

**BE
STRONG**

AND

COURAGEOUS

Deuteronomy 31:6

EPISCOPAL SCHOOLS CELEBRATION
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Excellence Through Association

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NAES Executive Director's Message



“Be Strong and Courageous” (Deuteronomy 31:6)

The Rev. David A. Madison, D.Min., Executive Director

One year, I taught Religion classes to our Kindergartners. As someone who started his teaching career with high school-aged students, this afforded me the opportunity to develop skills that I had not previously used. I was nervous, but I was eager. Our school used the Godly Play curriculum with the little ones, and it helped me understand ways to engage the biblical text with some of our youngest students.

I remember one day very clearly. I had just shared the story of “The Good Shepherd.” Honestly, it can be a bit of a scary story because it talks about “dark places” that we sometimes encounter. I shared with the students how the story also reminds us that Jesus is always with us during those difficult and challenging times that we sometime encounter. That’s what makes Jesus the “good” shepherd. After our time together, I noticed that one student was not quite ready to leave the room. Recess was next, so this was especially telling that he wasn’t scooting out to the playground with the rest of his buddies. I suspected that we had a little more “work” to do.

I asked him if he was ready to go or if he needed anything. He thought about that for a second, looked me straight in the eyes, and asked, “Do you ever get scared?” His question caught me a bit off guard. So, I thought about it and said, “Yes. There are some times when I get scared.” I could tell that he was thinking about what I had said. Then he said, “You know what? I do, too. But, I think it’s okay because God is always with us.” With that, he then ran off to recess.

My student said something important that day about fear, strength, and courage. First, and foremost, it’s okay to be scared. All of us face things that can induce fear or anxiety. That’s part of life and part of being human. I wonder if we do a disservice when we either don’t recognize fear or try to treat it as something to avoid at all costs. I’m not sure how to live a life that doesn’t have occasional fearful moments.

So, what are we to do? We can't live a life that is enveloped in fear. I wonder if the answer lies in focusing on the truth of the Good Shepherd—the truth that God never abandons us when we are in those scary places. It seems to me that when we live into that reality, fear takes on a different dimension. I don't think this understanding causes fear to evaporate forever, but it will allow space for strength and courage to take root.

Strength and courage come from the reality that we aren't alone. Strength and courage come from the reality that God never calls without equipping—no matter how challenging the call may initially seem to us. Strength and courage come from the reality that we will be reunited with our friends and loved ones in the fullness of time. When we recognize these truths, there truly isn't a reason to be scared. We can live into a life of strength and courage.

This was the message of Moses when he called the people of God together at the end of his Earthly ministry. As he was preparing Joshua for leadership and the rest of the family for their next chapter of faithfulness, Moses told them that now was the time to be strong and courageous. Now was the time to fully embrace the mission that God had placed before them. But one point was clear. Don't be strong and courageous on your own account. Don't rely upon your skill, your muscle, or your wisdom to crush your fear. Rather, be strong and courageous because God goes before you, and God will "never leave you or forsake you."

We should take comfort in this. God has placed before Episcopal schools a call to ministry. A call to create communities that respect the dignity of every human being. A call to help young people grow into what God has intended for them. And in doing this work, we too will have moments of fear. We will have moments that will cause us to question our ability to do this work.

But as Moses told Joshua, I tell you—God will never leave us. God will never forsake us. God will continually equip us for our work together regardless of the challenges we face this year as we enthusiastically embrace our mission as Episcopal schools.

So, should we find ourselves in scary places at some point this year, it's okay. God is with us. God will never abandon or forsake us. Hold fast to your mission. Allow space for your strength and courage to take root. And, in so doing, God will be glorified!