

Proper 6 A Sermon  
Matthew 9:35-10:8  
June 18, 2023

*Risk Boldly, Love Greatly*  
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*<sup>35</sup>Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. <sup>36</sup>When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup>Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup>therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. <sup>5</sup>These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ <sup>8</sup>Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. <sup>9</sup>Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, <sup>10</sup>no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. <sup>11</sup>Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. <sup>12</sup>As you enter the house, greet it. <sup>13</sup>If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. <sup>14</sup>If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. <sup>16</sup>“See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. <sup>17</sup>Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; <sup>18</sup>and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me... you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.<sup>23</sup>When they persecute you in one*

*town, flee to the next; for truly I tell you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.*

~o~

A young boy had just gotten his driver's permit and inquired of his father, an evangelist, if they could discuss the use of the car. His father took him to the study and said to the boy, "I'll make a deal with you, son. You bring your grades up from a C to a B-average, study your Bible a little, and get your hair cut and we'll talk about the car."

Well, the boy thought about that for a moment and decided that he'd best settle for the offer, and they agreed. After about six weeks the boy came back and again asked his father about the car. Again, they went to the study where his father said, "Son, I've been really proud of you. You've brought your grades up, and I've observed that you've been studying your Bible and participating a lot more in the Bible study class on Sunday morning. But I'm really disappointed that you haven't gotten your hair cut."

The young man paused a moment and then said, "You know dad, I've been thinking about that and I've noticed in my studies of the Bible that Samson had long hair, Moses had long hair, John the Baptist had long hair, and there's even strong argument that Jesus himself had long hair." To which his father replied, "You're right, son. Did you also notice that they all WALKED everywhere they went?"<sup>1</sup>

~o~

Jesus' friends knew a thing or two about walking, didn't they? According to our text, they'd been in all the cities and villages and now Jesus was sending them out again, this time alone, to proclaim the good news of the kingdom and to do the impossible work of curing sick people, raising the

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<sup>1</sup> "Father And Son Talking About The Bible." Myenglishpages.com:  
[http://www.myenglishpages.com/site\\_php\\_files/reading-jokes-about-fathers.php](http://www.myenglishpages.com/site_php_files/reading-jokes-about-fathers.php).

dead, cleansing lepers, and casting out demons. If it wasn't enough to be told to go traipsing around the country proclaiming "good" news that would get you into trouble, while attempting to do things that no human could, Jesus prohibited them from taking any provisions and chose to further inspire his friends with this motivational speech: "I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves . . . they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me... you will be hated by all because of my name." Awesome. Sounds great, right? If it had been me, I don't think I would have been up for the task. But they took a risk, they went, and they all came back.

There's a lot that could be said about this passage of scripture or the one from Genesis that I shared about during Children's Time. One could no doubt preach an inspiring sermon about trusting God in the face of obstacles, or about God's power to do the impossible, or about the radical hospitality of Sarah and Abraham, but that's not where I want to go with the sermon today. Today I want to talk about taking risks.

Ronald Heifetz, professor at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, likes to say that if you make one real decision in your life, that's more than most people. Taking a real risk? Well, that's just a rarity.<sup>2</sup> Of course we all know stories of successful people who took a risk and it paid off, Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Beyoncé and many others. "Good for them," we may think, but, by in large, people are risk averse. Perhaps that's because we know, or know of, someone who took a risk and it didn't work out. Perhaps it's because societal or familial pressures or expectations keep us from stepping out. Perhaps we simply lack the self-confidence to try something radically new.

The truth is, though, great things rarely happen that don't involve risk. In Jesus' own words, the disciples risked the ire of councils, governors, and kings, bodily harm, and the emotional injury of being hated by all because

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<sup>2</sup> "The Greatest Risks They Ever Took," Forbes.com, January 21, 2010:  
<https://www.forbes.com/2010/01/20/greatest-risk-they-took-entrepreneurs-management-risk.html>.

of the message they went out to proclaim and the name they proclaimed it in. But this was not the first time they'd taken a risk to follow Jesus and it wouldn't be the last.

In the story, Sarah and Abraham took a risk in welcoming three complete strangers into their camp and offering them food, drink, and shelter. They took a risk believing the words that they said about Sarah conceiving a son in her old age. They took risks, but they had already left their homeland. This was not the first time they'd taken a risk and it wouldn't be the last. Risk always holds both the possibility of failure and the hope of abundant life.

This past week, I read a wonderful little parable about risk and I'd like to share it with you now:

Two seeds lay side by side in the fertile [early-summer] soil. The first said, "I want to grow! I want to send my roots deep into the soil beneath me, and thrust my sprouts through the earth's crust above me...I want to unfurl my tender buds like banners to announce the arrival of [summer]...I want to feel the warmth of the sun on my face and the blessing of the morning dew on my petals!" And she grew.

The second seed said, "I am afraid. If I send my roots into the ground below, I don't know what I will encounter in the dark. If I push my way through the hard soil above me I may damage my delicate sprouts...what if I let my buds open and a snail tries to eat them? And if I were to open my blossoms, a small child may pull me from the ground. No, it is much better for me to wait until it is safe." And so she waited.

A yard hen scratching around in the early [summer] ground for food found the waiting seed and promptly ate it. Those of us who refuse to risk and grow get swallowed up by the life.<sup>3</sup>

That is true for us as individuals in our personal, social and professional lives. And it's true for communities, businesses, and even churches. If we always do what we've always done, we'll always get what we've always gotten. Risk is the stuff that charts a new course, that propels us forward, that helps us grow.

That said, I do want to back-pedal slightly and say that risk should be thoughtful and, to a degree, calculated. Some risks are foolish. Good judgement here is required.

I wonder, what thoughtful, calculated risks have we, as individuals and as New England Congregational Church, avoided taking that might chart a new course, propel us forward, help us grow as people and as a church? What risk do you want to take, need to take?

I'll let us sit with that question. I'd like to close with the words of author and teacher Leo Buscaglia, words that summarize more eloquently than I, what I hope we take away from this sermon:

To laugh is to risk appearing a fool,  
To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.  
To reach out to another is to risk involvement,  
To expose feelings is to risk exposing your true self.  
To place your ideas and dreams before a crowd is to risk their loss.  
To love is to risk not being loved in return,  
To live is to risk dying,  
To hope is to risk despair,  
To try is to risk failure.  
But risks must be taken because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://healthythoughts.in/2013/01/15/motivational-inspirational-quotes-thoughts/a-short-inspirational-story-taking-risk/>.

The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing.  
[They] may avoid suffering and sorrow,  
But [they] cannot learn, feel, change, grow or live.  
Chained by [their] servitude [they are] a slave who has forfeited all freedom.  
Only a person who risks is free.<sup>4</sup>

Which will we be? Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Leo F. Buscaglia. "Risks," Goodreads.com: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/6531047-risks-to-laugh-is-to-risk-appearing-a-fool-to>.