

## “God’s Bravery...and Ours”

Hebrews 5:1-10

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Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. <sup>2</sup>He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; <sup>3</sup>and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. <sup>4</sup>And one does not presume to take this honour, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

<sup>5</sup> So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, ‘You are my Son,

today I have begotten you’;

<sup>6</sup>as he says also in another place,

‘You are a priest for ever,

according to the order of Melchizedek.’

<sup>7</sup> In the days of his flesh, Jesus\* offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. <sup>8</sup>Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; <sup>9</sup>and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, <sup>10</sup>having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

How brave are you? Can you think of instances in your life when you did something brave? What were you feeling? How did things turn out? Was it easy to be brave? What does being brave look like in this world of ours?

To some being brave is what Felix Baumgartner was when he stepped out of that capsule 125 000 feet in the air on Sunday, October 14 over New Mexico. He was so far up that the sky above him was black and he could see the curvature of the Earth. Perhaps you saw the video as he hurtled toward the earth at almost 1300 km/h breaking the sound barrier. Or maybe being brave is what Chuck Yeager was when 65 years ago to the same date Baumgartner made his jump, Yeager became the first man to break the sound barrier knowing full well that other men had died trying the same feat. Or maybe being brave is what Yeager was on the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his feat when as an 89-year old he once again flew faster than the speed of sound in a US Air Force Jet. Some may call such things “being brave,” while others may just call it plain crazy! We look at people who do such things and maybe we say that they have a death wish or we call them daredevils. I know that I have witnessed people do some things that had less to do with being brave and more to do with being stupid. I know I can look back on my life and think of moments where in retrospect I may ask myself “what in the world was I thinking?”

And that is likely the question we ask when witness someone do something we may categorize as either brave or stupid. The question we ask, is what in the world is this person thinking to take such risks with their own life? They must be a fool!

A lot of people have asked that question about Jesus through the ages, especially when it comes to his crucifixion. Many ask why did Jesus go to the cross willingly? Was he a fool? I remember standing on top of the Mount of Olives when I was visiting Jerusalem pondering this same question. Many of you will recall that the Mount of Olives was the place where Jesus prayed with his disciples the night before he was arrested and executed by the authorities. As I stood on the Mount I could look in one direction where off in the distance I could see the desert and the Dead Sea. In the other direction one looks toward the city of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. Jesus could have just as easily gone down one side of the mount and fled into the wilderness, never to be seen or heard from again, but instead he chose to go back into Jerusalem -the place where he had been branded an instigator, a trouble maker, a blasphemer and a seditionist. What was going through his mind? What was he thinking? Was he being brave or foolish?

There were a lot of people who thought Jesus was foolish. You may remember the verse from Paul's Letter to the Corinthians where Paul speaks about the crucifixion being nothing but foolishness to some.

The author of Hebrews didn't think Jesus was a fool. The author of this text considers Jesus to be of the Order of Melchizedek...a high priest. The text gives a sense of Jesus' bravery since this reference to the order of Melchizedek is linked to our understanding of what Jesus accomplished by choosing the cross and how he reveals the reality of God's bravery lived out in him. The letter to the Hebrews was written to a community who understood that Jesus had descended from the lineage of King David and that Jesus had a kingly role. You will remember from the nativity story that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of David...and when he was crucified he bore a crown of thorns and was called King of the Jews. But by associating Jesus with the order of Melchizedek, the writer of the letter wants us to understand the priestly role of Jesus.

The order of Melchizedek refers to the priestly role within the history of Israel that goes all the way back to Aaron the brother of Moses. Over time, Melchizedek was a term used to refer to the Messiah and the lineage out of which the Messiah would come. The priests acted as mediators or bridges between God and the people. The priests connected the people to God, like a sort of conduit. As the Messiah the priest is the one “who offers gifts and sacrifices” to God on behalf of the people and “deals gently with the wayward.” There is a character that is being described here. It is a character that is rooted in a spirit of self-giving sacrifice and mercy. This character is revealed for the sake of God and the sake of the people, for the priest is one chosen by God, yet works on behalf of others. As we see in the text God declares about Jesus “You are my Son, today I have become your Father” and then continues by adding that Christ was one who “offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears.” Jesus is chosen by God and offers prayers and petitions for others.

