



## ***Four Week Worship Series for CDC Congregations***

**This resource is intended for use within Central District Conference congregations. Please contact CDC Conference Minister, Doug Luginbill, for permission to use this resource beyond CDC congregations.**

### **Meet the Creators**

-Introduction and Sermon Seeds: **Doug Luginbill** is a member of First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, OH and the CDC Conference Minister. He loves gathering wisdom from across the conference. In his spare times he enjoys tending to the rich variety of berries that grow in his backyard.

- Children's Stories: **Anne Marie Hardy Spelman** is a member of First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio. She is a spiritual director and homeschooler in Bluffton. She believes in the power of music and stories to help us slow down and connect in the midst of daily life. You can find her at [EverySeasonSpiritualDirection.com](http://EverySeasonSpiritualDirection.com).

-Words for Worship: **Jan Luginbill** is a member of Chicago Community Mennonite Church. She is busy in retirement as a spiritual director and with volunteer activities.

-Hymn Selections: **Adam Tice** is a member of Faith Mennonite, Goshen. He served as text editor for Voices Together. His hymn texts appear in denominational hymnals and supplements in the US, Canada, and Scotland. He edits congregational songs for GIA Publications. In 2024 he was named a Fellow of the Hymn Society. His forthcoming book, *Carols for the Coming Christ*, is an Advent and Christmas devotional based on hymns. It will be available this Fall from Herald Press.

### **Introduction**

Every two years CDC leadership comes up with a theme that guides us. I consider it a minor miracle that 20 people enter our Visioning Day at 10:00 am without a theme and leave the room at 4:00 with something that we believe is both inspired and inspirational. Worship on that Visioning Day 2025 was rooted in the story of Shiphrah and Puaah (Exodus 1) who have the courage to defy the deathly decree of Pharaoh. We also heard a story from the Mennonite Church in South Korea entitled "Teaching Peace in a Divided Culture" from *Faith in Full Color: A Tapestry of Anabaptist Stories*. And we listened and eventually sang along to the song, "We

Rise,” by Batya Levine. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6tkmkwufRVw> Following a meal, silent reflection, and communal discernment, the theme emerged, ***Rise up! Take courage!***

As the logo/image reflects, we are buoyed in our rising up and courage-taking by one who walked a perilous journey of faithfulness to his God. As Jesus followers, we draw our resistance and our strength from the same God who inspired Shiphrah and Puah, who empowered Moses, who blessed Hannah, who buoyed Esther, who transformed Saul/Paul, and who raised Jesus. May we hear the voice of God calling us to rise up and take courage, knowing that the living Christ and Holy Spirit are with us today.

## **Introduction to the Children’s Stories**

- Jesus used storytelling (parables) as a central tool in his teaching. We invite you to consider telling stories for children’s time these four weeks. You can use the story scripts as they are, or you can change them according to your own preference and context. And of course, you may prefer to simply tell one of the Bible stories each week.
- As we talk with children about courage and resistance, we can take care not to imply that they should carry our adult anxieties or problems for us. Adults are responsible for addressing the massive problems of our society. But we can invite our children to see themselves as part of a tradition that values courageous resistance. Let’s show them that adults in their tradition regularly take courage to stand up for what’s right.
- If storytelling feels a bit outside of your comfort zone here are some tips to consider:
  - Children respond well to storytellers who are grounded and present to them. Your presence with the children in front of you is a gift.
  - Before Sunday, get familiar with the story and read it out loud several times. Take your time. Don’t feel like you need to be overly animated or use special voices.
  - At children’s time, take a deep breath before you begin. Silently invite the Holy Spirit to create a canopy of divine presence around you and the kids. Imagine the Holy Spirit holding the story, you, and the kids together in the palm of God’s hand.
  - If things end up as pure chaos up there for a children’s time, as sometimes happens, that’s OK too! The important thing is that the children feel part of their church family.
- There are Possible Takeaways listed for each story. If some of these feel pertinent, feel free to briefly use them after you conclude the story. You may not have time to include them all. You may also just skip them and let the story stand on its own.
- If you enjoy this, you could try creating your own story for the children of your congregation in the future. It might be fun!

