

## McCabe United Methodist Church

Courage to Believe (Part 1 of 4)

Matthew 14:22-33: December 1, 2013

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Several years ago, a young woman named Liza was diagnosed with a rare and serious disease. Her only chance of recovery appeared to be a blood transfusion from her five-year-old brother. He had survived the same disease and had developed the antibodies needed to combat the illness.

The doctor explained the situation to the boy. He asked the boy if he would be willing to give his blood to his sister. He hesitated for about a minute before he took a deep breath and said, **“Yes, I’ll do it if it will save Liza.”**

The transfusion started as the boy laid in a bed next to his sister’s bed. He smiled as he saw some color returning to his sister’s cheeks. Then his own face grew pale and his smile faded. He looked up at the doctor and asked with a trembling voice, **“Will I start to die right away?”**

The boy had misunderstood the doctor. He thought he was going to have to give her all his blood and he was willing to do it.

It took courage, didn’t it?

Life requires courage for a lot of things. Facing new challenges. Adapting to changes. Helping other people. Moving from something old to something new. And believing in Jesus. It all requires courage.

Courage is kind of funny. It shows up when we need it. Most people who do courageous things, would never consider themselves courageous. Somehow they found the courage when it was needed.

One summer morning, Ray Blankenship was preparing his breakfast. He looked out his window and to his horror saw a small girl being carried away in the strong current of a flooding drainage ditch behind his home in Andover, Ohio.

Blankenship knew that further downstream, the huge drainage ditch disappeared underneath a road and then emptied itself into a raging river. He did what he had to do. Ray ran out the back door and ran along the ditch, trying to get ahead of the helpless child.

Then he hurled himself into the roaring water. He came to the surface, grabbed the little girl’s arm and started for the shore. With his free arm, he managed to grab hold of a rock. Desperately, he hung on. He thought to himself, **“If I can just hang on until help comes.”**

He did better than that. By the time the fire-department arrived, Ray Blankenship had pulled himself and the girl to safety. Both were treated for shock.

On April 12, 1989, Ray Blankenship was awarded the Coast Guard's Silver Lifesaving Medal. The amazing part of this award was that Ray Blankenship didn't know how to swim. He did what he had to do.

Life takes courage.

Karl Barth, German theologian, said this about courage: **“Courage is fear that has said its prayers.”** There is a God element in courage.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. I'm beginning a series about courage. We'll be looking at *The Courage to Believe*. *The Courage to Listen*. *The courage to Act Right*. And *The Courage to Start*.

Our Scripture lesson from Matthew is a story about courage and it's a story about Peter. The twelve disciples were in a boat out in the middle of a lake. Jesus wasn't with them. It was early in the morning and the weather wasn't good. The water was getting rough, really rough. The wind was blowing and the waves were crashing against their boat. Have you ever been in a boat during bad weather? It's kind of scary.

Suddenly, the disciples saw someone walking toward them. Someone, walking on the water, toward them. The disciples were afraid. Was it a dream? Were they seeing things? Was it a ghost?

It was Jesus. Jesus said to them, **“Take courage. It is I. Don't be afraid.”**

Peter, for some reason, said to Jesus, **“Lord, if it's you, let me come to you on the water.”**

I don't know why he said that to Jesus. He was fine in the boat, but he said it.

Jesus replied, **“Come.”** And Peter did.

Peter wasn't normally a courageous person. He was a lot like you and me. He worried about things. He had his doubts and made his mistakes. But he climbed out of the boat that early morning.

I know and you know that he didn't get very far before he started sinking, but he climbed out. He found the courage to climb out of the boat.

The other eleven disciples stayed in the boat. Now, you might say they were the smart ones. They stayed in the boat where they were safe. But Peter believed. He found courage and climbed out of the boat.

A lot of people today, don't like climbing out of boats. We'd rather stay in our boats or comfort zones where we know we're safe and sound.

But sometimes, life happens and we need to make a decision. We need to do something. Have you ever faced the unknown? Have you ever not known what to do? It takes courage to do the right things.

Have you ever been faced with a challenge? Have you ever had to take a risk? It takes courage.

Have you ever tried to ignore something, but a tiny voice inside refuses to let you sit in your boat? It takes courage.

Have you ever wanted to try something new? Go to that Bible study. Sing in the choir. Play bells. Volunteer to help around the church. Get involved in some mission project. It takes courage.

Have you ever been hurt and you know you should forgive, but you can't or won't? Have you been around someone who isn't very likeable or loveable, but you know you should help them? Have you ever been faced with doing something out of the ordinary that will require some of your time and attention? It takes courage.

On this first Sunday of Advent, do you believe that Jesus Christ came into our world to show us how to live better lives? Do you believe that **“God so loved the world that he sent his only Son to die for us?”** Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? It takes courage to believe.

The good news is this: Jesus tells us to **“Take courage”**, but then he also walks with us and gives us the courage we need. What do we have to fear? We're never alone. Jesus is with us and he will give us the courage we need. It doesn't matter if we've done everything wrong in our lives up to this point. Or, maybe we've done nothing at all with our lives. It doesn't matter. We're never alone.

Now, that doesn't mean that we won't make mistakes, that we won't be discouraged, that we won't get sick, that bad things won't happen to us. *‘Christ with us’* means that we'll never be alone and in every part of life, both the good and bad parts, he will give us the courage we need to keep going.

Author Leo Buscaglia tells a story about his mother and a family dinner that what he calls their *"misery dinner."* One night his father came home and said it looked as if he would have to go into bankruptcy because his business partner had stolen all their money.

His mother went out and sold some jewelry to buy food for a family feast, a feast fit for a royal family, a sumptuous feast. Other members of the family criticized her for it. They thought she should have saved the money for later. But she told them that **"the time for joy is now, when we need it most, not next week."**

Her courageous act helped the family face an uncertain future.

Do you see how it works? It takes courage to climb out of the boat. It takes courage to

believe. It would be far easier to stay where it's comfortable and safe, but this isn't where we'll find Jesus. He's not in the boat. He's in the world calling you and I to walk with him.

This takes courage. The kind of courage that comes from Jesus Christ.

As we sing our final hymn today, ask Jesus for the courage to face whatever it is you happen to be facing today. Ask him for the courage to leave your boat and walk with him.

**“Take courage,”** Jesus tells us. **“It is I. Do not fear. I’m with you.”**