

ISAIAH 42:1-4

Here is the servant, whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights. I have put my spirit upon him, he will bring both justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street, a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench. He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

MATTHEW 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you; and do you come to be baptized by me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

FAITH AND COURAGE

Isaiah 42:1-4
Matthew 3:13-17

Wow! That happened fast! Just two weeks ago, we were celebrating the birth of an infant and remembering the harrowing account of his parents fleeing to Egypt to escape the murderous intent of Herod. And now this infant has grown into an adult man who is embarking upon his Spirit infused ministry. That leaves us with at least 25 years of unrecorded history. I don't know about you, but I would really like to understand how Jesus got to this point. How did he receive his call? What happened in his youth to lead him in this direction? Who were his teachers? Did he have friends? Was he ever married? Did he have children? There is a lot of mystery surrounding him.

The only account we have of his earlier life is reported in Luke covering his journey to Jerusalem for the Passover with his family and then secretly remaining after they departed to sit with the rabbis to attain a deeper knowledge of the Torah. Jewish boys began their Torah lessons very early so they had to learn how to read and write. They were highly educated often studying and reciting passages from memory all day long. I think we can presume Jesus was actively engaged in this education throughout his youth. We also know that Joseph was a carpenter and it is

very likely that Jesus spent much time as his apprentice learning the trade. It is also probable that like all youths, he had friends that he horsed around with. It wasn't all study and work.

I think there is also a strong possibility that he was married and may well have had children. As we noted several weeks ago, Jewish marriages were arranged by the fathers, often with a paid Matchmaker who negotiated the bridal price and property rights. This was done when girls were about fourteen and boys around sixteen. And Jesus would have been a good catch considering that carpentry was a lucrative skilled trade and he was really a nice guy. It would have been extraordinarily unusual for a man from a well-to-do family to remain a bachelor. "Be fruitful and multiply!" was a sacred duty.

It is also clear from our passage that John and Jesus knew each other and many scholars believe they were actually cousins. If so, then from their prior relationship, Jesus had mightily impressed John not only with his biblical knowledge, but also for the charisma Jesus exhibited and the affect he had on people. Without these qualities, Jesus had no starting point for recruiting his disciples and gaining notoriety locally at first and then spreading throughout the region.

His baptism by John was the culmination of all these early

experiences and represented a peak in his early growth and maturity. It was a commencement into the next phase of his life just as graduating from college is the beginning of a life requiring a much higher level of commitment and responsibility. In other words, it is the starting point of a period of transition. And whenever we are in transition which occurs with every major change in our lives, we are constantly asking ourselves, "Okay, what's the next step?" as we proceed into a new reality. This is an extremely challenging phase which is going to require of us both Faith and Courage. The great deterrent that is always looming in the path is the fear of failure. So if we are to successfully take the next step, we must confront that fear.

Allowing John to baptize him was Jesus' next step in embarking upon his mission. He could not have known where that step would lead. How in the world would he go about recruiting a support group for this was surely not something he could accomplish on his own? But something was burning within him to trust the process; that there would be guidance as his journey progressed. His Faith in God was so strong that he trusted that the unknown would become known. That is what gave him the Courage to fulfill the mission to which he had been called. Paul said that faith without works is dead. But it could also be said that Faith without

Courage leads to stagnation.

What is the next step in your journey through life that is requiring of you both Faith and Courage? I remember when my brother had reached a point in his treatment for pancreatic cancer that he had to decide what the next step would be. To continue on with the chemo which was making him sick to gain a few more months of life or to go into hospice and accept the inevitability of death. Letting go of something that is very dear for us requires both Faith and Courage. And it really calls us to face the reasons we have told ourselves about why we can't do it.

Jesus' next step was to go into the wilderness and be confronted by the devil with the temptations. Could he really handle the responsibilities the Lord would give him? Could he stand up for the poor and the dispossessed rather than giving into the allure of fabulous wealth and power. Could he bring justice to the nations? *Would he not grow faint or be crushed until he had established justice in the earth; and brought it to the coastlands who waiting for his teaching?* Could he give over his life and go to the cross for the sake of humanity? If he could pass those tests, then he would indeed have taken the next step and would be prepared for the ensuing step which would be to recruit a band of disciples who would assist and support him in the mission ahead. Yes, Faith in God's

providence and purpose was absolutely required for the journey ahead and would present numerous occasions to practice the Courage he exhibited in the wilderness with Satan.

Faith is conviction based. We have no way of proving whether God exists or is in any way concerned with each of the eight billion people who now share this earth. But it is the conviction that God is not only real, but loving that allows us to confront the fear standing in the way of taking our next step. That's where Courage comes in. Can we trust in our Higher Power to bring us through whatever we are facing? Pray about it. Keep your heart open for revelation and even though you are anxious, proceed with Faith and Courage.

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