

## “Beau Courage”

The Rev. Drew Willard  
UCC at The Villages, FL  
April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sun./Easter  
St. George's Day

1<sup>st</sup> Kings 2:6-14

John 20:19-31

*On the evening of that day, the first day of the week,  
the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the [Judeans],  
Jesus came and stood among them and said to them,  
“Peace be with you.”*

*John 20:19-31*

Let us pray... O God,  
We acknowledge we cannot solve all the world's problems,  
but we thank you for the challenges that are within our ability to solve.  
We thank you for those who have come before us  
to provide an example for where we may make a difference.

Amen

One of my favorite Bible verses is Joshua 1:9 in which God  
speaking through Moses commands us to ‘Fear not’,  
which is best told using the King James Version:  
*Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage;  
be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed:  
for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.*

*Joshua 1:9[KJV]*

There has been a lot of talk about fear these past few... years,  
and people have responded at the polls, voting for those who promise  
to be tough on the bad guys, here and in Europe and Turkey.  
France is getting ready for their presidential election –  
and just days ago, a Parisian policeman – who incidentally, was a gay man,  
was shot and killed by an ISIS sympathizer.

France is a country that has suffered significantly in recent years  
at the hands of terrorists.

When the office of the satirical Charlie Hebdo magazine  
was raided on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015, 17 people were killed.

On November 13, 2015, 89 people were massacred at a Bataclan Theatre concert –  
with another 41 killed and 368 wounded, throughout Paris.

<http://www.rte.ie/news/2015/1120/747897-paris/>  
<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/injuries-from-paris-attacks-will-take-long-to-heal/>

On July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016, an ISIS surrogate drove a truck into the midst of a crowd  
in the coastal city of Nice, killing 86 and injuring 434.

It's sad when such monstrous events are followed by a statement  
from ISIS or some such politically-motivated terrorist group  
that they “claim responsibility” when they are anything but responsible  
in the sense of what it means to be mature and sane human beings.

Willard, p.2

There is a boldness that takes the form of ‘stone cold’ courage  
which makes no distinction between defenseless children,  
and trained, armed soldiers.

In order to objectify and kill people in this manner,  
it would seem that one would have to completely dispossess oneself  
of compassion, and in the process, compromise one’s emotional life.  
ISIS in particular has opted for the most heinous acts to demonstrate  
their unswerving willingness to do anything to achieve their goals  
as shortsighted as they are...

Nevertheless, there is a very different kind of courage –  
the good courage of Joshua 1:9 which has been demonstrated  
by such people who have taken a stand against ISIS, the KKK,  
and other such thugs, even those disguised as government authorities.

There are people of good courage like the Yazidi elder who refused conversion  
though this provoked ISIS to execute 80 men of the village of Kojo in Iraq  
even though they had already converted under duress.

People like Matthew Ayairga of Chad who chose to die  
with 20 Coptic Christians who like him had been kidnapped in Libya.

People like Walter Lee Irwin who was falsely accused of rape in Groveland near here  
in 1947 by the police of Lake County,  
yet he never admitted to guilt even under torture.

People like Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was hanged by the Nazis.

People like the Jews who were killed in the Holocaust.

People like Jesus...

People who demonstrate this kind of courage don’t always go to their death.

Sometimes, they even get their day in court,  
or at least the support of public opinion.

This week, women speaking up against a popular TV commentator  
exposed him for sexual harassment on the job,  
which led to him being fired from that influential role.

One plaintiff’s attorney convinced her to go ahead with the suit, saying,

*“Do you think Rosa Parks*

*[who was one of the heroes of the Montgomery bus boycott in 1953]*  
*decided she was not going to do what she needed to do*

*because people were going to say nasty things to her?*

*...This is your time.”*

<http://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/%E2%80%98the-mission-was-to-bring-down-bill-o%E2%80%99reilly%E2%80%99-the-final-days-of-a-fox-news-superstar/ar-BBA8qiN?li=BBnb7Kz>

Willard, p.3

A white Florida state senator lost his job because of a racial slur he used in debate with African-American colleagues.

The senator was pressured to apologize to the assembly and later resigned.

The senate president, Joe Negron, made this statement:

*Racial slurs and profane, sexist insults have no place  
in conversation between Senators and will not be tolerated  
while I am serving as Senate President.'*

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4424966/Florida-state-senator-uses-N-word-late-night-argument.html#ixzz4ezOgmGgB>

It may seem like there is a sea change in our society,  
about attitudes towards women, racial, and religious minorities,  
but we already know better as a society.

We know the difference and that knowledge and that imperative will not go away  
as long as we recognize and acknowledge the pain of injustice  
and then resolve to do something about it.

There are still people of good courage –of *beau courage*,  
who are still willing to pick up the responsibility to make a difference  
for the common good and ‘pick up the mantle’ of leadership.

To ‘pick up the mantle’ is a direct reference to how the Prophet Elijah  
passed on his power to his disciple Elisha.

From 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 2:13-14,

*Then Elisha picked up the coat that had fallen from Elijah.*

*He went back and stood beside the banks of the Jordan River.*

*He took the coat that had fallen from Elijah and hit the water. He said,*

*“Where is the LORD, Elijah’s God?”*

*And when he hit the water, it divided in two! Then Elisha crossed over.*

Each of us in our own lives must pick up the mantle of responsibility  
to follow those who came before us.

