

Sermon for the Kirchentag opening service, 30 April 2025, Opera Square, Hanover
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1. Being courageous

When did you last do something needing courage?
Where you felt your heart beating?
When were you last courageous?
Perhaps said loudly what you think?
Dared to start again?
Dared to go away.
Or to go somewhere else, to a new place, to new people.
Perhaps you also needed courage to come here.
Perhaps you have told someone you love them – him, her or them.
You have finally made an appointment with the doctor.
Have you offered assistance to anyone?
Or accepted help?

That was certainly an effort.
Being courageous is often difficult, isn't it?
Perhaps perhaps you were even a little anxious.
Because you didn't know what would happen afterwards.
How others would react.
But you knew:
That is important now.
It is good to do that.
Even if it is hard.
Starting a difficult conversation.
Or getting up – once again.

That is exactly what courage means:
You are afraid.
You don't know what will happen.
And you do it anyway.

That's why:
Anyone who is courageous is also strong – strong at heart.
Stronger than the fear.
Even if you perhaps only notice it afterwards.
That you have this strength.

2. What if the courage is lacking?

Courageous, strong, resolute.
That is the theme of the Kirchentag.
Courage, trust, love – that's what this service is about.
I like that better because it sounds softer.
Courageous, strong, resolute:
That sounds like "roll up your sleeves".
"We're setting off together!"

Sometimes that's absolutely important.
Nowadays, certainly.
Together we have a strength we didn't suspect.
We are needed.
We can make a difference.
Sometime that's what it takes to be courageous!
The Bible verses we are looking at today says
[direct translation from the Simple German on the Kirchentag website]:
*"Live with curiosity in the world.
Trust God.
Be courageous and strong.
Whatever you do and don't do:
Do everything in love." (1 Cor 16:13-14)*

"Be courageous and strong."
But perhaps you are feeling vulnerable right now.
Or you are tired.
Trust is difficult.
And even if you happen to be strong:
Perhaps you know very well what it feels like to be unsure.
Helpless.
When you are anxious.
"Be courageous and strong."
Yes, that's right.
But what if you don't feel like that?
When "courageous, strong, resolute" proves too hard – what then?

3. Daniel's encounter with God (Dan 10)

I'll tell you a story.
It's in the Bible too.
The Prophet Daniel, yes, the one with the lions.
He has grown old.
He's no longer a big hero.
He has seen too much.
He has got tired.
When he looks into the world he feels scared.
He has tried hard all this life.
Has tried to tell people what really counts.
But he sees the people and they make the same mistakes, again and again.
That makes him so tired.
That makes him so tired.
He's exhausted.
Daniel eats very little.
He neglects himself.
He is lost in his sorrow.
His courage has left him – though he was so courageous in the past.

Daniel does what he has always done, again and again:
He talks with God.

Perhaps he also recites the words from the psalm:

"God, I want to be near you.

Where are you?

I'm really asking:

Save us humans!" (Psalm 27:9)

One day he gets a visitor.

Someone comes to see him.

Someone who looks like a person.

But strong and shining.

Daniel knows who it is.

He knows him.

He knows: God has heard him.

And when Daniel sees the visitor, he lets go.

Tears run down his face.

He falls on his knees, falls to the ground.

He stays there and makes himself very small.

This divine splendour, which he has seen so often.

And then this topsy-turvy world that is going down the drain.

Both exist.

How does that fit together?

This is too much for Daniel.

As he stays there, he feels a hand on his shoulder.

A warm, strong hand.

It shakes him a little.

And gradually Daniel moves again.

He is still on the ground, on his hands and knees.

His eyes closed, full of tears.

Then he hears a voice.

"Daniel, you beloved person.

Get up." (Dan 10:11)

Daniel struggles onto his feet.

He stands there and trembles, lets his head hang low.

His visitor stands very nearby.

Daniel feels him, he feels his warmth, his strength.

The visitor strokes him on the cheek.

Very gently.

He gives him a kiss.

And then he says again:

"Don't be scared,

Daniel, you dearly beloved person.

Peace be with you.

Be courageous and strong." (Dan 10:19)

This affectionate attention.

That moves me incredibly.

How gently God encounters the old prophet.

How respectfully.

How lovingly he talks to him.
"You dearly beloved person."

Daniel doesn't understand the world any better after this visit.
But he has met God.
God who loves him.
That gives him courage.
Courage to take another few steps.
I believe that called for the same amount of strength as his earlier encounter with the lions.
To get up – once again.

4. Drawing courage from God's love

Love.
It is what is there when you are not courageous, strong, resolute:
God's love.
God, who says to you: *"You beloved person."*
You do not need to cling to this love.
It holds you fast.
It embraces you.
"Do everything in love.
Whatever you do or don't do,
Do everything in love." (1 Cor 16:14)
Not "with love", but "in love".
In the embrace of this love of God.
This love carries you.
Supports you.
It raises you up.
Entrusts you with something.
It encourages you.

The first letter to the Corinthians from which our Bible verses comes says a lot about love.
It is described like a human, but strong and shining.
Like Daniel's visitor.
This love lays a hand on your shoulder when you are on the ground.
Perhaps, for you, that is a spark of beauty in your daily life.
Perhaps you sense the love of God in the embrace of a friend.
In nature.
Or in the feeling of peace, of being able to let go.
In breathing in and out.

Love is always there for you.
Every day, every minute, until the end of your life.
Whether you happen to be courageous or not.
"Love never ends." (1 Cor 13:8)
It stays there when the world is going down the drain.
When you have lost hope in humanity.
"Love hopes all things." (1 Cor 13:7)

Kommentiert [EG1]: Tippfehler im Deutschen, sollte 8 nicht 7 heißen

Or when you always make the same mistakes.

"Love is patient." (1 Cor 13:4)

It is there when you are exhausted.

"Love bears all things." (1 Cor 13:7)

And it says to you:

«You beloved person.

Be courageous and strong.

Trust me.

Whatever you do and don't do:

Do everything in love." (Dan 10:11/1 Cor 16:13-14)