## **Week 1: Rise up! Take Courage! Voice your Rage!**

**Texts:** Psalm 44:22-26- The psalmist accuses God of the suffering of God's people and implores God to "Wake up! Get up! Stand up! Help us!" (CEB)

I Samuel 1:9-11, 2:1-8: Hannah bears her soul to God. Later she begins her song/prayer with the words, "My heart rejoices in the Lord. My strength rises up in the Lord." (CEB)

Job 3:1-10 Job, in the midst of his suffering, laments the day he was born. (An image of Job appears in the *Anabaptist Community Bible* at chapter 18.)

### ***Sermon Seeds***

A gift of the Psalms is the invitation to express all our emotions and bring them before God, even our anger and blame. "It's all your fault," the psalmist cries out to God. Hannah's pleas before God are so agonizing that Eli accuses her of being drunk. "Why was I even born?" Job laments. What happens when we stuff our anger, refuse to rail at God, and interpret "peace" as the avoidance of conflict? Dare we demand that God get up and do something about the injustices, violence, brokenness, chaos, and pain around us? How might God be inviting us to courageously express our anger and outrage in ways that bring transformation to ourselves and our communities? And, of course, we root our response in our commitment to non-violence.

Suggested theme songs for the entire series are in bold. Consider selecting one of these to sing every week

### ***Hymns:***

VT 792 How Can Our Anger Give Life

VT 412 My Soul Cries Out

VT 637 Blessed Be Your Name

**VT 287 Jesus Christ Is Waiting**

VT 146 Lord Jesus, Come and Overturn

VT 150 Gentle God, When We Are Driven

VT 591 When I Can't Find My Way

VT 696 My God, My God

**VT 790 How Can We Be Silent**

VT 546 There Is a Line of Women

VT 771 Enviados somos de Dios (We Have Been Sent by God)

### ***Children's Story***

**Week 1: Rise up! Take Courage! Voice your Rage!**

Theme for children's story: **Courage can be angry**

*Hello! I am going to tell you a story today. This is a make-believe story, but even though it didn't actually happen, I hope it helps us understand something true.*

Many, many years ago, when wolves still lived in this land, a strong gray wolf gave birth to three newborn pups in early Spring. They were tiny little things, with their eyes still closed. Inside the den, they snuggled with each other in their mother's warmth, ate and ate, and started to grow.

When their parents led them outside the den for the first time, they gave them their names: Tate, Sage and River. They grew bigger and stronger. By mid-summer, their baby teeth started to get loose and come out, and big grownup teeth took their place. At night sometimes, Tate, Sage and River joined the grown wolves in their howling. Their voices were still small, but they were getting stronger.

They learned that their family was called The Great Rock Wolf Pack. How proud they felt to be part of it!

That first spring and summer, the three pups knew only gentleness and warmth. By Autumn, Tate, River and Sage looked at each other and were shocked to see three near-grown wolves! When spring came around again, they started to help with the hunting. They learned to babysit their new baby siblings.

And they started to notice things they had overlooked before. They noticed more and more humans around. Their mom and dad called them *settlers*. They said there had been humans in this area forever and ever, and the wolves had always given them space.

But now there were so many *more* people. And these new people were clearing lots of perfect wolf space – cutting down so many trees so they could farm. There had always been some farms around, but now they were everywhere! The wolves were trying to adjust, but their territory was getting squeezed into land held by neighboring wolf packs. There just wasn't enough space for them anymore.

And to make things worse, it seemed like these new settlers really didn't like wolves. It seemed like they wanted a land with no wolves on it at all. This gave Sage a floppy sort of feeling in her stomach. Her whole pack seemed so worried.

Then one evening, their parents called a pack council. When their mom and dad, all their older siblings, and the three pups arrived, they stood at attention and waited. "Welcome," their mother said, in her deep, firm voice. "I know we have all been worried about the new settlers. But I fear we've each been holding our worries ourselves. We hold this council in order to bring all our hidden worries into the open. Tell us what's on your mind."

Many wolves jumped right in:

“What if we run out of food?”

“Why are the other packs getting in our space? Will we have to fight them?”

“I saw a shining metal wolf trap the other day. What if I had stepped in it?!”

Their father said, “Yes, we hear you all. Let’s breathe together and see what else is there.”

Sage tried to breathe into her worry. Slowly, she began to notice something else. “I feel ... angry,” she said.

Then the anger started to pour forth from other wolves, too. It was a bit scary at first.

