

Article 4: Take Courage

A paralytic was brought to Jesus (Matthew 9:1ff.). “Take courage, your sins are forgiven,” Jesus said to the paralytic. While the King James Version translates this word “be of good cheer,” the word really has to do with confidence and boldness. “Have courage,” Jesus says. When used as an adverb this word is never translated “joyfully” or “cheerfully,” but “boldly.” We might say, “Be brave,” or (in days gone by) “Be a man.” It is the word God used after Moses’ death, when He sent Joshua leading Israel into the Promised Land. “Be strong and *courageous*,” God told Joshua. [LXX] This is a word from God for all Christians today. Christians need courage to believe, and to say and do what is right.

Jesus bestows what He Himself calls for. He gives courage, “the spiritual strength to persevere and withstand danger, fear or difficulty.” Courage is needed when a person has a task to do, the doing of which necessarily arouses opposition. Can you imagine the ridicule this man faced when he told people Jesus had healed him, when he said and did not deny, “I believe Jesus is my Lord and Savior.”

It takes courage to resist opposition. And because of our enemies, we Christians all need courage—the capacity to meet strain and stress with resilience. That’s what St. Paul needed when he was arrested in Jerusalem for confessing Jesus Christ. While Paul was kept in the barracks, the Lord stood by him at night and said, “Take courage, Paul; for as you have testified of Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.” If you or I think we have it bad, more than 40 Jews banded together the next day and bound themselves with an oath: they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul!

Courage is what allows us—drives us—to bounce back after suffering loss, after stumbling. Courage enables us to hold our own against interference or temptation. The paralytic would never wonder whether he had in fact been healed. Hey, he’d been on a stretcher and now he was walking. He’d been healed alright, but was he really forgiven? That thought would perhaps cross his mind. Is that what Jesus said? Don’t you think Satan might have worked on him just a little with respect to that question? Courage clings to Jesus’ Word when Satan and conscience accuse.

“Take courage!” Jesus says. How often each of us has to stand alone. Like the prophet Elijah against the prophets of Baal; and when they were gone, against Jezebel, King Ahab’s wife. Elijah ran with fear from Jezebel’s threat to do him violence; he was filled with cowardice, until the Angel of the Lord appeared to him and gave him courage, touching him and saying, “Arise and eat.”

Are you suffering? Would you like to run away in fear—are you running—are you afraid? Jesus would have you take courage. Courage chases away anxiety and distress. Jesus would bolster your courage. But how? What did Jesus give to this man? Jesus said, “Your sins are forgiven you.”

Forgiveness signals the presence of our Savior God, Jesus Christ, because no one can forgive sins except God. Forgiveness is never bestowed except when Jesus is present—as in Holy Baptism, Absolution and the Lord’s Supper. The forgiveness of sins and Christ’s presence with you bestow courage: knowing that God is on your side.

Therefore, while the world derives boldness from what it can muster from within itself, the Christian derives courage from the victory of Jesus Christ. Jesus always issues the summons to take courage on the basis of His crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus begets courage always on the basis of His saving presence with His people.

When God spoke to Joshua before entering the Promised Land, He didn’t send Joshua off alone, “I will not leave you nor forsake you.” In the same way, the Lord didn’t just speak with Paul after his arrest in Jerusalem. Acts 23:11 says, “The Lord stood with him.” Courage comes precisely from our realization that Jesus Christ is with us.

In Galatians 3:27 Paul writes, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Paul is speaking of “putting on” not by imitation but by birth. You are no longer under the law’s condemnation, but you have been dressed in a new garment, in the righteousness of Christ. “Therefore Paul teaches that Baptism is not a sign but the garment of Christ, in fact, that Christ Himself is our garment.” [Luther]

The paralytic was given a lifelong testimony of Jesus' presence with him; he was given “new legs.” His healing carried with it Jesus’ word of forgiveness. Baptism into Christ declares constantly to every repentant, believing Christian, *your sins are forgiven*. Even so, “Take courage.” Trust in Jesus for eternal life and stand firm against sexual immorality, abortion, greed, hatred and every form of godlessness that seeks to destroy our families and nation. Christ is with you.

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