

Take The Risk!
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Matthew 14:22-33

There is a story about a monastery in Europe perched high on a cliff, several hundred feet in the air. The only way to reach the monastery was to be suspended in a basket, which was pulled to the top by several monks, who pulled and tugged with all their strength.

Obviously the ride up the steep cliff in that basket was terrifying. Anyone who got in that basket was taking a risk. But how much of a risk?

One tourist got very nervous about halfway up as he noticed that the rope by which they were suspended was old and frayed. With a trembling voice he asked the monk who was riding with him in the basket, how often they changed the rope. The monk thought for a moment and answered brusquely, “Whenever it breaks.”

How comforting! The adventurer/tourist was taking a much greater risk than he realized! Risk! It’s all around us. You cannot escape some risk. It’s part and parcel of life. There are all levels of risk, from low to extremely high, including “old and frayed ropes.”

If you Google “risk”, you will receive more than a billion references in less than an eighth of a second. Wow! A lot of risk is out there, just waiting for us – you and me.

Did you know:

- Your risk of being injured by a malfunctioning television this year is 1 in 7,000?
- Twenty eight thousand people are treated at trauma centers every year for handling or swallowing cash?
- Your chances of being seriously injured by Christmas decorations are 1 in 65,000?
- A 16-year-old male driver is 40 times more dangerous on the highways, than a 40-year-old woman.
- One out of every 25 drivers we encounter on the road at night is legally intoxicated?
- Three thousand three hundred Americans are injured by room deodorizers every year?
- Five thousand sustain injuries playing billiards?
- Eight thousand Americans are injured by musical instruments?

One more (from a vast litany): The most likely month to die in is January. Least likely, September.

Risk is all around us. Thank God it doesn’t normally paralyze us. We learn to live with risk. The real issue is knowing what is worth risking for and what is not!!

There are good, positive risks, and there are bad negative risks – “Risky behavior.”

This morning I want you to consider your approach to good/positive hopeful risk.

I recently heard a world famous brain surgeon share his faith and his philosophy on risk taking. I was greatly impressed and inspired. In fact, I went out last week and bought and read his newest book, from which my sermon title is derived Take the Risk. His name is Ben Carson. He is a professor of neurosurgery, plastic surgery, oncology, and pediatrics, and the director of pediatric neurosurgery at John Hopkins Medical Institutions. Dr. Carson himself is a prime example of a “risky” candidate for becoming a world renowned brain surgeon. I share what he shares; he was an “at risk” youth. Here is his litany. A black male, raised in poverty in a ghetto culture on the streets of urban Detroit and Boston, the product of a broken home headed by a poorly educated and very young single mother (married at 13, divorced by her mid-twenties when he was eight.) who had no professional training or job skills.

But, my friends, his mother loved Dr. Carson and his brother! She sought and prayed for guidance, for her boys when they were young. At one point she told them, pick three T.V. shows to watch per week, and each of you will read two books per week. And write a report for me. They protested, but obeyed. Mother insisted, “Benny, honey, if you can read, you can learn just about anything you want to know. The doors of the world are open to people who can read.” Each week mother listened and looked over the reports. Only years later did Dr. Carson find out his mother could not read!

So much at risk!!

And yet, he overcame and excelled. As a boy knew he would become a medical doctor. From childhood on, he learned which risks to avoid and which to embrace!! As a boy, his faith was nurtured by his mother and his church, it was and remains strong! He shares, “I believe God has a specific purpose for me, and for every other person to whom he gives the gift of life.” (p. 133) So says the director of pediatric neurosurgery at John Hopkins Medical Institutions! The first doctor to successfully separate infant twins joined together at the head. He knows what it is to take risks! Dr. Carson continues to exhibit risky behavior – endeavoring to save and improve the lives of God’s children.

His story is worth hearing!

I couldn’t help but recall Matthew’s story of the disciples struggling on the Sea of Galilee, as the storm raged and the waves threatened to capsize the boat and drown them all. The “risk” out there was at a very high level, indeed! I’m sure when they got into the boat, they were not thinking they were soon to be risking their lives.

Some risks come up fast and furious!

They are in a panic! Tossed about by those huge waves and wind. All anyone could think was “this is the end,” “it’s all over,” when Matthew tells us that they see a ghost out on the sea. No. No, it’s not a ghost, (as they thought) it’s Jesus. Jesus calls out, “Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.” And Peter, good old, high risk Pete – ramps up the risk!! “O.K. Lord, if it’s you – call me to come over to you!” Jesus responds, Pete, all right, great, step out of the boat, come on down! Once Peter is out of the boat, he falters a bit (who wouldn’t, with all those waves and wind?). And, of course Jesus reaches out, and lifts him up. But, let’s give Peter his dues! A

storm, in the middle of the sea, you're in a boat – the only security around – who in their right mind would risk stepping out of the seemingly only place of any security or hope? Talk about risky behavior! Peter takes the risk!

Thank God there are those of us who see things differently! They see beyond the wind, waves and lightning all around us. They intuit, they sense, they reason – the risk is worth taking!

- How are you doing in the risk department?
- Are you open to the possibility that taking a risk could enhance your life, and the lives of others?
- Is there a risk facing you that might redirect your life?
- Are you in a storm, and have you considered that God has a plan for your life, is waiting to uphold you when you “take the risk?”

Dr. Carson shares; “It all boils down to your values. If your priority is to look good in front of people, your life will take a different direction than if your priority is to use the talents God has given you to make a positive difference in the world. Such values will influence what risks you choose to take.” (p. 118)

My friends, there are times in our lives, in your life, when storms overwhelm, and the direction is out of the comfort zone (shaky as it is), and great risk is called for. That direction faces your God, whose arms are ready to rescue and guide!

Take the Risk!

Amen.