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A Pirates of the Caribbean sermon with four points. And it might be so long that you'll need vitamin C to avoid scurvy. Yeah, so it's better to be too long.

It's about courage, trust, freedom, a curse, and the treasure of faith. First and foremost, it's about courage, specifically the courage to take first or new steps in life. In the film, it's Will, the blacksmith, who embarks on an adventure to save his love.

Elisabeth leaves her role as the governor's daughter and gains new freedom. So they show courage for change. My son Leo is now 13 months old, so I am my wife's son.

I didn't somehow get this on my own. Our son Leo, 13 months old, is just taking his first steps in life. And you can really tell he needs courage.

He can stand for quite a while, but then he'll start standing along the wall, looking at you and maybe taking a step, and then you realize, oh, I'd better get back on my knees. Taking the first steps takes courage, right at the beginning of our lives, but also throughout our lives. The step of changing jobs, the step of moving to a new city, the step of entering into or ending a relationship, the step of having children, the step of going to a new school.

There are always steps in life, and we actually always need courage to take them. I believe that's also the case in faith, something like first steps or new steps where you can say, I need courage to take these steps in faith. I'm just saying that, in principle, all steps in faith are also steps in life.

I don't want to differentiate between steps in faith and steps in life. When you take a step in faith, it's actually always a step in your life too. By that, I mean if you say, out of faith, I want to forgive someone, even though it's really difficult for me, then that can be a step in your faith and in your life. If you say, financially, everything is getting more expensive and it's been a long time since I last got a pay rise, but I still want to trust God to continue to provide for me, then that's a step in faith, but of course also a step in your life.

Maybe you're staying in a situation, super patient, where you actually say, "I already had the solution yesterday, but God, I trust you to still find a solution for me." Then, of course, that's a step in faith and a step in your life. What's very important to me is that when we talk about steps in faith, they're often incredibly difficult.

That's not the case. I'll just take a small step; I don't have anything else planned today. There's a seafaring story in the Bible that has something to do with taking steps of faith. This story is about one of Jesus' closest friends, named Peter.

And Peter is traveling with other good friends, and it's a large lake—I'd probably say more if I were traveling on the lake. And in the middle of the night, Jesus suddenly comes running to the people, walking on the water. That's kind of crazy enough.

But then the story continues: Jesus is essentially standing on the water, Peter is on board, and Jesus says, "Come out, take the step, come to me." Get out of your safe boat, or reasonably safe boat—the mast might have been similar—and get out of your reasonably safe boat into the unsafe waters. There, you might say, "I'm afraid of drowning, I don't even know what that's like, I've never walked on water before, Jesus."

Peter must have been really scared, he must have really said, "Okay, Jesus, you're telling me I should come, but I'm really scared of taking this step." Not every step of faith is that drastic, but I think we can recognize the feeling Peter had back then when we take steps in life, steps of faith. It's the feeling that we're on a relatively safe boat, and now I'm supposed to take a step out onto what feels like the open sea, where I'm afraid of drowning, and it was perhaps the stupidest decision ever, changing jobs, moving to a new city, or something like that.

And because taking steps of faith is so difficult, I find one question very important: What can help me take steps of faith? Here are a few ideas from me. First, a classic: prayer. That was beautiful.

We practiced, we practiced all afternoon today. First, pray. I truly believe that if you're standing on the boat like Peter did and saying, "God, I don't know if I should take this step," then asking God to give you the courage to take this step is a good idea.

But it can also be a good idea to read similar stories in the Bible, like the one about Peter, who dared to take this step. Read about other Christians in the Bible or hear from those around you who have also dared to take steps of faith or life. It can also be extremely helpful to remember your own steps of faith.

Wait a minute, I've been standing here on board before and somehow had to get out onto the open sea. How did I do it back then? If it was a good experience, then it helps to remember it. But then there's one point that's very important to me, because it's also a very personal one for me: when you're standing on the edge of your boat and want to go out into open water, you can pray as much as you like, read the Bible as much as you like, ask as many other Christians as you like, but you have to make the decision to go.