Then, her father said, “This anger is a messenger, trying to tell us something. Let’s listen to it together.” Then he let out a low, deep sound that slowly grew into a broad, piercing howl. Then their mother joined in. Then the older wolves. Finally, Tate, Sage and River threw their voices into the sky, too.

Together they howled and howled. The Great Rock Wolf Pack poured out their anger into those howls. It was like the floppy feeling in Sage’s stomach got unstuck and poured out of her in her howl, where it joined the howls of everyone else. She didn’t feel alone anymore. Together, her pack howled with anger. They howled their call for justice. They heard their anger telling them that something was not right. And that now they were all in it together. Sage’s whole pack howled with her. It was a powerful and beautiful sound.

Possible takeaways:

- Sometimes when things are not right, we might feel worried, or scared, or angry. Our anger can be like a messenger for us, telling us that something wrong is happening. Or that something needs to change. Sometimes, courage starts with admitting we are angry.
- You might know someone from this church who has gone to a protest before. When we protest, we let our anger tell us that something isn’t right, and that we have courage and strength to ask for change. We don’t use our anger to hurt others, but to let others know we see an injustice.
- Finding ways to express our anger can get us unstuck, especially if we do it together with others. In our story, it wasn’t fair that the wolves were losing their land. As they expressed their anger together, through howling, they felt like they were in this together, ready to know that something needed to change.
- Did you know that in the Bible, lots of people get angry with God? And lots of people have the courage to tell God how angry they are? They complain to God and ask why God isn’t fixing things. In today’s Scriptures, the person who wrote one of the Psalms is

angry with God. Job is angry with God. Hannah is in great distress, weeping before God and asking God for what she wants. They all had the strength to be angry. And that started things moving for them.

### ***Words for Worship***

#### **Call to Worship:**

One: We come today angry and tired, seeking a place to worship you.

**Many: How can we worship when we are so often filled with rage?**

One: We call on you, O God, to wake up and get up! We wonder how you can allow the suffering and pain we see around us! We wonder why we were even born!

**Many: We're afraid to voice our rage out loud to each other and to you. Hear our cry, help us! Do something!**

One: Come, Jesus, come.

**Many: Surround us, comfort us, rage with us!**

#### Prayer

God, we're not always sure it's ok to share our rage and anger with each other and with you. Today we dare to bring these things to this holy space, believing you will take them in and hold them with and for us. We are tired of the pain and suffering we see around us and we don't understand how this can possibly be part of your plan. Help us so that even amidst our pain, like Hannah, we may find it in us to say, "Our hearts rejoice in the Lord. Our strength rises up in the Lord." May it be so. Amen.

#### Benediction

As we leave this place and return to our daily lives, carrying our rage and anger with us, may we hear the voice of God calling us: Rise up and take courage, knowing that the living Christ and Holy Spirit walk with us today and always.

## **Week 2: Rise up! Take Courage! Your Deliverance is Near**

**Texts:** Exodus 3:1-12 and Exodus 9:13- God calls Moses to rise up and go to Pharaoh, demanding justice and liberation for God's people.

Esther 7:1-10- Esther reveals Haman's plan to destroy the Jewish people. The *Anabaptist Community Bible* includes an image of Esther.

Psalms 27:7-14- "Be strong! Let your heart take courage! Hope in the Lord!"

### ***Sermon Seeds***

Liberation, justice, and salvation are closely linked throughout scripture. Moses and Esther are two examples of people who bring awareness to and respond to oppression and injustice, resulting in the salvation of an entire community of people. In Exodus 3, Yahweh "observed," "heard," and "knows" the suffering of the Israelites. Finally, God "comes down" to deliver God's people from the Egyptians. Earlier in the story, we learn that Moses also observed, heard, and knew the suffering of his people. With their mission aligned, God and Moses rise up and go down to Egypt together. Similarly, Esther and her adoptive father, Mordecai, develop a plan to deliver the Hebrew people from the power-hungry and vengeful Haman. Together, they rise up against injustice and change the course of history. Who are our partners in doing justice today? How is God providing courage in the face of the injustices we observe?

