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“Take Great Risks”

Sermon Series: “Good to Great for God’s Glory”

Sunday, June 8, 2008©

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Scripture Lesson: *Acts 4:1-12*

When we know God’s call, we can risk it all.
Will you pray with me?

Lord God when we risk it all in you, we risk nothing. Open our hearts this morning to your Word so that we might be transformed and renewed for your glory. We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Let’s begin with a question this morning. Where is your faith compared to where it was last month? Last year? 10 years ago? Is it about the same? Is it something less? We may be someone who has gone to Church faithfully, studied our Bible, prayed when the need arose, helped out around the Church—but we are in the same place with God as we were month, a year, a decade ago. At one time we desired something extraordinary for our life, but now we have settled into the routine of the ordinary. What happened?

When was the last time you took a risk for Jesus Christ? Chip Ingram in the book *Good to Great in God’s Eyes*, writes, “Where there is no risk, there is no faith...if you’re playing it safe and staying away from the scary edge of faith, you won’t please God.”¹

One of the things that made the early Church great was that the believers routinely risked it all for Jesus Christ. They didn’t play it safe and God blessed them for it.

When we know God’s call, we can risk it all.

The story from Acts today is the fallout from the passage we looked at two weeks ago. You may remember that Peter and John on their way to temple passed by a man who had never walked, who spent every day begging at the Beautiful Gates of the temple. Peter said to him, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise and walk.” And not only did he start walking...he went from lame to leaping and praising God in matter of seconds. And this got everyone at the temple all stirred up. Every day, for decades, people had walked past this man, begging at the gates. And now he was not only standing but leaping in their midst, saying, “The mere mention of the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth healed me!” You can’t heal someone in the name of Jesus Christ without causing a stir.

Peter and John began preaching in the temple right then and there. Saying that Jesus Christ is God. Saying that we are saved by faith and not works. Of course there was no First Amendment in First Century Jerusalem. The temple police hauled Peter and John away and threw them in the pokey. Let them cool their heels and their tongues a little bit and give some thought to just what it was they were doing. Of course this was not before 5,000 people came to believe in salvation through faith in Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

There's a great story about John Knox, the founder of Presbyterianism, the man who took the principles of the Protestant Reformation, taught to him at the feet of John Calvin. In the 17th century in Scotland there was no first amendment either. And John Knox, for practicing his Protestant faith, was arrested and made to serve as a galley slave. He spent a year in the bottom of a French warship, rowing around the English Channel. After a year, he was brought topside. And standing on the deck, he was told that he would be set free if he would only kiss a statue of the Virgin Mary and demonstrate that he had repented of his Protestant ways. John Knox walked over to the statue of Mary, took her in his hands, leaned forward and then pitched her over board into the foamy sea. He was taken right back down into the galley chained to an oar, where he spent another seven months before he was released. If Presbyterians are risk-takers, we come by it honestly.

A special meeting was called to deal with Peter and John. Basically we are told in Acts that anyone on Jerusalem's religious A-list, and probably their B and C lists too, showed up. "On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the High Priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, all of who were part of the High Priestly family. And when they had set Peter and John in their midst, they inquired, by what power or by what name did you do this?"

Now, if you were Peter and John, you might have had flashbacks at this point. It was probably a little less than two months prior that the two of them watched Jesus himself do a similar dance for the same judge and jury. And they could both remember how that turned out. Do you think the prospect went through their minds that the same thing could happen to them, if they did not weigh their

words carefully, wisely consider their options, count the cost before they spoke. If they did, it was certainly not evident in their choice of words, "*Rulers and leaders of the people, if we have been brought to trial today for helping a sick man, put under investigation regarding this healing, I'll be completely frank with you—we have nothing to hide. By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the One you killed on a cross, the One God raised from the dead, by means of his name this man stands before you healthy and whole. Jesus is 'the stone you masons threw out, which is now the cornerstone.' Salvation comes no other way; no other name has been or will be given to us by which we can be saved, only this one.*" (Acts 4:8-12)

In front of this hostile crowd, the same bunch who handed Jesus over to the cross, Peter did not calculate. He did not equivocate. Instead He chose to risk it all to demonstrate his faith in Jesus Christ.

When we know God's call, we can risk it all.

