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**Sermon Title:** The Courage to Be Vulnerable

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**Text:** [Joshua 1:4-9](#)

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When leading a group and doing an icebreaker activity, I often play “Two Truths and a Lie.” A person tells two truths about themselves and a lie but does not tell the group which is which. The group then has to guess the lie.

So, for example, you might say:

Made a game-winning field goal in high school

Sang “Beat It” at intermission during a professional hockey game

Made a higher score on the SAT in 7th grade than I did in the 11th grade

And then you would guess which one of those is the lie, what didn’t happen. It’s a fun way to get to know others better. One of the tricks of the activity is that the more vulnerable one is, the harder it is to guess which is the lie among the three statements.

This is the second week of a series we are calling *Keeping It Real: The Power of Vulnerability*. We started last week with the idea that the church being a place where we can be vulnerable is needed in this time and is a biblical model for being in community. We used Paul’s statement that God’s power is made perfect in our weakness.

This week, our focus is on the courage to be vulnerable. It is a brave act to be vulnerable. I love what Madeline L’Engle says about this: “When we were children, we used to think that when we were grown up, we would no longer be vulnerable. But to grow up is to accept vulnerability. To be alive is to be vulnerable.”

This week, we are looking at a significant event in the Hebrew scriptures: the transition in leadership from Moses to Joshua. The Israelites can see the Promised Land as they are in the wilderness on the plains of Moab. It is here that Moses dies and is mourned for thirty days by the people. Moses is the greatest prophet in Israel, leading the people out of slavery and to freedom.

After Moses' death, the Lord speaks to Joshua, Moses's assistant, and tells him he will lead the people.

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses's assistant, saying, 2 "My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. 3 Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. 4 From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. 5 No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. 6 Be strong and courageous, for you shall lead this people to possess the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. 7 Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. 9 I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:1-9)

Joshua is tasked with leading the Israelites to the Promised Land, tasked with picking up the mantle from Moses. The problem is that he is not Moses; he is Joshua. At least, I suspect he and others believe this to be an issue.

We all want to be alive

We all want to live fully, to flourish.

And if to be alive is to be vulnerable, why is it so difficult?

Being vulnerable is hard. One of the reasons that vulnerability is so hard is because of shame. Brene Brown tells a story about giving a talk on shame and being approached by a man after the talk. He took a deep breath and said, "I have to tell you, I didn't want to come tonight. I tried to get out of it, but my friends made me come." He said, "I couldn't think of a worse way to spend an evening than listening to a shame researcher." He said, "I need to tell you, what you said tonight during your talk meant more to me than I ever thought it would; it made a lot of sense." He said, "What I discovered tonight, what I didn't even know about myself, is that I am pretty bad at vulnerability, but I'm really good at shame."

I could probably say the same thing about myself; perhaps you could also say this. I struggle with vulnerability, but I'm good with shame.

As Brene Brown points out to that man, to be vulnerable, we must develop a resilience to shame.

Of course, that is easier said than done, especially with so many places in our lives willing to perpetuate shame and tell us we aren't enough of this or we aren't enough of that. Some many places and experiences that simply tell us we are not enough.

These places make us feel the need or even the obligation to be someone we are not, to be something less than real.

A man was looking for a job and noticed an opening at the local zoo. He inquired about the job and discovered that the zoo had a very unusual position that they wanted to fill. Apparently, their gorilla had died, and until they could get a new one, they needed someone to dress up in a gorilla suit and act like a gorilla for a few days. He was just to sit, eat, and sleep. His identity would be kept a secret, of course. Thanks to an excellent gorilla suit, no one would be the wiser. The zoo offered good pay for this job, so the man decided to do it. He tried on the suit, and sure enough, he looked like a gorilla.

They led him to the cage, where he took a position at the back and pretended to sleep. But after a while, he got tired of sitting, so he walked around a little bit, jumped up and down, and tried a few gorilla noises. The people who were watching him liked that. They would clap, cheer, and throw him peanuts when he would move or jump around. And the man loved peanuts. So he jumped around some more and tried climbing a tree.

That seemed to get the crowd excited. They threw more peanuts. Playing to the crowd, he grabbed a vine and swung from one side of the cage to the other. The people loved it and threw more peanuts.

Wow, this is great, he thought. He swung higher, and the crowd grew bigger. He continued to swing on the vine, getting higher and higher, and then, suddenly, the vine broke! He swung up and out of the cage, landing in the lion's cage next door.

He panicked. Not twenty feet away, there was a huge lion that looked very hungry. So the man in the gorilla suit started jumping up and down, screaming and yelling, "Help, help! Get me out of here! I'm not really a gorilla! I'm a man in a gorilla suit! Heeelllllp!"

The lion quickly pounced on the man, held him down, and said, "Will you be quiet! You're going to get both of us fired!!!"

Shame causes us to wear masks.

Shame causes us to be someone other than God created us to be.

Shame limits vulnerability.

The Bible tells us a different story. Of course, we hear in the beginning chapter of Genesis that all people are made in the image of God, and this is one of the overarching themes of scripture.

There are situations in life where we feel compelled to present ourselves to others as something we are not, situations where we pretend to have it all figured out.

Good news here: God expects Joshua to be Joshua.

God wants him to have the courage to be himself, to be real with others and not to be afraid to be vulnerable as he leads the people. He is the leader they need in that moment.

The problem is not that he is not Moses. The problem comes when he doesn't have the courage to be Joshua.

I've come to recognize that part of the courage in this text is really about having the courage to be who God made you to be—the courage to take risks, to be real, to fail, and to know it will all be okay, for God is with you. It is repeated three times in this text: Live with courage.

God is with you wherever you go. God is with you every step you take.

Because of this, we can let go of those lists of who and what we are supposed to be. That's the courage we need, the courage to love our authentic selves, to be known and to be seen. It's the courage to love others as they are, the courage to create space where we can be vulnerable with each other. It's the courage to live fully into God's calling upon each of us.

Let us pray.