### ***Hymns:***

VT 193 When Israel Was in Egypt's Land

VT 194 Lead On, O Cloud of Presence

VT 195 No Longer Slaves to Fear

VT 546 There Is a Line of Women

VT 800 Honja sorironeun (With My Voice Alone)

VT 102 Santo, santo, santo (Holy, Holy, Holy)

VT 803 We Shall Overcome

VT 228 Wait for the Lord (Contemplaré tu vida)

**VT 716 God of Grace and God of Glory**

VT 31 Come, We that Love the Lord

VT 611 Lift Every Voice and Sing

### ***Children's Story***

Theme for children's story: **Courage is something we can do together**

*Hello! We are going to visit our wolf friends again today. Last week, we saw how Tate, Sage and River grew from tiny little cubs to young wolves. Many new settlers were moving into their pack's land; the wolves wouldn't have enough food and space if something didn't change. When*

*we left them last week, the pack was finally expressing their anger about the injustice they faced. Now let's see what they do about their problem today.*

When Tate, Sage and River howled their anger with their pack, everything began to feel different. Before they had been stuck, each one worried inside their own bodies. Now, they didn't feel alone. They knew together that their situation wasn't right. The courage to voice their anger helped them feel strong, ready for the next step.

So, the next night, at the height of summer, their parents held another council. This time they were ready to look for solutions.

Their father spoke: "These human settlers have cut down our trees and taken our land. They will make it impossible for us to find food for our children and live in peace with neighboring wolf packs. Something must change. Be strong, wolves of the Great Rock Pack. Take courage! We welcome your ideas."

The older wolves started speaking up:

"We could attack the people, those stealing our land. We could drive them off. That would be strong and courageous!"

"We must attack the other wolf packs who come into our space. We must defend our territory."

"I think being brave means waiting patiently to see what happens."

"No, we must be strong ... and fight!"

"No ... I think we should leave."

The pack's leaders heard all this and waited. After a long silence, their mother spoke, "We have heard the suffering of our pack. Of the wolves all around us. We have seen. And we have decided to respond. But we cannot fight. What good would it do? It would only bring more suffering."

"No, I see what we must do. We must do something even more courageous. [pause] We must gather ourselves and our pups and leave this place. Leave our home. We must find a new territory. Away from the settlers. Away from the rival packs of this land. We will become refugees in search of a new place to belong."

Sage couldn't believe her ears. "But" she said in a small voice, "But this is our home. The great rock, these forests, these streams. They are all I've known. How can we leave?"

"It isn't fair!"

And the truth was that no, it wasn't fair. None of it was fair. It wasn't the wolves' fault they were losing their land, their food, their stability.

But Sage also knew, deep down, that they couldn't stay. It wouldn't be safe. Those new people did not want her there. They would do what they had to in order to drive them out.

The pack knew this, too. Their father spoke: "We are wolves. We are strong. We choose the way of courage together. And for us, the way of courage is to leave. To forge a new path. To find a new land."

One by one, all the wolves crouched down and rested their heads on the ground. To show they were part of the pack. That they were in this together.

Sage was scared. Terrified, really. But she took strength from the pack's strength. From their collective breath as they crouched together, heads bowed. This is not what she thought their courage would look like, but she felt as brave as ever. Ready to do what she had to do, as a member of the courageous Great Rock Pack.

Possible Takeaways:

- Courage can come in many forms, with many tasks.
  - For Sage's wolf pack, courage meant leaving their home and becoming refugees.
  - For Moses, courage meant walking back to Egypt and telling Pharaoh to let God's people go.
  - For Esther, courage meant risking her life by asking the King to spare her people.
- We do not have to have courage alone. When there is injustice happening, we are part of a community that can respond together. You are part of this congregation. And this congregation is part of a bigger community. We partner with others in our town, with other Mennonites around the country and the world, with all those seeking justice.
  - Moses partnered with his brother and sister in his very courageous work.
  - Esther had Mordecai's support. Even though she had to confront the king alone, she knew Mordecai was standing with her.

Tell a very short story of when people in your congregation took courage together and stood up against injustice.

### ***Words for Worship***

#### **Call to Worship**

One: We come today wondering how we can go on.

**Many: Our hearts and lives are filled with a desire for justice and an end to suffering.**

One: We take off our shoes and step before you like Moses before the burning bush.

**Many: Full of awe and wonder and afraid to draw closer.**

One: And yet, yet we are drawn to your voice and your promise to be with us.

**Many: Deliver us, be with us, show us the way.**

### Prayer

God, we so want to believe that you have a plan to lead us out of the mess and confusion of our world. Today we dare to take off our shoes and step closer to the burning bush, hoping with our whole being that we will find you there. We pray that, like Esther and Moses, we will find our way and open our hearts and that you might lead us to companions who will join us in our search for justice. May it be so. Amen.

