

Lent 2 C: Courage and Vulnerability

By David Lose

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Luke 13: 31-35 *At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to [Jesus], "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"*

*I'd like to share with you this morning some reflections on our Gospel passage by David Lose. I have adapted in a few places, but mostly the words come from Dr. Lose.**

I've often thought that there are at least two kinds of courage. One is the immediate and situational courage of the person who, in a moment of extreme need, summons the courage to face an imminent danger. This is the courage of someone who jumps into a raging river to save someone struggling to swim at great risk to him- or herself. Of course, such courage is not actually just a spur-of-the-moment kind of thing but ultimately is a display of character, an accumulation of traits and beliefs, training and patterns of behavior that have been developed and exercised over the long span of life preparing one to act courageously in any given moment.

There is a second kind of courage as well, this one displayed not simply in a single moment or act but in *anticipating* a significant, daunting, or even frightening challenge and not turning away from it but rather meeting it head on. This is also a matter of character – character that has emerged from a lifetime of facing fears and shouldering burdens and that is also being forged in the very moment of accepting challenges and responsibilities that one *could* avoid.

It is this second kind of courage that Jesus displays in the passage before us this week. The Pharisees come and warn Jesus to flee from Galilee because Herod is out for his blood. We don't know who these particular Pharisees are or what motivates them, and it doesn't really matter. We just know that they tell Jesus to run and save his life...and that Jesus refuses. Instead, he will keep to the road appointed, traveling the arduous path to Jerusalem to meet his death there like so many earlier prophets of God. This commitment to embrace his dark and difficult destiny for the sake of humanity is the very embodiment of this second kind of courage.

What strikes me is the absolutely critical role that *vulnerability* plays in this kind of courage. To anticipate challenge and suffering and not look away is, by definition, to make oneself vulnerable for the sake of others.

And that, I think, is important to notice. Because, as a culture, we don't often equate vulnerability with courage and strength. With care, love, and concern, perhaps, but not often with courage and strength. At our worst, we see vulnerability as a sign of weakness, something to be avoided at all costs. Hence the leading political candidates for the presidency not only avoid any level of profound candor, let alone vulnerability, but increasingly seem to be rewarded by behavior that if seen anywhere other than the campaign trail we would label blustering and bullying. At our best, we recognize the need to be vulnerable to those we care about most deeply. But we don't often see vulnerability as essential to living a courageous life.

And yet in this passage I think that Jesus demonstrates that vulnerability is **essential** to courage, vulnerability stands at the core of the Christian life, and vulnerability invites us to discover the peculiar strength of being open to the needs of those around us. In this passage, Jesus chooses the image of a mother hen gathering her brood of chicks to her for protection and safety to illustrate his love and concern for God's people. Beyond the provocative feminine imagery that invites re-imagining some of our views of God, it's also an image of unparalleled vulnerability. To be a parent, for instance, is to be held hostage to fate and captive to destiny. There is no way you can protect your children from all the threats this life presents (nor should you!), and that not only leaves parents profoundly vulnerable but promises a level of suffering that you simply would not endure if you had not bound yourself so fully to your child. As a friend of mine once said, a parent is usually only as happy as her or his **least** happy child. Now that's vulnerability!

And it is precisely this characteristic that Jesus embodies and by extension invites us to attribute to God – that God becomes vulnerable to all the vicissitudes of human life by becoming one *of* – and one *with* – God's children through the incarnation. In addition, Jesus' choice of this image [of the mother hen with her chicks] has helped me realize that it is our **vulnerability** that spurs our courage and nourishes our strength simply because *you can and will do things for those you love that you simply would not or could not do for yourself*. And so Jesus continues on to Jerusalem not to prove himself fearless or a hero, not to make a sacrifice for sin to a judgmental God, not even to combat death and the devil. Rather, Jesus marches to Jerusalem and embraces the cross that awaits him there out of profound love for the people around him, a mother's fierce love that will stop at nothing to protect her children.

Researcher and storyteller Dr. Brené Brown, through her TED Talks and books, invites us to recognize that while vulnerability inevitably opens us up to feeling things we might want to avoid, it also spurs us to be more authentically human

and more caring, compassionate, and courageous than we could otherwise be. Brown reminds us that courage comes from the Latin *cor* – “heart” – and she defines courage as living from the heart, the willingness to embrace our vulnerability in order to be our authentic selves. Christian courage, then, might be the kind of whole-hearted living that comes from believing that as God’s children we are enough and that those around us are also God’s beloved children and therefore deserve our love, empathy, and respect.

What if in this passage we see Jesus not merely acting courageously but embracing who he was called to be for the sake of those he loved, and thereby inviting us to be who *we* are called to be for the sake of those around us? What would our community look like if we decided together to live whole-heartedly, making room to name our vulnerabilities in a cross-shaped confidence that God is with us and has given us sufficient resources – including each other! – to not simply endure the challenges before us but to flourish as we discover that God meets us most reliably precisely in our places of vulnerability?

Where are **you** feeling most vulnerable? In a relationship? Financial situation? Illness or disability? Growing old? Be assured that God is with you in all these places of vulnerability, and through God’s grace you may find **in** these vulnerabilities a way to discover more fully who you have been called to be and connect more deeply with those around you.

To be vulnerable is a courageous thing! After all, have we not come to know God best through the manger and the cross?

AMEN

*<http://www.davidlose.net/2016/02/lent-2-c-courage-and-vulnerability/>