In other words, as a true Messiah, as a real saviour, Jesus laid his life on the line for others. This is the essence of his bravery. He did it for God’s sake AND he did it for the sake of humanity. This is what made him a high priest of the order of Melchizedek and in this his life became a bridge between humanity and God. This is what shapes his bravery and ours as God’s people. You see, there is something about being brave that has everything to do with knowingly putting one’s life on the line, in pursuit of something else. -Namely something greater than ourselves or something that is beyond ourselves. In the Christian sense, it is for the sake of others. It is ultimately for the sake of God.

This level of bravery can be difficult to reach in this world of ours. There are things that can stand in the way of our bravery. Being brave requires self-sacrifice. It can be painful. We may like it when others are brave but it can be a hard thing for us to be brave. In fact, it can be easier to give others permission to be brave while we sit back and watch.

It’s like the story about this couple who walked into a dentist's office one day. The man told the dentist, "Can you pull a tooth quickly? I'm really late! Another couple is waiting for us at the golf course and our tee time is in thirty minutes. I don't have time to wait for anesthetic to take effect."

The dentist thought, "This is one brave man, asking to have a tooth pulled without anesthetic."

The dentist asked him, "Which tooth is it, sir?"

The man turned to his wife and said, "Honey, show him your tooth!"

You see, the reality is that being brave is a challenge. Think of some of the impediments that can stand in the way of true bravery.

How about job security for example? That can stand in the way of being brave. Just this past week there was a new Nanos poll that was released that revealed how over half of Canadians would have difficulty paying their bills if they either missed one pay check or if it was delayed. Think about how that can compromise a person's decision making. As people take on more and more debt and find themselves in a position where they are more or less slaves to that debt, it can become a challenge to speak out when one witnesses injustices or wrongdoing in the workplace. Individuals may even be more susceptible to participate in an injustice because they cannot afford to lose their job. When we hear stories about whistleblowers and people who are willing to take the risk of losing their job because they witness an injustice, we are usually talking about bravery. Of course there will be those who may look on and think that they are crazy for risking the loss of their job. But to them there is a larger reality to fight for other than job security. There is the cause of others and the cause of justice. Christ took on the weakness of others, knowing his own weakness, knowing his vulnerability and lack of security, yet in that sacrifice he revealed the injustice of the world, as he himself, an innocent was accused and executed.

And sometimes when it comes to bravery, I think of those who speak out. Speaking out on behalf of another can be difficult. But what about speaking out on the internet? The internet has become a real forum where people speak their mind, but a lot of the times these so-called brave comments and calls to action come from behind a "username." We seldom know the person's true identity. Are they really being brave? Is there not something missing from a courage that wants to remain "anonymous?" Christ reveals that true bravery does not hide its face. When God comes into this world it is with a face that can be looked down on and spat upon. With a body that can be tortured and crucified. The reality of Christ's bravery on

the cross is one that acknowledges that there is often a price that is to be paid when it comes to real acts of bravery.

I think by now a lot of us have heard of Malala Yousafzai, the teenage girl in Afghanistan who took a bullet in the head from the Taliban because she dared speak out for the education of girls and women in that part of the world. In a country and a place where human rights abuses and violence against women is well documented she did not hide her face, she did not remain anonymous, and this is something that gives her actions a real sense of bravery and ultimately greater force. It will never be lost because hers is the kind of bravery that points to the cross of Christ. Hers is a sacrifice borne for the sake of others.

You see, what God shows us in Christ is that real bravery is something that identifies and takes on that which is evil in the world. This is something the cross of Christ does for all of us. It reveals the presence of evil when others may want to deny evil even exists. The life of Jesus shows us how the power of evil will always seek to block the power of love. Yet without the brave act of Christ on the cross we would not know this would we?. Evil would remain hidden without brave acts. And without this bravery we would not know the power of Divine love. The power of evil gets exposed by Christ in order that we might have a chance at overcoming it with Divine love. I believe this is something the author Erica Jong alluded to when she wrote, "[Do you want me to tell you something really subversive? Love is everything it's cracked up to be. That's why people are so cynical about it. It really is worth fighting for, being brave for, risking everything for. And the trouble is, if you don't risk anything, you risk even more.](#)" And, my friends, in Christ God knew this, if he did not risk the cross to expose the evil that exists in this world, that he risked even more, he risked a world that would never know the true power of love. A love made known in weakness, a love that shows it's face, a love given for others. We would never know God's bravery...or ours.

Thanks be to God.