### Benediction

As we leave this place and return to our daily lives, may we hear the voice of God calling to us: Be strong! Take courage! Hope in the Lord! knowing that the living Christ and Holy Spirit walk with us today and always.

## **Week 3: Rise up! Take Courage! Healing and Hope Arrive**

**Texts:** Luke 6:1-11- Jesus invites the man with a withered hand to “get up” and stand before the religious leaders. (There is an image of this in the *Anabaptist Community Bible*.)

John 16:25-33- “I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But **take courage**; I have conquered the world!” (NRSV)

Luke 24:1-10- “He has been raised.”

### ***Sermon Seeds***

Sometimes Jesus breaks the rules...or at least reinterprets them with a deeper and fuller meaning. Jesus often wrestles with the religious leaders, showing them (us!) a better and more faithful way to live into the principles that guide our lives. It takes courage to challenge those whom we generally respect. Are there deeply held values, beliefs, and laws that we Mennonites are invited to reinterpret in light of a deeper Gospel message? Perhaps the greatest rule or law that Jesus broke was death itself. How does resurrection hope provide courage to follow the radical love of Jesus? If death is no longer our greatest fear or enemy, what Gospel risks might we take?

### ***Hymns:***

#### **VT 287 Jesus Christ Is Waiting**

VT 349 Christ Is Risen

VT 356 Be Not Afraid

VT 359 Christ Is Alive! Let Christians Sing

#### **VT 716 God of Grace and God of Glory**

VT 159 Kwake Yesu nasimama (Here on Christ the Rock I Will Stand)

VT 599 We've Come This Far by Faith

VT 565 Christ Is Alive, and Goes before Us

#### **VT 790 How Can We Be Silent**

VT 771 Enviados somos de Dios (We Have Been Sent by God)

### ***Children's Story***

Theme for children's story: **Courage can be creative**

*Hello! In the last two stories, we met Tate, Sage and River, young wolves of the Great Rock Pack. Because settlers were moving in and taking their land, the pack made the courageous decision to leave their home and become refugees in search of a new land. Let's see how they're doing.*

The hot summer softened into autumn. Tate, Sage and River had been traveling with their pack for weeks. They moved under the big sky and gaped at the open plains before them. A new coolness in the air brushed their fur.

Everywhere they traveled, the pack sniffed. They searched for the telltale signs that they were entering another wolf pack's area. Sometimes they had to turn and go miles around, just to avoid a confrontation. They searched for good land, with space, and food, and water, and one that no other pack had claimed.

It was a hard journey. Sage's strong legs ached. The youngest pups were tired. And still they traveled on.

The entire pack looked forward to the Autumn Festival. At the next full moon, Sage knew they would celebrate as they always did: an afternoon of games, when the whole pack acted like pups and wrestled around. Then their mother would tell stories of the wolves of old. And then: the Great Howl. This was the longest, loudest howl of the year. Last year, Sage felt like she was joining with every wolf who ever lived during that howl. The sound would come from her gut and go straight to the moon.

Her parents said that every wolf pack in the land joined the Great Howl. Every pup learned this rule: that honorable wolves join the Great Howl. It showed you were part of the great wolf community. That you respected the wolves before and after you. That you respected the land and the entire web of life.

Sage, River and Tate talked about it for days as they padded along in file, as the pack wound their way westward. Tate imagined the games; Sage wondered at the stories. And they all anticipated the howl.

Finally, *finally*, the day of the festival came. Sage overflowed with anticipation.

But then her mother gathered them in the cool morning and said, "My children, my pack, today is the day of the Great Howl. The howl by which we show our respect, our identity as wolves."

Then she took a big pause and looked worried. "But I don't know what to do. We are not in a safe spot here. The place we stand is surrounded by the territories of other wolf packs. The humans have a village just down the river. We are in a strange place. Among strange wolves. If we howl tonight, we will surely endanger ourselves and our youngest pups. ... I cannot bear to break the rules. We would lose our honor as wolves if we cower in silence while others howl. Yet ... I see no other way."

"Not join the Great Howl?!" Sage whispered, shocked. "How ... *terrible*."

Her heart beat hard in the silence that followed. Then her father spoke: "Perhaps we are missing the point," he said. "Perhaps wolves were not made for the Great Howl. Maybe the Great Howl was made for wolves."