For me personally, it was like this: at some point I knew I wanted to study theology, I wanted to become something like a pastor. The problem is, there are several ways to do that. I really prayed and asked God.

I thought, I want to know where I'm going. At some point, I spoke to a relatively wise yet religious person who said, Jonas, you have to decide. You have to decide if you want to take this step.

But you do it with the certainty that Jesus is standing there, holding out his hand to you. Just like Peter, who was standing on board, and Jesus wasn't there saying, "Go ahead and try it out and see if it works." Instead, he was standing there in that uncertain territory and saying, "I'm here, and if you're in danger of drowning, rest assured, my hand is holding you."

But we have to make this decision to go. When it comes to taking steps of faith and, of course, steps in life. So, first of all, courage.

We need courage to take our first steps. Our son Leo needs courage to take his first steps. In the film, Will and Elisabeth constantly need courage to take new steps.

It makes sense to start with small steps. We can take new or first steps with the trust that Jesus is standing there and saying, "I am here. When you are about to drown, I will hold you tight."

Maybe this is a topic for you. Maybe you're sitting there thinking, yes, I'm actually about to take a first or new step. If so, there's some time and a question for you at the end.

But first, point 2: trust. Trust, specifically trust in God. And the question: How can I learn to trust in God? In the film, here with Captain Jack and co.

It's all about trust. Jack Sparrow isn't the type of person you'd typically trust. Normally, you'd say, no, I'll entrust my 12.4 kilo gold bar to other people.

Will Turner has to learn to trust him. Elisabeth has to constantly ask herself, who is honest about me? Who is trying to rip me off? I think pirates and seafaring in general are basically always about the question of who trusts and who is ripping whom off? When is trust broken? Trust is everything, but it's certainly not easy. I'm sure all of you have had the experience that, firstly, it's not always easy to trust and, unfortunately, you can also experience that trust wasn't worth it and that you end up disappointed.

I trusted someone, and it didn't go so well. Anyone who trusts lives at least with the relatively high risk of being disappointed. In life, we must therefore constantly ask ourselves this question: Who do I trust and how much? Just as in movies, we constantly ask ourselves: Who do I trust and how much? The good thing, I think, is that trust can definitely be learned.

In life and in faith. Now, referring to God, how can one learn to trust in God? I just said that Leo can't be judgmental, meaning he can't even walk properly, so riding a bike isn't the next topic right now, but hopefully, sooner or later, Leo will learn to ride a bike. Now I could take a bike, throw it at him, and say, I'm going to watch a bit of Pirates of the Caribbean, go ride a bike, learn how to ride.

It wouldn't be as educationally valuable. I think that when it comes to learning to trust in God, it's very similar to learning to ride a bike. By that, I mean, I need help to learn it first.

If I want to teach Leo to ride a bike, it helps if I show him how I do it. Maybe if I put him on the bike and show him the movement. Then there might be training wheels, or he'll ride a bit and I'll run with him and hold him. I'm not very athletic, so we'll probably have training wheels. Similarly, with faith, trusting in God is best learned with support and by watching others: how does it work for you? How do you do it? That's why I think it's totally worth learning something from other Christians.

It could be on TikTok or Instagram, it could be people talking about their faith, it could be books written by others, it could be the Pope, it could be people in the public eye from whom you might be able to learn something. So, if you say, "I want to learn to trust in God," then surround yourself, above all, with people who can be training wheels, who can support you when trust might be a little difficult at first. And then there's a second thing about trust that's important to me.

Trust in God must have limits. I think it's a really stupid idea to simply naively trust in God and say, "It'll be okay, with God I can always do anything." I trust him that everything will work out.

I don't think it's a good idea, either in life or in faith—it's simply naive, in a way—to always trust everyone and everything. When cycling, yes, we're all better cyclists when we're aware that I could fall, I could hurt myself, something could happen. My cycling skills have their limits.

Awareness makes us better cyclists, and the same applies to faith. Don't let yourself or other Christians talk you out of doubts, worries, or fears. These are part of faith and are important because it creates awareness of where and how you can trust.

