

“A Living Faith: Dare To Risk”

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Nov. 3, 2019

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

When was the last time you dared to risk significantly for the hope of something better?

Was it for a higher purpose, like love? Or perhaps a business dream? Or maybe you risked your own safety for the sake of someone in need.

Today we are talking about daring to risk.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-5

This man named Paul who lived nearly 2000 years ago altered the course of history in service to God with the ministry that he was called to accomplish. He dared to risk everything — his reputation, his job, his respected position in religious circles, his respected position with those who held political power. Paul dared to risk being perceived as a crazy person. He risked future honors and personal acclaim.

Why did he do this?

He sacrificed all of this because he was committed to serve God.

What was the cost to him?

In his second letter to the churches in Corinth, Paul wrote about what serving had cost him. He wrote,

Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches.

(2 Cor 11:24-28)

Paul dared to risk so much. Can we?

What keeps us from risking? It is often the anticipated pain and discomfort associated with sticking our neck out that keeps us from risking and our heels firmly dug in.

We also don't risk when we are not fully committed to something. If we are wishy washy, it is very unlikely that we'll risk — and it is also very unlikely that we'll make much of a difference in the community or world at all. History proves that those who remain safe in the status quo simply don't make lasting impact in the world.

However, it feels in so many ways much easier to play it safe and not risk. We feel the tension.

So, what nudges us toward risking and perhaps pushes us over the edge to take the plunge?

It often begins when we look around us at the status quo, the way things are in the world, or in our church, and it isn't what we would like to see. Then the kicker comes when we see a new vision of a different reality. This can give us a horrible tension between what we see and what we understand as possible.

The horrible tension is often what tips the balance.

We will dare to risk when the pain of the status quo is greater than the anticipated pain from risking.

We are compelled to risk when the vision of a possible future is so compelling that it strikes a "YES"

chord within us and pulls us toward that future.

This seems to be what drove Paul to risk everything. Paul met Jesus and Jesus gave him a vision for a possible future that looked nothing like the present world.

In the vision that God gave to Paul, people who had no voice in society and were being persecuted were given a voice and a place at the table. The people who were set aside included those who were marginalized based on race, belief, gender, degree of wealth, position in society, or some other criteria.

In this new vision, the power brokers of the current world had no power over those who lived in God's family. And in God's family all had what they needed because they were generous with one another and with those in society who were in need.

In this new future, there were no divisions that kept people separate. All had access to all of God's goodness, grace, love, and forgiveness.

Paul believed so strongly in this God-given vision of a new world, that he risked everything to build it among people who at first had no clue what he was trying to do.

Paul was amazingly determined to carry out this vision. But he didn't do it alone. He couldn't do it alone! He had the support of Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, and quite a number of others who God brought together to do this important work that involved tremendous risk.

It takes courage for us to risk. But we also need others to join us on this journey, to risk along side us in the endeavor to create a new future.

An older man named Hank had a grandson who took his own life about a year ago. Hank rearranged his vacation plans to attend the funeral and to be with his family. When he returned, Hank went back into his routine. Part of this was tending the orchids in the reception area of a friend's business. The receptionist called to him asking how he enjoyed his vacation.

Hank's first inclination was not to say anything, it just took so much energy. The grief was heavy on his heart, but his desire to be honest was greater. So Hank chose to be vulnerable and mustered up the energy to share about how his grandson had taken his life and how he had changed his vacation plans to attend the funeral.

During the next week, Hank was teaching his young couples class at church and chose to be vulnerable and risk again by sharing the story of what happened with his grandson.

The wife of a new couple who had come to the class for the first time broke down and began crying.

Surrounded by the support of the group, this young woman began sharing how she had attempted suicide three days prior.

Because Hank stood for a world where people can be vulnerable and supported, this young woman could too, and the rest of the class undergirded her with unconditional love and support that she would not have had otherwise. Perhaps this action saved her life.

We face this situation often. We are presented with a vision of a possible future — a future that looks different than our current reality.

Hank saw a world where people could be vulnerable and supported and where healing was possible. So, he overcame his own personal resistance to create that world often without knowing what might happen.

Paul recognized that the world needed to change, and be transformed by the good news that Jesus was making available to all people. He believed so strongly in this message and its value for others that he sacrificed his own comforts and even his personal safety to bring them this news.

Paul was clear that ministry wasn't about him. He wasn't going to focus on speaking eloquent words that improved his reputation or his social standing among those who listened. He wasn't going to attempt to impress anyone with his knowledge or his status.

It wasn't about him getting what he wanted for himself. It was about getting himself out of the way, allowing himself to become less, in order for the Spirit of God to become front and center and work in the lives of others.

What an amazing example for us and the church today!

What might living with this mentality mean for our church here in Birmingham?

Can we give up the idea that this church is about us being comfortable and getting for ourselves all of the things that we want?

Can we truly be selfless and stand unified for the sake of young families who have not experienced the generous love of God?

Can we allow this church to take the shape needed to minister to young families who long to have a grounded community of unconditional support and love in their lives?

Let us take to heart the example of Paul and dare to risk.