River cocked his head, "Um... *what?*"

Their father continued: "Joining the Great Howl is a rule that is supposed to help us wolves. It helps us with the rhythm of life. It helps us feel connected to each other, to the land. These are good things. But it is not the only way. Perhaps ... today we break the rule in order to honor a deeper message of wolf-ness: that honorable wolves take care of each other. Usually, to be a good wolf is to join in the Great Howl, but today we are good wolves by staying quiet."

And so that year, for the first time ever, the Great Rock Pack honored their wolf-ness by staying quiet. They wrestled quietly. Their father told soft stories, and then they sat and watched the full moon. They heard the other wolf packs in the distance, howling and howling.

And though they longed to join in, they knew in their hearts that they were taking courage in breaking the rules, in order to take care of each other.

Possible Takeaways:

- There are many different ways to show courage. Sometimes, being courageous means "breaking the rules" and being creative with what we do.
- Sometimes, we need to break the "rules," or the traditions we think are so important in order to do something even more important: Take care of each other, and take care of the people, the animals, and the ecosystems who need our care.
  - For example, usually, it is the right thing to do to follow the law. But sometimes, adults in our tradition break the law on purpose in order to peacefully protest an injustice and call for change. We call that "civil disobedience."
- Jesus' disciples had always followed rules about the Sabbath. They couldn't imagine breaking them. But Jesus challenged them to see the deeper message: Sabbath rest is good but loving each other is even more important. By healing people on the Sabbath and feeding his disciples on the Sabbath, Jesus showed them what he says elsewhere: "The Sabbath was created for humans; humans weren't created for the Sabbath."

### ***Words for Worship***

#### **Call to Worship**

One: We come today believing healing and hope have arrived

**Many: Christ has conquered the world!**

One: Jesus has broken the rules of death!

**Many: Let us worship the One who calls us to radical love and courage.**

Prayer

God, you know that we are so often rule-followers and yet we strive to follow One who reinterpreted or broke the rules. We follow One who broke even the rule of death itself! Today we ask for the courage to challenge unjust rules and the ones who make them. We pray that, like our Anabaptist ancestors, we may become risks-takers and followers of the rule-breaking Jesus. May it be so. Amen.

Benediction

As we leave this place and return to our daily lives, may we hear the voice of God calling to us: Take courage! Know that the living Christ has been raised, conquers the world and walks with us today and always.

## **Week 4: Rise up! Take Courage! Partner with God's Beloved**

**Texts:** Haggai 2:1-5 (NRSV)- "Take courage" is repeated 3 times in these verses as Haggai challenges Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple. (The CEB uses the words "be strong.")

Proverbs 8:1-3 and Wisdom 8:5-7 One of the characteristics of Wisdom/Sophia is courage. (See the image in the *Anabaptist Community Bible* of Woman Wisdom associated with Proverbs 8.)

I Corinthians 13:4-8a, 16:13-14, 22-24- Paul calls on the Corinthian church to be courageous in love.

### ***Sermon Seeds***

It takes a lot of courage to build or rebuild relationships in the face of criticism and polarization, especially when the relationship is with those we don't agree with. Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zerubbabel faced deep criticism and resistance to their commitment to rebuild the temple. Haggai's repeated call for courage undergirded the efforts to rebuild. One of the many characteristics of Wisdom/Sophia is courage. (Can you hear the refrain of *God of Grace and God of Glory* [VT 716] ringing in your ears; "Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour...?") Paul identifies love as a solid and enduring foundation that allows courage to grow and flourish. How might Wisdom be calling us to rise up and take courage as we partner with God and God's diverse beloved community?

### ***Hymns:***

#### **VT 716 God of Grace and God of Glory**

VT 196 Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom

VT 74 O Worship Our God, All Glorious Above

VT 763 Waterfall

VT 376 O Holy Spirit, Root of Life

VT 526 En medio de la vida (You Are the God within Life)

VT 749 Jesus Christ Is Love Divine

VT 396 May You Be Rooted and Grounded

#### **VT 790 How Can We Be Silent**

VT 665 El cielo canta alegría (Heaven Is Singing for Joy)

### ***Children's Story***

Theme for children's story: **The purpose of courage is love**

*Hello! We're going to hear one more story about our wolf friends today. We've heard about how they were forced out of their homeland, and how they showed courage in choosing to leave and find a new place to live. Let's see how they're doing.*

Tage, Sage and River's hearts felt light. Finally, *finally*, after weeks and weeks of travel, their pack had found a good place to stay. Their noses told them that other wolf packs lived nearby, but

none claimed this area. There was enough land, enough space. And it was good land, too—with water nearby and faded purple coneflowers standing tall in the late autumn breeze.

