

Courage when the world is tough

Luke 10: 25-37

It was about four years ago when an amazing story hit the headlines. Part of what made it extraordinary was that there was no sleaze, no violence, no disappointment. A toddler had fallen from the balcony of some flats in Paris, and although his father had managed to hang onto him and prevent him from falling any further, he could not pull him back to the safety of the balcony. What happened next was indeed amazing. A man came out of the crowd of onlookers and began to climb up the front of the building eventually hauling himself onto a neighbouring balcony and taking the child to safety. The story became even more heroic when we learned that he was a refugee from Mali who was not legally in France.

It is a story that continues to a fairy-tale ending, but we will come to that later.

We have been talking in our Bible Art sessions to the year 6 children at TGPA St James about their current school values of courage and love, and using this morning's gospel story as an illustration of someone showing both those things. The man from Mali also demonstrates those values but in a more modern context.

Both the Samaritan and the Malian exposed themselves to physical danger to help another person, a stranger from another country. If at the time you saw the video of the Malian man climbing up those flats you will know how precarious he looked. Surely the Samaritan must have feared that the robbers would return and attack him as

well, we know that he had money and a donkey. But there was other potential danger for the heroes of our stories. The Samaritan put himself in danger from Jewish travellers coming upon the scene and assuming, wrongly, that he had caused the injuries to the first man. We can only imagine how that would have ended, but blood and violence seem inevitable. Or the Paris authorities arresting and deporting the Malian because a lack of the correct documents was seen as more important than saving a life.

It is easy to think of courage in a purely physical sense. Jumping from a plane. Climbing a rock face. Taking on someone armed and dangerous. We see examples on the news especially at the moment in Ukraine. But what of the other types of courage?

Some of the most courageous people are not doing extraordinary things. They are doing ordinary things but in difficult circumstances. Perhaps coping for years with a partner's dementia without much support from family or statutory bodies. Perhaps providing support to their children in the form of childcare for their grandchildren despite a deterioration in their own health. Maybe they are speaking out in public about something they really care about even though their knees are knocking and their heart pounding when they do so. They do what they do because it matters.

It is courage that allows us to do things that frighten us. Back to our year 6 children. We have been talking about changing schools. For them it is an exciting part of growing up but they know that finding themselves in a year group with as many children as there currently are in the school will be daunting. They will need to take more responsibility for being in the right place, at the right time, with the

right things. Most of the group are moving to the same school and it is obvious from their attitude now that they will watch out for one another. Some will be in a new place where they know no one.

Where can they and we look to find our courage? Now at this point my father who had a terrible sense of humour would suggest going to the pub. I grew up in Courage brewery territory.

But seriously, how do we find our courage? Given that when it is most needed, we already feel vulnerable.

The year 6 children have already shown us that it can come from the help and support of our friends and colleagues. It can come from knowing that the scary thing is so important that there is no choice. It has to be attempted. And it can come from the God who loves and cares for us.

Think back to Moses. Several times he told God that the task he had been set was too hard, beyond his ability. But God was relentless in his support, both is assuring him that he was capable and in guiding his actions. How often does that happen to us?

Have you ever felt that invisible arm round your shoulders? That presence in the seat beside you? Being with you as you embark on your scary task. Leaving you knowing that whatever happens God is with you in this. Or that wave of support from others? Often it is the little things that make the difference rather than big extravagant gestures.

My son was an enthusiastic rugby player and so I have frequently joined the other parents on the touch line, urging them on. Boys

grow at different rates and sometimes the opposition team were massive. As our boys' faces fell, we would shout at them, 'Turn and face them'. It's not bad advice for other situations as well.

Believing that God will help us as we take on our difficult tasks will give us courage to turn and face them. But we should not forget the importance of that indirect support, that comes from others. Others motivated by love, concern and God working within them.

I promised you a fairy-tale ending. We hope that our year 6 children will have one at their secondary schools, that they will thrive during the next five or seven years and emerge into an adult world where they can achieve their dreams.

And the man from Mali? He was invited to the Elysee Palace to meet President Macron. While he was there he was given French citizenship and a job with the Paris fire brigade.