That is especially true for healthy communities to stay healthy.

A person who challenged me to do that was a man named Chris Farlekas,  
a columnist for the Times Herald Record in Orange County, NY –  
whom I have spoken of from time to time.

He has since passed from this life to go home to God  
and this summer, I will do a tribute for him at a place called  
Pacem in Terris in Warwick, NY

It so happens Chris’ birthday is today and he would have been 88.

April 23<sup>rd</sup> is also the religious ‘feast day’ for St. George –  
the Dragonslayer, also called the Great Martyr.

Willard, p.4

There are 23 countries that honor St. George as their patron saint  
as well as the Boy Scouts of America and  
the Armor combat branch of the US Army.

Medieval Catholic crusaders brought the legends about St. George back from  
the Middle East where it had been part of the Eastern Orthodox tradition.  
The story of St. George and the Dragon plays out like another  
myth of redemptive violence, but is believed to have been added on later  
to what was already a heroic narrative.

According to the tradition about him,

George was the son of a Roman soldier who was from Cappadocia in Turkey  
and a Palestinian Christian mother.

George became a Roman soldier, too, and  
attained the position of a high ranking officer  
who was known to the Emperor Diocletian.

Diocletian was a very effective leader militarily and administratively  
stabilizing the empire – and he was also a ruthless persecutor of Christians.

He wanted to get Rome back to its pagan roots and  
he had advisors who strongly urged him to suppress Christianity  
which was established,  
200 years after Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection – and growing.

The persecutions took the form

of denying Christians the right to gather for worship,  
destroying their houses of worship and scriptures  
and insisting that everyone – even Christians, participate  
in the worship of pagan idols.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diocletianic\\_Persecution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diocletianic_Persecution)

When George was told to take part in these persecutions,  
he refused and revealed that he was a Christian.

After many efforts to convince him to change his mind,  
he was subjected to various tortures,  
yet he survived each trial until he was finally decapitated.

21 years later, the Roman Empire would adopt Christianity as its 'favored religion'  
because of people like St. George.

<https://oca.org/saints/lives/2016/04/23/101184-greatmartyr-victory-bearer-and-wonderworker-george>

[https://orthodoxwiki.org/George\\_the\\_Trophy-bearer](https://orthodoxwiki.org/George_the_Trophy-bearer)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint\\_George](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_George)

Willard, p.5

The early Christians were actively abused by  
those who were 'stone cold' in their violence towards them,  
but these Christians also found ways to respond  
with a good kind of courage, a resilient kind of courage,  
a *beau courage* that comes from the Holy Spirit,

*[God through Moses said,]*

*Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage;  
be not affrighted, neither be thou dismayed:*

*for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest. Josh.1:9[KJV]*

Amen

*Our lesson today from 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 2:6-14 tells about not only the succession of Elijah by his disciple Elisha to become the principal prophet of Israel, but the transfer of spiritual power as well...*

<sup>6</sup> Elijah said to Elisha,

“Stay here, because the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.”

But Elisha said,

“As the LORD lives and as you live, I won’t leave you.”

So both of them went on together.

<sup>7</sup> Fifty members from the group of prophets also went along, but they stood at a distance.

Both Elijah and Elisha stood beside the Jordan River.

<sup>8</sup> Elijah then took his coat, rolled it up, and hit the water.

Then the water was divided in two!

Both of them crossed over on dry ground.

<sup>9</sup> When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha,

“What do you want me to do for you before I’m taken away from you?”

Elisha said,

“Let me have twice your spirit.”

<sup>10</sup> Elijah said,

“You’ve made a difficult request.

If you can see me when I’m taken from you, then it will be yours.

If you don’t see me, it won’t happen.”

<sup>11</sup> They were walking along, talking,

when suddenly a fiery chariot and fiery horses appeared and separated the two of them.

Then Elijah went to heaven in a windstorm.

<sup>12</sup> Elisha was watching, and he cried out,

“Oh, my father, my father! Israel’s chariots and its riders!”

When he could no longer see him,

Elisha took hold of his clothes and ripped them in two.

<sup>13</sup> Then Elisha picked up the coat that had fallen from Elijah.

He went back and stood beside the banks of the Jordan River.

<sup>14</sup> He took the coat that had fallen from Elijah and hit the water. He said,

“Where is the LORD, Elijah’s God?”

And when he hit the water, it divided in two! Then Elisha crossed over.

*Let us be challenged and guided by these words...*

John 20:19-31

- <sup>19</sup> On the evening of that day, the first day of the week,  
the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the [Judeans],  
Jesus came and stood among them and said to them,  
“Peace be with you.”
- <sup>20</sup> When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.  
Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.
- <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again,  
“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.”
- <sup>22</sup> And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them,  
“Receive the Holy Spirit.  
<sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven;  
if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”
- <sup>24</sup> Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them  
when Jesus came.
- <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him,  
“We have seen the Lord.”  
But he said to them,  
“Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails,  
and place my finger in the mark of the nails,  
and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.”
- <sup>26</sup> Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them.  
The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said,  
“Peace be with you.”
- <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas,  
“Put your finger here, and see my hands;  
and put out your hand, and place it in my side;  
do not be faithless, but believing.”
- <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him,  
“My Lord and my God!”
- <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him,  
“Have you believed because you have seen me?  
Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”
- <sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples,  
which are not written in this book;  
<sup>31</sup> but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ,  
the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.