

**Monday 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

**Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**

Dear Friends

The virtue of Courage has been in my mind a lot recently. We see it aplenty in the health service of course with staff working incredibly hard, long hours. It must take courage to keep going day after day, death after death. The same is true of teachers. On a much more mundane level we need courage to do so many ordinary things we would never previously have considered courageous at all – stepping onto a bus, going into a shop, sharing space with another human being. Do you remember the first time you wore a mask in public when so many others had yet to catch on to its importance? That took courage too. Standing out in a crowd.

There are plenty of biblical examples of courage of course in both Old and New Testaments. One of my favourites is David and Goliath. Perhaps it's all in the name! But I've always been impressed by the weak individual standing up to the big bully and simply standing in the way and saying 'no'.

David's defeat of Goliath teaches us something else very important about courage – and that's its intimate connection with wisdom. David didn't beat Goliath simply because he was courageous enough to wield his catapult against the odds. He had first worked out (wisdom) that compared with the heavily laden, lumbering, slow Goliath, he was swift on his feet, light and mobile, and easily able to confuse and irritate the much larger warrior. Wisdom fuelled David's courage...

So, courage is not enough – we need the wisdom first to reflect on events and decide where our courage is needed. Wisdom fuelled courage is so much stronger than simple bravado.

Biblical wisdom encourages us to slow down and reflect; to remember that there is a bigger, divine picture that is largely obscured to our eyes, but which has the future in mind. The wisdom to recognise that we may not be the centre of attention but that we do still have a vital role in shaping the future.

As the top of this letter states, today marks the beginning of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Given that there is so much else going on in the world right now, praying for Christian Unity hardly feels like a priority. In fact, it feels like we'd be wasting God's time with it (not that God or prayer works like that).

Yet it is important, for the simple reason that the Church points towards the Kingdom of God. Every time the Christian Church fails at something – and failure is something the Church knows a lot about – all Kingdom work is damaged and undermined.

Our struggles to get on with our Christian brothers and sisters is a very practical example of a failed humanity. Most of the time we co-exist, rather than work together. Unity is so much easier if we don't have to talk to one another!

One opportunity that will shake itself into our consciousness once COVID is under control is the possibility of the churches working more as one. The Archbishops currently talk about a post-COVID church that is simpler, humbler, bolder. It will be all of these and probably smaller and weaker too. One only has to think about our Christian friends who've died in the past 18 months to know our local church is diminishing in number and strength. We are losing so many precious and articulate Christians. We give thanks to God for them all, but it hurts.

So, though it may feel unimportant compared with other pressing issues, please do pray for Christian Unity this week. In particular, pray that we might have the humility and the courage to emerge from the pandemic more willing to listen to other traditions and find in their stories, echoes of our own and above all, echoes of God's Spirit calling us to be One.

At the time of writing there are 13 funerals being prepared to be taken in the next two and half weeks by Anglican clergy and Readers in Bromsgrove. Please pray for all the ministers involved, for the deceased and their friends and families. There is a lot of heartache in the town right now; your prayers make a difference.

I continue to pray for you all; may you find signs of God's joy and peace in your homes and the world around them this week. Every blessing,

David

David Ford, Rector  
01527 873831

revdavidford@googlemail.com