

Two stories from the news this week have had me thinking about courage, about what gives us the ability to step outside our comfort zones or, to push past the cliché, to step outside our safe zones. What would it mean to move not only to the places where we are uncomfortable but to places we risk truly being vulnerable?

I do not simply ask using 'we' just to be rhetorical – I mean to include myself in wondering how I, too, might step outside the places I am comfortable, whether God calls me to do that, and how to do that, because the thought strikes me as terrifying.

The first was an opinion piece about Pope Francis. A photograph circled the internet this week of the Pope embracing a severely disfigured man. The author was asking the question about whether what will happen with Pope Francis is that he is a strong enough figure to lead the catholic church into the changes he lives or if he is simply to be someone we admire for living in a way we do not see ourselves as able to live.

It was the first time someone had pointed out that this kind of admiration one felt could come from seeing oneself as unable to do, which, of course, gets me to thinking... what does it take to be called to embrace those I know I do not?

This question was driven home by listening to the proceedings for the bill on same-sex marriage in the house this week. One of our state representatives got up to speak about how he had voted against civil unions a few years ago, that his wife was not in support of same-sex marriage, that his church was opposed to the decision he was about to make, and, he said getting choked up, he felt compelled to vote in support of this bill, let the consequences on him in terms of getting re-elected or welcomed at his church be what they would be.

In a little bit of awe, I found myself wondering if I would ever in my life find myself needing to take such a public stance, unpopular with those close to me, on behalf of those I could just as easily, if not oh-so-much more easily, ignore.

Now, this is not some self-flagellating sermon about how we all just need to buck up and try harder.

... I promise.

Rather, I believe this morning's Gospel provides one of those insights that helps us see, not only why we might be compelled to move towards a more just world, but how we might step out of our safe enclaves.

Jesus is certainly never one to be cowed by anything, and also doesn't ever seem to hesitate to speak his mind. In this morning's Gospel, he's been speaking his mind at the Temple, the place for worshipping God, for sacrificing, and for gathering and learning. Up until this point, Jesus has been travelling the countryside, teaching in smaller towns and cities, and has now entered Jerusalem for what will be the last time, so his celebrity not only gathered a crowd to hear what he had to say, but also drew detractors. Scribes and Pharisees grilled

him in the courts of the Temple and, in this morning's reading, the Sadducees step up to have a go at Jesus.

The Sadducees were a sect of Judaism at this time that believed in keeping the practices at the Temple but did not believe in the resurrection or angels. In a sense they were somewhat analogous to secular intellectuals who have a religious practice for cultural reasons. Despite being a very small sect, they were also significantly wealthier than the scribes, the Pharisees and certainly Jesus and his followers.

In the Torah there was a law that if a woman's husband died before she'd had a son, she could marry his brother to have a son on her dead husband's behalf. While this seems odd to us now, for a rural society of farmers organized by families, this was a way of ensuring that there was a contingency for someone who otherwise could fall into desperate poverty. The Old Testament often concerns itself with the wellbeing of the widow and the orphan, and this is one of those ways.

To grill Jesus on the resurrection, the Sadducees take this rule and ask if a woman goes through many of these marriages, then to whom will she be married at the resurrection?

Talk about a redefinition of marriage. Jesus' answer pushes beyond their notions of marriage, but also pushes their ideas of what it means to be human. Jesus says, marriage, in the age to come, as with all human institutions, will not exist. One implication is that the Sadducees miss the point. The rule about marriage is not supposed to comment on the afterlife, but create a way for someone on the margins to survive. In the world to come... the things we build to get by, even the great things and the flawed things, will all be gone. But rather all live into being children of God.

This also says something vital about what it means to be human. C.S. Lewis puts it another way, writing:

There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.

What might give courage?