

FRUITFUL LIVING:  
RISK-TAKING MISSION AND SERVICE

Text: Matthew 20:20-28  
LHUMC 10/28/12  
Five Practices Series #4

I. Introduction

- A. Okay, as I've been saying the point of the book is that it's all about the adjectives, right?
- B. Most of us do some form of mission and service in our community, but what makes it "risk-taking"?
- C. I think Bishop Schnase hits the nail on the head with those very first words of the chapter—that question that we've all asked at one time or another, that question that is both personal and Biblical—"Why would I want to do that?"
  - 1. It's Biblical in the sense that the Bible is full of people who get a call from God for some kind of mission and service and their first reaction is: "Why would I want to do that?"
    - a) God calls Moses from a burning bush to lead the people out of Egypt to the promised land, and he says "Why would I want to do that?"
    - b) God calls Isaiah to go to the people with a word of judgment, and then tells him "Oh by the way, they aren't going to listen to you" and Isaiah says, "Why would I want to do that?"
    - c) God calls Gideon to lead the people against a powerful enemy and he says, "Why would I want to do that?"
    - d) Jesus tells the disciples that a part of the job description of a disciple is to bear the cross, and they say, "Why would we want to do that?" and on and on it goes...
  - 2. It's personal in the sense that we wouldn't be disciples, we wouldn't be human if there weren't times in our lives when we get asked to take part in some worthy cause, or we sense that God is calling us to do something (which is even more scary), and our very first reaction, if we are honest, maybe just a little voice within us asks "Why would I want to do that?"
  - 3. I think the Bishop is absolutely right when he says that that question defines whether something is truly risky for us or not.

4. If our very first response to a call to mission is that question, then it's clear that whatever is being asked of us is going to force us out of our comfort zones and take a risk.
- D. And by "risky", keep in mind that we're not really talking about a risk of physical harm, although it may be a part of it. We are talking more about spiritual risks—those kinds of risks that threaten our status quo; that threaten our preconceptions, not just about those we are being called to serve, but preconceptions about ourselves.
1. And in my experience, those preconceptions about ourselves are more likely to keep us from being risky in our mission and service.
  2. "I've never done that before", "I'm not good at that", "I don't have the time"—all are forms of the original question "Why would I want to do that?"
  3. All are about preconceptions of ourselves.
- II. So the question is, how do we overcome the risks? How do we step out of our preconceived, predetermined comfort zones and do the kind of mission and service work that it's going to take to be truly fruitful as individuals and as the church?
- A. If I could sum up the chapter, if there is one key word to all of this, it is "interconnectedness"
1. In other words, we have to realize that God created us, all of us, to be interconnected with each other.
  2. As he says in the book, "We are one; we belong to one body. In theological terms, you belong to me and I belong to you because we both belong to God."
  3. Until we get that, it's hard to take any risks at all in our mission and service to others.
  4. And he says the problem is that our society from day one conspires to erase that kind of thinking that God placed within us when we were created in His image.
  5. Again, quoting the book, he lists some messages that are all around us:
    - a) "Look out for number one".
    - b) "If we pursue our own self-interests, the collective results help everyone thrive." (Capitalism 101)
    - c) "Helping people in need feeds dependency and squelches initiative."
    - d) "One person's efforts make no real difference."
    - e) And then the all pervasive catch-all that covers all the bases of our selfishness and independency—"It's not my problem."

- f) (To which God would say, this God who created us to be interdependent with each other—“Nice try, buddy, but it’s all your problem.”)
- 6. His point is that if we can buy into God’s will of the interconnectedness of all creation, then that will can have the power to overcome our risk-aversion, it can be the answer to the question “Why would I want to do that?”
- 7. If we buy in to God’s interconnectedness, that discussion within ourselves would go something like this: “Why would I want to do that? I want to do that because we’re all God’s children. And if any child of God is hurting, then so am I. I want to do that because we’re all a part of God’s family, and so we’re all in this together.”
- B. Bishop Schnase also makes the point just like the last chapter about intentional faith development, that risk-taking mission and service isn’t a sprint, it’s more often like running a marathon
  - 1. Sometimes the risk we take is not in our original investment to whatever the project or people, it’s in our willingness to stick with it over the long haul.
  - 2. As he says at one point, to “dabble” in our attempts at serving others probably doesn’t do us or them a whole lot of good.
- C. Another thing that’s also like last week’s message is that we can accomplish far more working together than working alone.
  - 1. And so sometimes the risk comes when we step out in faith and recruit others to help us in our efforts.
  - 2. Sometimes it seems easier to just go it alone, but sometimes that is just too easy.
  - 3. If you’re like me, a person who is really adept at picking up the pieces, who is always tempted to go it alone, the simple act of asking for some help can be tremendously risky.
  - 4. Another way to put it is that so often when we sense a call from God for some mission or service project, we are seeing just the small picture.
  - 5. When we get others to join us, they bring their own perspective, their own pictures to the effort, and working together, we begin to address the bigger picture.
  - 6. I think of all of these local ministries that we participate in—things like MAP, or Supper House, or Family Promise.
    - a) All of them began with one or two people who had a call and a vision, and were willing to take a risk to share that vision with others and when they did, it was like a snowball

rolling downhill—people buying in, people sharing their own small pictures.

- b) And now, all of these ministries accomplish far more than what we could do as one church.
- c) They really are addressing the bigger picture here in our own community and making a real difference because a few people were willing to take a risk way back when and were willing to stick with it over the long haul.

D. And then his other major point is that when our mission and service is truly risk-taking, then it not only changes the lives of those we serve, but changes our lives as well.

- 1. To paraphrase the book, when we are able to overcome our fear with love, it changes us.
- 2. Once we've stepped out a first time, we discover that the next time the call comes, that little question of "why would I want to do that?" is far less of an issue.
- 3. Because once we step out of our comfort zones to serve once, we find out exactly why we would want to do that, and our lives are never the same again.
- 4. Once you discover the joy that comes from finding the answer to that question, once you find that joy that comes from risk-taking mission, it changes you.
- 5. I've been sharing stories told by Fred Craddock over these weeks, because his stories always are about what a fruitful life looks like or doesn't look like, told in his own homespun kind of way. Today a story about what a fruitful life does look like:
- 6. My own experience with risk-taking mission and service is that almost by definition, it can wear you out. To step out of your comfort zone once in a while can be exhausting. But it really is the "best tired there is."

III. Conclusion—two things about the chairs that are different today:

A. They have wheels.

- 1. The gifts that God gives us to share with the world are like the wheels.
- 2. If we use them in service to others, they can propel us out into the world to truly make a difference.

B. They are facing outward.

- 1. By definition, risk-taking mission is that which focuses us outward rather than inward.

2. And we're talking not just about out of this building, but out of our own inner, spiritual comfort zones.
- C. God is still at the center—it is God who sends us out.
- D. **(Add another God chair outside the circle).**
1. But God is also out there—in the faces, in the lives of those He calls us to serve.
  2. When we see Him there, we understand exactly why we would want to do whatever it is He has called us to do.
- E. Thanks be to God for those opportunities he gives each of to serve, thanks be to God also for the riskiness—those times when he calls us to step out and live more even more fruitful lives through our mission and service to the world.