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Matthew 25:14-30

“Blessed Are The Risk Takers”

British Author, Neil Gaiman, writes in The Graveyard Book: **“If you dare nothing, then when the day is over, nothing is all you will have gained.”**

Gaiman’s quote seems a good quote to share with you as we are in the liturgical season of Lent.

Over the 40 days of Lent, we are invited to consider what it means to be a follower of Jesus as he makes his way to Jerusalem there to confront the powers-that-be (the Roman Empire, King Herod, and the Sanhedrin), suffer for doing so, and be hanged on a cross to die.

During Lent, Jesus asks of people like us, who profess to be his followers, are we willing to follow him into the heart of the suffering and pain of the world to confront the oppressive powers-that-still-lord-it over others today, and in the process, dying to our old ways, beliefs, attitudes and worldview, in order to be raised into the new life for all the world!

Faith, you might say, is a risky business. Our sacred story tells us of the many people who dared to step out in faith, leaving their old lives behind, to follow God’s call.

It was a risk for Abraham and Sarah to go from the the security of all they had known and trusted, to follow a voice calling them to “Go” into the unknown, trusting that in doing so something greater themselves was a stake.

Moses took a risk to listen to this “Voice” speaking to him from a burning bush to go back to Egypt, where he had fled in fear for his own life, and confront the powerful Pharaoh in order to free the Hebrew people.

The prophet Nathan took a risk when he confronted King David, speaking God’s truth-to-power about his sin of sexual abuse, murder, corruption, and abuse towards the people.

The Prophet Isaiah, when he found himself presented with the call of God, saying, who shall I send, took a risk and responded: “Here I am. Send me.”

It was a risk for Peter and Andrew, James and John to leave their lives as fishermen to follow Jesus.

It was a risk for the women, like Mary Magdalen, Martha and the Samaritan woman at the well, to follow Jesus, because it went against the laws and social/religious customs men had imposed on the women of their day.

Our list could go on and on of people from the Protestant Reformers and saints of old, to modern day people, like Bishop Oscar Romero, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malala, Nelson Mendele, Greta Thunberg, and the students of Parkland, who have and are still taking a risk venturing into the pain and suffering of the world’s people, confronting the powers-that-be, risking their own lives in order to bring hope, healing and God’s promised new life for all.

It is a bit ironic to speak of risk when our coming to worship on a Sunday morning, sitting in the pew, then around a table during fellowship before heading home or out to eat isn't really all that risky.

That wasn't always the case. Matthew is writing to his community reminding them that to follow this Jewish Jesus who they believed was the Messiah, was to take a risk, putting their lives on the line as they ventured back into the suffering and pain and political chaos of their world.

Early followers of Jesus, met in secret as it was against the political and religious law. They developed greetings, like drawing part of a fish in the dirt, to determine if the other person was a follower of the "Fisherman".

As I mentioned last week, Matthew's Gospel was written around 85 CE (Common Era). Jesus was dead. His memory lived on in the stories and teachings the Disciples, who were eyewitnesses, passed on to others, who like Matthew, eventually wrote them down to share with the various communities scattered around the known world at that time.

Did you know that there were many of these types of "Gospels" written and circulated? Thomas, Mary Magdalene, Judas and others had their names attached to "Gospels"? That is for another sermon and discussion.

Having access to these types of writings was itself risky, so many were kept hidden, only to be shared in secret when followers of Jesus gathered.

Risk is an underlying theme in Matthew's Gospel. To be a follower of Jesus, whether an eyewitness or as one was a part of the community Matthew was writing to or for us gathered here today, has its risks.

While those "risks" have changed over the centuries, being a "follower of Jesus" is still risky.

If we are truly following the ways and teachings of Christ, when we leave the comfort of our beautiful sanctuary and the warmth of our fellowship tables, we are heading out into a world filled with the challenges followers of Jesus have always been called to engage and confront - economic and social injustices, pain and suffering, violence and death, we who are all created in God's image still inflict on one another.

During Lent, as we tell the stories of Jesus on his Way to Jerusalem. We remind ourselves of the risks involved in our own lives in following him. We speak of dying to our ways of thinking, believing, relating and engaging, so we might rise to our new life in Christ as bearers of love and light, healing and hope for all the world.

There very little risk in our gathering here each week, but there is risk when we go out into the world in Christ's name.

In one way, that is what the Parable of the Talents is about - risk. All three servants are entrusted with their master's Wealth. Remember, a Talent is equal to 15 years wages. The view of how these servants view and relate to their master strongly influences the risks they are willing to take on his behalf. Two risk the investment, maybe because they understand the master to be gracious towards them. The third, however, views his master as harsh and wrathful, fearing his anger, so he plays it safe and risks little.

While some scholars suggest the master is not meant to be viewed as God, how we ourselves view God does influence what risks we are willing to take in our lives as followers of Jesus.

In her article, "The Risk Takers" (Patheos 11/10/14), Nancy Rockwell writes: **"Love and faith...require the taking of risks in order to grow. And risks always require relationships, and relationships require opening ourselves to murky as well as mighty possibilities."**

She goes on, saying: **"Taking risks is not easy. Most of us hem, haw, get sweaty palms, have to beat off the shadowy what-ifs that swarm in. The aftermath of risk taking can be as uneasy as the steps that were taken, and this is largely due to the qualms of spirit that devoured the servant who buried his talent and, in the end, had nothing to show."**

Is Matthew urging his original audience and in that way, us today, to recognize that what we have, has been given to us by God, to share with others, to meet the problems we face here and around the world, problems we can see on the news and in our communities? I believe so.

As followers of Jesus, God knows there is great risk in investing ourselves in the lives of others across the street, down the block, around our nation, and across the world.

Of course, some, like the suspicious servant, shrink from the challenge, choosing to play it safe in life, burying ourselves in the comfort of our known lives.

We all do that, me included, because it feels too overwhelming, scary and risky to give something of our lives for the sake of others, especially those we don't know or judge as unworthy and different from us. What have they given to us?

I wonder if we aren't all at times, each of the characters in Jesus story - the master of all that we have, the stewards who seem to invest wisely, and the suspicious servant who views his master as harsh and demanding?

Nancy Rockwell offered this thought on Matthew's story of the Talents: **"When we spend money on guns and bombs and the military, but loathe money for aid to the poor, the sick, people with special needs, we are the like the suspicious servant. And when we invest ourselves in meeting the sufferings of this world and work to set the suffering free, we create a wealth which is a divine reward, as hope, peace, joy, and abundance increase."**

It is Lent. It is a time when we ask ourselves are we willing to take the risk to follow him into the outer darkness on the fringes of the world, where the vulnerable of God's people are weeping and gnashing teeth, crying out in hunger, suffering and dying from gun violence, discrimination, war, and disease, to be bears of hope and life.

Faith is a risky business for sure. As Nicola Yoon says: **"Everything is a risk. Not doing anything is a risk. It's up to you."**