naming the injustice, daring to imagine that things can change, and then doing something about it.

Courage changes things.

2. John 4:1-15, 27-30: The Courage of Vulnerability

Jesus, as a first century Jewish rabbi, by publicly engaging with a Samaritan woman, breaks cultural taboos of ethnicity, gender, and common moral standing. He crosses societal boundaries to engage in an honest conversation. His courage lies in exposing Himself to criticism to prioritize love and truth.

The Samaritan woman, despite her own history of pain and societal rejection, she stays in the conversation. When Jesus reveals her past, she doesn't retreat in shame but steps into transformation.

Reconciliation demands vulnerability—a willingness to listen, to confront uncomfortable truths, and to stay in the tension of unresolved conflict. Both Jesus and the Samaritan woman display this vulnerability as they bridge divides

Courage changes things.

3. The Reconciler's Courage: Embodied in Coventry's Witness

Remembering with Purpose: Coventry Cathedral's ministry began by embracing the pain of destruction. Inscribing “Father Forgive” among the ruins was a courageous act of naming and remembering—not to fuel bitterness but to plant seeds of hope.

We remember Holodomor: The Ukrainian famine—known as the Holodomor, a combination of the Ukrainian words for “starvation” and “to inflict death”—claimed and estimated 3.9 million lives, about 13% of the population. And, unlike other famines in history caused by blight or drought, this was caused when a dictator wanted both to replace Ukraine's small farms with state-run collectives and punish independence-minded Ukrainians who posed a threat to his totalitarian authority.

We name and remember this genocide with a purpose- so that history may not repeat itself; but large-scale collective amnesia and the lack moral imagination is rampant. This is why we need a generation of reconcilers.

This is why the work here at the Cathedral is so important, our work through ICONS in our schools, the retelling our of story through our guides, the hosting of events and exhibitions like moonlight sonata, singing hymns about a different kind of world in our choir, praying in hope for people who visit here with burdens so heavy to carry.

Imagination for the Future: Courage in reconciliation requires seeing what does not yet exist: a world healed- reconciled to God, others, the earth and ourselves. This imagination is powered by faith and expressed through actions that seem radical, may even impossible—offering forgiveness, advocating for justice, and seeking peace.

Working definition of Reconciliation:

Each of my clergy colleagues have their own working definition of what reconciliation means to them. This November sermon series has helped me in developing my own understanding and definition of reconciliation, based on the themes we have covered this year.

“Reconciliation is the courage to name things as they are, daring to believe it can be different, then working together to make it happen”- N. Muller

4. Lessons for Today - Courage as a Call to Action

Personal Courage: How can we embody courage in our daily relationships? It may mean addressing a broken relationship, owning our faults, or stepping out to advocate for justice.

Communal Courage: Like Jesus and the Samaritan woman, we are called to engage in conversations across divides—whether racial, political, or generational—with humility and honesty.

Global Courage: As a cathedral with a legacy of reconciliation, we are challenged us to embody boldness on the world stage. Engaging deeply with hard questions like “How do we speak of peace and reconciliation in a time of war?”. To continue holding space for those conversations that most shy away from. Our time calls for courageous leadership on issues of war-conflict, on the global climate crisis, patriarchy and sexism, gender-based violence, racism and the like.

Conclusion:

The image of Jesus as the “living water” (John 4:14) is a reminder that the courage to reconcile is not something we generate ourselves—it flows from the living waters of Christ. His Spirit refreshes, sustains, and emboldens us to be reconcilers in a divided world.

I conclude with a call to action:

Where is God asking you to be courageous today?
