

Text: [Luke 13:10-17](#)
Date: January 9, 2022
Title: Courage Series Week 1 > “The Conviction of Courage”
Theme: Courage begins when we allow God to convict our hearts about the things that really matter.

1

It takes courage to be different.

Last month, I read a wonderful book by the Rev. Ann Kansfield called *Be the Brave One*.

Ann Kansfield was the first out gay chaplain of the FDNY – the Fire Department of New York

I thought her book would provide some inspiration for the series – and it did. Her writing is wonderful and fun and funny – I finished it in about a day. I highly recommend it.

It's filled with beautiful and also some difficult stories about her life.

One chapter in particular caught my attention.

It wasn't just a story about her courage, but about her family's courage.

In 2005, Rev. Kansfield was living in New York, serving a tiny, almost-dying church in the Bronx, part of the RCA – the Reformed Church of America

She was out and the congregation, all three or so of them – were perfectly fine with that

An out lesbian pastor can kind of fly under the radar in a church of three

But then it got more complicated

Because she fell in love and got married – as people do

Now, at that time, gay marriage was only legal in a few states

So she and her fiancé arranged to be married in Massachusetts by her father, a pastor and seminary president

That's when things got intense

Within six months, he lost his job and had charges filed against him

It ultimately went to a church court where he was convicted of heresy and stripped of his ministerial credentials

All this was front-page news in the denomination and in upstate New York,
where the trial took place

It just so happened that the morning after the verdict, in the hotel
restaurant, the family and their supporters gathered for breakfast
Right near them was a group of pastors who were discussing the trial,
talking about the sad state of clergy, that something like this should
happen

And who then concluded, as pastors often do, by praying about it – and not
very quietly

It was at this point that Ann got up from her chair and started toward them
Now, the day before, Ann was angry enough that she was ready to have a
go at one of her father's accusers
But on this day, her Dad stopped her

And he went to the pastors
Introducing himself, he said, "I'm Norman Kansfield, and you've been
praying about me."
And he had a conversation with them, with his daughter (calmly) standing
by his side¹
She describes it this way: "I didn't think I would change their minds. I knew
they wouldn't change mine"
But they both felt, in that moment, that a conversation was necessary

This story crystallized for me the courage it takes to swim against the
tide
Not only for Ann, who has had her life dissected, analyzed, and judged by
people who know nothing about her
But also for her Dad, who faced a choice of either holding on to his faith,
values and family, or holding on to everything he worked for
professionally
There wasn't a way to choose both

2

It takes courage to be different.
And to follow in the way of Jesus is nothing if not a calling to be different.
So it's a summons to courage.
We sometimes forget that.

Because Jesus, in his life here on earth, wasn't afraid to challenge religious authority

He wasn't afraid to allow his compassion to move him toward people others steered clear of

He wasn't afraid to say hard things – even to the people he loved

Ultimately, Jesus wasn't afraid of *anything* – not even the cross

He's our inspiration and example

And the one who challenges us to live out of the courage of our convictions

3

What does that look like?

Well, the story of the Kansfield family is one example

Another comes from today's scripture

Where Jesus sees a woman in need and helps her

Despite the fact that he knows he's going to catch heat over it

Sometimes, honestly, I think he healed on the Sabbath just to see how people would respond

As kind of a test

Because in those times, a lot of religious leaders were absolutely obsessed with the rules around the Sabbath

To the point where Jesus believed they'd lost sight of the purpose

That Sabbath was no longer an occasion for rest and celebration of God's goodness

But rather 24 hours of anxiety about whether what you were doing was ok in God's sight

And judgment on those whose observance was less than perfect

Jesus breaks all kinds of rules in this story

First, in a time when a woman couldn't even enter a synagogue, and when men on the street did not even dare to talk to women who weren't their wives,

He speaks to a woman who has been disabled for eighteen years and heals her through his touch

Well, this sparks an uproar
“You ought not to have done this,” people want to know
Why are you doing healing work on the Sabbath?

It was fine to do whatever was necessary to save a life on the Sabbath –
but certainly after 18 years, this was no emergency situation
So the detractors have a point

But Jesus also has a point: you all lead your animals to water on the
Sabbath, don't you?
Which, at the time, was kind of frowned upon because it was also
considered
Or, at least we think that's accurate because a couple hundred years later,
by the time that the Talmud is written down, it's clear that rabbis had
been arguing the point
And while they ultimately permitted it, it was only under certain limited
conditions
So Jesus' point is this: y'all are ready to treat your animals with more
respect and care than a woman in need of God's healing

And for that, you ought to be ashamed of yourselves
For Jesus, ignoring people in need is something that simply can't be
tolerated

4

The other book that I'm drawing inspiration from for this series is one called
Courage: Jesus and the Call to Brave Faith by the Rev. Tom Berlin
Again, if you'd like to look it up, it's well worth your time

And in the chapter on conviction, he writes: “Conviction is necessary to
elicit the courage that makes action possible.”²
In other words, conviction leads to courage leads to action

We have to really believe in something before we're willing to risk anything
for it
Ann Kansfield's Dad believed in her, and in God's love for her, so strongly
that even the Church wasn't going to stand in the way of his showing
it

And likewise, Jesus believed that alleviating human suffering was not
something that you should wait on
And he was ready to take on the whole religious establishment in order to
make that point
When you have the means and the opportunity to help, you do so right
away
You don't say, "come back tomorrow"

Having clarity about what we believe "raises the moral temperature in our
lives", Berlin says
I like that idea - of raising the moral temperature

When we are genuinely convicted about the rightness or wrongness of
something
And we're confronted with a situation where there's a conflict
We've got to decide whether we're going to act, or if we're just going to
walk away and pretend like nothing happened

5

The reason why we're talking about these things is because I don't believe
Jesus' followers are supposed to walk away
We're meant to live out of the courage of our convictions
Just like Jesus did

We're not meant to walk away from instances of individual suffering
Or even from tough issues like racism, sexism, or homophobia
We're not meant to walk away from unjust, abusive, or just plain bad
behavior when we see it happening in our workplaces, organizations,
families – even our churches

No, courage is meant to spur action
And courage is born out of conviction

About who God is
And how God calls us to treat one another

We find our courage when we figure out what we really believe.
I'm convinced that when we see those things clearly, we'll be ready, as individuals and as a church, to be part of what God is already doing to remake the world.

We can't be like the religious leaders then – or now – who are so convinced of the rightness of their own cause that they are willing to deny the full humanity of others

Who are willing to let people suffer because they are afraid of how those in power might respond if they try to help

Who are willing to let injustices go unspoken about or uncorrected because they're afraid to stand with those who are being hurt

Who don't act because they're afraid to be different.

Failing to recognize that a calling to follow Jesus is a CALLING to be different.

Courage leads to action.

And courage begins when we allow God to convict our hearts about the things that really matter.

And to live differently as a result.

Amen.

By Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ

¹ Ann Kansfield, *Be the Brave One: Living Your Spiritual Values Out Loud and Other Life Lessons* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2021), pp.44-45.

² Tom Berlin, *Courage: Jesus and the Call to Brave Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2021), p.47.