Jen and I have a visual demonstration of this happening before our very eyes. Before Calvin came along I didn't realize just what a defined process learning to walk really is. It's a big deal. I didn't realize how big a deal it actually is. Of course this is one of the most asked questions we get as a parent, "Has Calvin learned to walk yet?" Our response is, "Not yet. But he is reading the Wall Street Journal."

Most of you here probably know that there are multiple stages to learning to walk. I won't go through all of them, but the stage Calvin has been in for a little bit is called 'cruising.' Now I thought he wouldn't be 'cruising' until he was 16. But with gas at \$4 a gallon, I'm glad he's into this other kind. 'cruising,' for those of you like me, means walking with assistance. He walks by

standing next to and putting his hands upon things on which he can balance, a couch, a trash can, a door, a dog. Anything he can lay his hands on. He can walk a long way as long as he has others means of support. Some of us have been cruising in our faith with God for a long time—not walking, let alone running. We take a few steps, but it's always without risk, its never standing on the legs of faith alone. We never learn how to walk by faith alone and we find ourselves very limited in just where we can go. We never know the joy of living by faith in Christ alone—instead we walk leaning on our reputation, our money, our career, our stuff, our home et cetera, et cetera.

This week, Tuesday afternoon, 4:47 PM, to be exact, Calvin walked for the first time. I wasn't there to see the greatest steps since Neil Armstrong, but Jen told me that he took about five steps toward her and when she looked down, he had a great big smile on his face, like he knew he had just done something momentous.

Risking it all to take a step of faith has the same effect upon us. We were made to walk in faith with God and when we do it is our greatest joy. *2 Corinthians 5:7, "We walk by faith, not by sight."*

Before I close I want to make two quick points about risk. First, how do we know the difference between what is risk and what is reckless?

The car I am now driving, a Volkswagen, I bought online. New Years Eve about four and a half years ago, I bought a one-way plane ticket from Dayton, Ohio, to Buffalo, New York to pick it up. On the way to the airport at 5:00 AM, Jen looked over at me and said, "You know I think this is a terrible idea." I saw a calculated risk. Jen saw recklessness.

The car had a great price, low miles. It had leather seats and sunroof. It was even the right color. I had researched its history. Asked for pictures of everything from the front end to the fetzer valve. I found out later there is no such thing as a fetzer valve. I also prayed about it and asked God if this car was a gift or a goat. But Jen didn't see it that way. Five years later, I'll let you be the judge!

Risk is informed. Recklessness is ignorant. Risk knows the dangers, but it also knows the Savior. Risk knows that there is no other name under heaven by which men are saved. Risk is confident of God's call and sure of God's sovereignty. Recklessness is a feckless hope and a decrepit dream grounded in ourselves rather than our Lord and King. Even Jesus Christ himself said to risk rather than be reckless. *"For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost." (Luke 14:28)*

However, when we know God's call, we can risk it all.

Second, the greatest risk is to risk nothing in Christ.

I'm going to assume that nearly everyone here this morning is here, at least in part, because they believe that Jesus Christ is the key to our eternal life. In other words, we are here because the truth of *John 3:16* has been impressed upon us, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."* We can risk trusting God with our eternal fate and the eternal fate of everyone we love. We can risk handing over to Him our hope to someday inhabit heaven. But trusting God in simpler, everyday things is a struggle: following

Christ's command to tell the truth, even when the truth is unpopular; trusting God with our money; stopping to spend time every day to pray and read our Bible believing that we will have enough time for everything else; telling that person who we know is hurting that we will pray for them; allowing Christ to lead us at work; trusting Christ to take charge of our marriage and our family. When we risk nothing in Christ we risk never knowing the delight of becoming everything He desires us to be.

After Peter and John stood before the A and B and C lists of all the religious figures in Jerusalem and at great risk claimed that Jesus of Nazareth is God, the Council warned them sternly to not say anything to anyone about it. But Peter and John didn't back down. They answered "For us there's no question—we can't keep quiet." And then the religious leaders threatened them again. But they

couldn't do anything. The people around the temple were so excited by the Jesus they had experienced through Peter and John—that the Council risked a riot to even lay a finger on them.

Where there is no risk there is no faith but...
When we know God's call we can risk it all and...
When we follow God's call, we risk nothing.

¹ *Chip Ingram, Good to Great in God's Eyes, p. 121.*