By that, I mean, I can ride a bike. I won't show you that today, because it's hard to show in Talak. I can ride a bike as long as it's relatively flat. So, I can get to Rewe and Edeka here, and I can get to Lohr fairly well, obviously, there aren't many motorway bridges I have to cross. But we were on vacation recently, and we went hiking there, and I found a relatively challenging route, even for hiking, with some rocks and climbs. Then I saw that it's also a mountain bike trail.

People ride this route on mountain bikes, and quite honestly, I would never ride this route on a bicycle, on a mountain bike, because I know my cycling skills will definitely reach their limits. If I ride this route on a bicycle, I'll probably end up with a few broken arms and legs. I know I can ride a bike, but I also know where my current cycling limits lie, and I believe it's similar with faith, with trusting in God.

You may find it totally easy to trust in God on the smooth roads of life, but there are some bumps in life that are significantly more challenging, and trusting in God is significantly more difficult. Simply saying, "No, I can do this, I'm going to ride down here," would likely lead to a crash landing, both in mountain biking and in your faith. Don't get me wrong, with God, we can ride any bump.

I can also ride moguls, but I should learn it step by step. The best way is to watch others do it on mountain bikes. Maybe I'll ride a short distance, or maybe someone will come and help me, like I did with Leo when I rode a flat bike, and show me how to do it or give me a little help.

The same goes for trusting in God. When the bumps come, you don't have to close your eyes and trust God to save you. Instead, you can say, "At this point, I'll park my trustworthy bike and push it." Or I'll find someone to help me get through this difficult part of my life.

Trust isn't something you learn once and for all, neither in life nor in God. People say, "I've learned to trust in God, I've checked off the list." No.

Every day, with every new phase of life or bumpy road, you may have to learn it all over again. I'm sure that with God we can ride over every bumpy road. But I'm also sure that it's good to be aware of my current level of trust and how far I can go. And when you reach a limit, you can say, stop, now I'm going back to step 1 of the sermon and move forward in small steps, courageously learning to take new steps in faith.

If that's your point, if you're sitting there thinking, yes, trust in God, that's totally my topic, then lucky for you, there's a question for you at the end of the sermon. But first, my favorite point. Third, freedom.

Jack Sparrow loves freedom. For him, that means having my own ship, making my own rules, and not having to obey anyone but myself. I think pirates are a symbol of freedom for many people.

I'd like to question whether that's a desirable freedom. There's another freedom that I find very desirable, and it's called Christian freedom. What Christian freedom is? It's good that you ask.

I have prepared two answers. For me, Christian freedom is freedom from guilt and fear. I don't want to convince you that you are bad people.

But I can say for myself that I keep making mistakes, no matter how hard I try. Sooner or later, I end up burdening myself with some sort of guilt. Sometimes bigger, sometimes smaller.

I believe that it's more or less true for everyone: we simply make mistakes or feel guilty sometimes. In the Bible, in the Christian faith, it's a very important and important point that God forgives us all guilt and all mistakes. For me, that means specifically that you can live without fear of God punishing you.

You can live a life full of confidence because God loves and accepts you. For me, Christian freedom therefore also means freedom from the pressure to perform. You don't have to and can't earn God's love.

God's love is a gift, and I find that liberating. At school, at work, sometimes even among friends or family, there's often a sense of pressure to perform. Pressure that you may sometimes only feel yourself, but pressure to achieve something, to do something, to belong.

The God of the Bible tells you, I love you. No ifs, ands, or buts, no asterisks or fine print. I love you.

To take our son Leo, who is now my constant point of comparison for everything, as an example. I love him. And I don't care if he's the first to crawl, if he's the fastest at daycare, or if he does particularly well in English class.

I love him. Without a doubt. And so God loves you.

No asterisks or fine print. God loves you because you exist. There's nothing you can or need to do or try to make God love you at all, or love you more.

And that's why, for me, I believe, it also means being able to live a literally liberated and redeemed life. Hey, you have such a strong, intense, and profound value for God. Your worth isn't measured by what you do or think or have achieved.

