

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Tuesday, December 15, 2020

Reasonable Risk

And now, as a captive to the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me. But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace. —Paul, explaining his journey to Jerusalem, Acts 20:22-24

In this world you will have troubles. But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world! —John 16:33

Safety and *safe practices* have become big words in our present vocabulary, and we can all easily rattle off all the rules prescribed for limiting the spread of the virus. This bug has long proven itself to be formidable, and it is so hard dealing with an invisible enemy! These days we find ourselves evaluating and re-evaluating every setting and situation, and wondering if all is safe. I have gotten good at constantly second-guessing myself and always managing to feel stupid no matter what I do. (“Do I really need a mask at this distance outside?”) These become anxious days, which is a nice way of saying that we become fear-driven. With fear being so prominent our natural response is to focus solely upon eliminating danger. We become safety-obsessed and averse to most any risk. As the old saying goes, “One can’t be too careful!” Or can we?

From time to time, I need to rediscover risk. No, I am not taking up hang gliding, base jumping or even buying a motorcycle, and these shall always be risks I consider unacceptable. What I do need to remember is that all of life involves risk, and those who wish to fully eliminate risk will quickly find themselves avoiding all motor vehicle travel, bathrooms and kitchens. Soon they may find themselves unable to get out of bed, for it is a dangerous world out there! The focus must not be upon absolute safety. What is needed is a reasonable look at risk, which is an unavoidable factor in every life.

The risk dilemma became clear to me some years ago when the Church Pension Board decided to give our pastor’s greater choice in the investment of their pension nest eggs. This sounded wonderful to many as we all seem to like having choices, and several pastors were regularly showing off their alleged investment smarts at pension seminars. At our next pension seminar our clergy were instructed on how they could direct their money, going with higher risk and potentially higher yield market investments, or with a very low interest but sure investment in bonds. A few of our

clergy (not the boastful ones) became extremely anxious about making any decisions that would involve financial risk, and some began talking of putting *all* their assets in the safest funds. The obvious resulting problem was that many clergy were choosing an investment path which may have prevented any loss, but also did not allow for enough interest to be accrued to ever make for an adequate retirement! If one is to get to where they need to go in life, risk is required and to pursue a path of “complete safety” is to create dangers of its own. (I can gladly report that the Pension Board dropped that system.)

Not only does life involve risk, but Christ calls us to new and often greater risks! As Jesus proclaims in that celebrated verse, *in this world you will have troubles*. Paul and the Apostles lived lives of constant danger, as have many others who have followed the Master’s call. In the beloved children’s book, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis presents the Christ figure in the story as Aslan the lion. In discussing Aslan, one of the characters, perhaps frightened by the thought of dealing with a lion, asked if he was safe. The response is worth our consideration. It was reported that Aslan was not safe, but he was good!

I say all this, not as a swipe at those who are taking an especially cautious path in these days, for those who are, are generally doing so for good reason! My concern is that we may all see beyond a tunnel vision concern for some unattainable ideal of absolute safety which can easily lead to a relentless anxiety, and instead take a reasonable approach to risk. In prayer and in careful thought, let us decide upon our response to this virus, and then let us proceed with a confident faith, freed from anxiety and second thoughts. Let us be confident, not that we are risk free, but that we are acting wisely and are under Christ’s gracious care.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light rises up in darkness for the godly; give us, in all our doubts and uncertainties the grace to ask what thou wouldst have us to do; that the spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in thy light we may see light and in thy straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

—William Bright, 1824-1901