

“Faith and Fortitude”

Philippians 2:5-11, Mark 11:1-11, Hebrews 11:1, Philippians 4:8-9 & 13

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Philippians 2:5-11 NRSV “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted Jesus and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Mark 11:1-11 NRSV “When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’” They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and Jesus sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” Then Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.”

When I was five I wanted to be a cowboy like the Lone Ranger, so I put on my cowboy hat, buckled on my cap guns, and slipped on my cowboy boots. I needed a trusty horse like Silver. We saddled up our horse, Thunder. My dad led Thunder and I around the yard. I was having a wonderful time. Confident in my riding abilities, I begged my dad to let me ride Thunder all by myself, which he did. Everything was perfect until our dog, Barney, chased something around the barn barking wildly which spooked Thunder. I hung on for a while, but the bouncing from Thunder running at full speed was too much for me and I fell. The problem was my foot was twisted in the stirrup, and I was dragged under the belly of Thunder a quarter of a mile down a gravel road being kicked numerous times before my foot came free. Other than numerous bruises, abrasions, and gravel embedded in my skin, I was fine physically but emotionally I have never felt at ease on a horse since.

My experience with horses leaves me in amazement with a fact that both Mark and Luke share with us, “You will find there a colt that has never been ridden.” Jesus grew up a carpenter. I doubt he had very much if any experience riding a colt, and he picks an unbroken colt. The facts have the makings of a rodeo not a royal procession. The scene gets even crazier as people start lying down multi-colored garments, waving palm branches, and shouting. One would expect the colt to be bucking and kicking, twisting and turning like crazy.

It certainly was a miracle that Jesus was able to ride this unbroken colt through the crowd. Perhaps it was another miracle revealing that Jesus was God with power to control anyone, any animal, or anything; or, perhaps Jesus was exuding so much faith and fortitude that the colt was calm, and the crowd was drawn to Jesus.

Jesus demonstrated his love for everyone. Jesus showed his desire to heal and save everyone. After he told his disciples that he must die to save them, Jesus set his face like flint toward Jerusalem. Jesus is determined to save us from our sins to give us life eternal in heaven and abundant life today. Jesus knows exactly what awaits him in Jerusalem. In a few days, Jesus will be hanging on a cross. With fortitude and faith, Jesus goes forward to save us.

We reenact this scene in many ways in our own lives. We may not have a procession and be treated as royalty, but we all face situations that demand fortitude and faith. When we suffer a loss or fail, or hear the word cancer, or find ourselves alone after the death of a loved one, we wonder how will I ever make it? That's when we need the fortitude that only God provides. God's Holy Spirit fills us and enables us to go forward, to take the next step, to say to our self, "With God's help I can do this." Jesus in human flesh saved the world through his death and resurrection revealing that with God we also will get through every dilemma. It might take a lifetime. We will not be complete until we also are resurrected. God gives us fortitude to enable us to keep going.

Jesus with fortitude, a face set like flint, rode into Jerusalem on the back of a colt that had never been ridden before. This was new for Jesus and the colt. Animals do have the ability to read humans. If an animal senses that a person is nervous, then they become nervous and jumpy. The colt and the crowd were drawn to Jesus' faith and fortitude which filled them with peace, joy, and love.

Sometime our familiarity with this scripture diminishes the miraculous happenings. Jesus was radiating God's love, a love so strong that Jesus was willing to freely die, so each of us can come home to God's love. This love, faith, and fortitude was drawing the people. Jerusalem was a big city and most of the crowd had never even heard of Jesus, yet they were drawn to Jesus. Imagine the aura Jesus was creating to draw the crowd. What would it take to have you drop everything and sprint out to the outskirts of the city, to take off your best coat, and lay it in the mud, so an unknown man could ride his colt across your coat ruining it in the dirt. The crowd shouted, Hosanna, which at this time was a cry of joy and a shout of welcome yet hosanna originally was a prayer requesting God's help meaning, "Save us now." It is intriguing that most people thought they were shouting a word of joyous welcome when in reality they were praying for Jesus to save them. Jesus was radiating faith and fortitude at the most difficult time of his life, his passion for us.

With God, we can get through anything even death. The apostle Paul tells us to have the same mind that was in Jesus. When faced with situations we do not like or want, our faith will help us make the right decision and boldly go forward with fortitude. Jesus had a mind that overcame the "what if" game. What if the colt starts to buck or tries to run away? What if I fall off this beast? What if I can not endure the pain of crucifixion? What if I ran away? What if . . . ? If Jesus would have been nervous, uneasy, wavering in faith or fortitude, indecisive, afraid of any of these things then the crowd would not have been drawn to him and he likely would have found himself lying on his back being kicked by the colt. Our society loves to play the what if game and is becoming more and more cynical, sarcastic, questioning everything, and demanding explanations. Faith is the opposite. Scripture states, **Hebrews 11:1 NRSV "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen"**. Do you have that kind of faith? God wants to help you have that kind of faith and to have a mind like Jesus, constantly generate thoughts of peace, love, joy, hope, and resurrection.