On this day, their mother and father traveled the borders of their new land, marking the territory as their own.

As Tate, Sage and River followed along, River saw his mom stiffen and stand. She let out a small howl. Quiet, but firm. River could see what she saw – two neighboring wolves in the distance. The grown wolves looked at each other, howled, and stared. Then they nodded at one another as if in agreement and went on their way.

River couldn't stop thinking about those neighboring wolves, and all the others he knew were close by. His mother had looked so strong and brave. *River* wanted to be brave too. He knew they'd meet the other wolf packs at some point. River wanted to *impress* them. He wanted them to see his courage.

Lost in thought, River stayed behind the others for a long time. Suddenly, he heard strange rustling behind him. He whipped around and found himself face to face ... with a strange young wolf.

River growled, baring his teeth. He felt scared, but he wanted to be brave. River yelled "We are the Great Rock Pack. How dare you enter our territory! Stand up and fight!"

But ... the other wolf didn't growl back. River growled harder, looked even meaner. Still, the other wolf stood and looked, then bowed its head.

Then it spoke in a small voice: "Um ... could I say something instead of fighting?"

This is not what River expected. He felt confused. "Well ... I guess?" he answered.

"My name is Meadow," the wolf said. "And I followed you all the way here. I grew up near you. My pack, too, was being squeezed out by the humans. We knew there wouldn't be enough food this year, so I ... I tried to be brave and leave, so they would have one less mouth to feed. I didn't know where else to go. So, I followed your pack."

River swelled with anger, "How dare you follow us unbidden!" he growled.

But then, River saw the fear in Meadow's eyes. He noticed how thin she looked. The pleading in her face. Meadow spoke again, "Please. I want to join your pack. Let me help you. I can hunt. I can howl. I ... need a new family."

River stared. He knew he could attack this wolf and win. If the point of being a wolf was to be brave, wasn't that what he should do? But deep inside, River knew this was not what his bravery was for.

So instead of attacking, River took Meadow to meet his parents.

They gave Meadow food, heard her story, and considered.

“You have shown great courage, Meadow,” River’s mother said. “And you, River, have shown wisdom – wisdom to know what courage is for. I know you think the point of being a wolf is to be brave. But the true point of being a wolf is to love. If you have all the courage in the world, and do all the great wolf deeds, but you do not have love, what is the point? The purpose of courage is love. That is what we chose now.”

And from that day on, young Meadow had a new pack. And in that new land, the Great Rock Wolf Pack built a new life, together.

- Possible takeaways:
  - One of our Scriptures today, 1 Corinthians 13, tells us that even if we do impressive things, but we don’t have love, we have missed the point.
  - All of the courageous things River’s wolf pack did were motivated by love – leaving their home, finding a new land, welcoming Meadow instead of attacking her. The purpose of courage is to love.
  - When we as Christ-followers rise up with courage, we do it because of love. Any time you see us protesting injustice, helping others, or praying, I hope we are being motivated by love. Because God loves all of us and this world, and we are sharing that love with others, especially with those who are poor, vulnerable or oppressed.

### ***Words for Worship***

#### **Call to Worship**

One: We come today believing that love never fails.

**Many: Love is our solid, strong foundation.**

One: We worship One who takes a stand, who stands firmly on love.

**Many: We come held up by love and sure in love’s embrace.**

One: We come believing that God is love.

**Many: We come believing love is brave and there is no limit to love’s power to endure.**

### Prayer

God, we implore you to grant us wisdom and courage for the facing of this hour! Because of your all-encompassing love we can be brave enough to listen to those with whom we disagree. We can take the risk of building and rebuilding relationships. Your love is our solid and enduring foundation. We pray that, with Wisdom, we may have the courage to risk building on the solid and enduring foundation of love. May it be so. Amen.

### Benediction

As we leave this place and return to our daily lives, may we hear the voice of God calling to us: Stand firm! Be strong! Be brave! Know that the living Christ walks with us today and always as we seek to rise up and take courage with God and God's diverse beloved community.