You have an incredibly great value to God because you are a being created and loved by God. And that can mean for you in concrete terms: starting today, you can stop earning your worth through performance. You are wanted by God.

You are not an insignificant legacy in the vast universe, but the meaning and purpose of God's love. You can live today with the certainty that you were uniquely and intentionally created by God. You don't have to search for your meaning in life, because from God's perspective, the meaning of your life is you.

You and your existence, that you are there, that you are here. And that brings us to what, for me, is the treasure of faith. For pirates, treasure always means something to do with gold and money, with 12.4 kilograms of bars lying around somewhere.

For me, the treasure of faith is God's love for each and every one of us. One of my favorite Bible passages is in Romans chapter 8, and at the end of verses 38 and 39, it says: "Nothing can separate us from God's love. Not death, not life either."

No angels or other powers. Neither present nor future. Nor anti-God forces.

Neither high nor low, nor anything else in the world. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is given to us in Jesus Christ. For me, the treasure of faith is precisely that.

Nothing can separate you from the love of God. If you take one thing with you from today's service—I hope it's several things, because we also have a parting gift for you—then hopefully it's at least this one sentence from the Bible.

Nothing can separate you from the love of God. And that brings us to the last, and I promise very brief, point. He preaches the curse.

The pirates, a Pirates of the Caribbean, are cursed because they greedily seized cursed gold. They continue to live, but without a real life. No pleasure, no emotion, no joy.

And only when the last gold piece is returned and the necessary blood is sacrificed does the curse end and real life is possible for the pirates again. I believe that, in a metaphorical sense,

this also happens in our lives sometimes. That we live, but feel like it's no longer truly worth living.

As if we were cursed. It could be caused by selfishness, guilt, hurt—whatever the trigger—it might feel as if our heart is ice cold. And one of the most beautiful things about the Christian faith, for me, is that, with God, this curse is broken.

So the curse that we also experience in real life, namely that real life is no longer possible. It's a bit like in *Pirates of the Caribbean*. In *Pirates of the Caribbean*, it takes a gold coin and a drop of blood to break this curse.

In the Christian faith, Jesus on the cross is needed to end this curse. We celebrate this every year at Easter. Just a week ago, today belatedly, and throughout the year.

We celebrate that through Jesus' death on the cross, through what happened at Easter and what we celebrate, everything that separates us from God has been lifted. That this curse has been defeated. This is one of the most important biblical messages.

Through Jesus on the cross, you are free. Through Jesus on the cross, a true, full, magnificent life is always possible for us. A life full of hope and confidence.

Therefore, when you go home today, don't go cursed, but free. Not empty, but filled. Not condemned, but loved.

Loved by God unceasingly. For nothing, nothing can separate you from the love of God, which is given to you in Jesus Christ. Amen.

I've spoiled it twice, so there might be questions. Right now, Akemi Tsunomura, our church musician, will be playing film music live for you again on the organ. It won't be that long, just under two minutes.

I don't want to stress you out, but you heard. Just two minutes. You'll find a message in a bottle in your messenger.

The people sitting at the front can start looking for them. You'll find paper and pens. And if you like, you can use these two minutes to give your own personal answers to two questions.



Putting this answer in a message in a bottle. We then collect the messages in the bottles (posts or whatever the plural is) and symbolically bring them to the people during the prayers to God. And the two questions are: Are you about to take a first or new step? If so, perhaps today is a good day to ask God for the courage to actually take that step.

So, when it comes to a first or new step, you don't have to write a long text; God understands. You can write down my new job, my new place of residence. If you say there's something here where I'm asking God for courage to take a step in faith or in life, write it down briefly and concisely.

Maybe there's something, it could be very similar or the same, where you say, I want to trust God. It's like a bumpy road, and I want to learn to trust him even on the bumpy road. Feel free to write that down, too.

You don't have to write anything down. You can just sit and enjoy. But now take two minutes to say, "God, I ask you for courage in this matter, or I want to trust you more in this matter."

And if you've written something down in the message in a bottle, we'll collect it and promise we won't read it.

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