This is a rollercoaster week of emotions. The crowd celebrating with Jesus, the shouts of joy, hope for a caring and united Jerusalem, love and loyalty promised, betrayal, abandonment, hateful shouts of crucify him, fearful denial, hopelessness, agonizing what ifs, painful whys, sadness, death, shattered everything, darkness, grief, resurrection, forgiveness, joy, love, hope, peace, glory, radiance, faith and fortitude all in a few days. Jesus' faith and fortitude was tested. Our faith will be tested as we travel through the darkness of Maundy Thursday night, the crucifixion of Good Friday, on our own way to Easter Sunday. Perhaps you are also going through your own dark time in your life. If so, have the fortitude and mind of Christ, for God will get you through.

The apostle Paul wrote the words, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus," from a prison cell. Paul does not sugarcoat the circumstances that we all face at times in our life. Paul begins by warning the Philippians and all believers that we are not immune from sufferings. Paul has plenty of first-hand knowledge for he endured beatings, ridicule, shipwrecks, imprisonment, heckling, and whippings all for his faith in God and fortitude to spread the good news. Paul says it is a privilege and honor to suffer for Jesus. When we have the mind of Jesus we discover a faith and fortitude which will get us through even the worse situation. The amazing miracle is that God will not only get us through but will give us peace in the midst of the storm and joy in the midst of the hardship. Paul divides his letter into four sections, joy in suffering, joy in serving, joy in believing, and joy in giving. This permeating joy results from having the mind of Jesus.

The apostle Paul explains some of the characteristics of having the mind of Jesus: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit," and "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others,"

and Jesus “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.” Our mind becomes more like Jesus’ mind when we humbly, joyfully, lovingly serve. Transforming your mind takes practice, sharing, giving, loving, gratitude, forgiving, uniting, trusting that the glory of heaven is coming to earth. Jesus is the ultimate compassionate loving servant as he freely laid down his life for us. When Jesus hung on the cross in excruciating pain, he was not thinking of himself but each one of us as he said, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” Jesus was feeling the pain of every sin you have ever committed and will ever commit in your life. His concern was not the pain, the betrayal, or sometimes how freely or carelessly we sin, rather his concern was that we are forgiven for each and every sin, that we are free from burdens, guilt, and regret. Having the mind of Jesus is being gracious.

Sometimes life overwhelms us. Jesus said from the cross, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me.” For a moment Jesus did not perceive the loving presence of God the Creator and Sustainer. This feeling is hell. God is always with us. God always loves us. God resurrected Jesus. God will resurrect you from every moment that you feel alone, abandoned, unloved, and unworthy to a realization that you are God’s beloved masterpiece, a work in progress that God will complete. And God will resurrect you from earthly death to eternal life.

Paul challenges us to view things and do things like Jesus. Our experiences color the way we think, shaping our minds, thoughts and feelings. With faith and fortitude, be intentional in thinking positive, loving, joyful thoughts and put those thoughts into action. You might not normally be charitable; then, serve breakfast at the soup kitchen or give a gift to mission. It will change you mind more like Christ’s. You might not normally see the God given beauty in every person; then, say or write an affirmation for at least two people every day. You might have a hard time hearing the voice of God; then, spend time listening to God through scripture, nature or people. You might not normally have compassion for others; then, pray for someone every day, inquire about their feelings, send them a card, find a way to serve them. You might not normally be forgiving; then, say to yourself, I am forgiven, let go of hurts, grudges and resentments, forgive others, shift your thoughts to the good they do. You might not normally be peaceful; then, take time to rest, to do something you enjoy, look for moments of awe. You might not normally be joyful; then, make a list of your blessings and with gratitude thank God and others for the good in your life. Read Mathew, Mark, Luke and/or John. Strive to do more of the things Jesus did. Memorize some of Jesus words. Post scriptures that are meaningful to you where you will see them every day. The list can go on and on. With faith and fortitude, be intentional about your thoughts and actions, and you will be transformed into the likeness of Christ.

To have the faith and fortitude of Jesus most of our thoughts need to be positive, loving, and joyful. Each of us has control over our attitude, thoughts, what we say and do, what we read and watch. Intentional positive thoughts will overcome negative thoughts and transform one’s thinking process. Jesus tells us to repent, meaning “think differently” or “reconsider.” Repentance is not a once-and-done-with experience. Repentance is ongoing constantly asking God to guide our thoughts. Paul said, **Philippians 4:8-9 NRSV “Beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.”** And if it seems impossible to change thought patterns that have been ingrained throughout a lifetime, Paul adds, **Philippians 4:13 NRSV “I can do all things through God who strengthens me”**.

Strive to have the mind of Christ, so you to will have faith and fortitude to journey through this Holy Week and get you through every trial, hardship and suffering with inner peace, love, and joy. Amen