

Risk  
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**Luke 10:1-11, 16-20**

<sup>1</sup> After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. <sup>2</sup>He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. <sup>3</sup>Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup>Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. <sup>5</sup>Whatever house you enter, first say, “Peace to this house!” <sup>6</sup>And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup>Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. <sup>8</sup>Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; <sup>9</sup>cure the sick who are there, and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.” <sup>10</sup>But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, <sup>11</sup>“Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.”

<sup>16</sup> ‘Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.’

<sup>17</sup> The seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!’ <sup>18</sup>He said to them, ‘I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. <sup>19</sup>See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. <sup>20</sup>Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’

This summer we have been exploring Joan S. Gray’s book, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook*, as we seek to more faithfully be what she calls a sailboat church. In comparison is a rowboat church, where people figure God has given them everything they need to do what God is asking of them and then sent them off to get there on their own, by their own devices. A sailboat church relies on God to fill their sails and guide their boats while they work with God to get where they are to go. It’s why you see the sailboat mobiles behind me and why there are sailboats in the narthex for you to take with you as your own reminder to work **with** God. Today we lift up from Gray’s book the quote which you find on your bulletin cover: “Effective spiritual leaders know that in the church, success

is about faithfulness, and faithfulness sometimes requires taking risks. These leaders...are willing...to take a leap of faith when it seems necessary to do God's will."<sup>1</sup>

"These leaders...are willing...to take a leap of faith when it seems necessary to do God's will." In Luke we hear Jesus telling the disciples "Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!'" Jesus says, "Go out vulnerable and at the mercy of others for my sake, to prepare my way." Take a leap of faith to do God's will. Professor Elaine A. Heath describes it this way: "Having apostolic authority...means having the courage and freedom to go forth in vulnerability and intentional poverty, to travel lightly, and to depend on the hospitality of others."<sup>2</sup>

This call upon the disciples is about as far from a rowboat understanding as can be – they are putting nothing of themselves into this mission. God has assured to provide what they need, including the words "Peace to this house!" and "The kingdom of God has come near to you." Professor James W. Thompson explains: "The absence of the minimal necessities for travel indicates their total reliance on God and the hospitality of others."<sup>3</sup>

**This** does not feel right. **This** makes us uncomfortable. Dr. Brené Brown, in her book *Rising Strong*, defines vulnerability as "the willingness to show up and be seen with no guarantee of outcome."<sup>4</sup> She rightly, I think, speaks of those with that willingness as daring, willing to take a risk. And she says, "Daring is essential to solve the problems in the world that feel intractable: poverty, violence, inequality, trampled civil rights, and a struggling environment, to name a few"<sup>5</sup>

Being in a rowboat gives us a sense of control – we can mitigate our risk by having an inventory of our supplies, our strengths, and our weaknesses and we can make our plans accordingly. Sailing involves risk – there is only so much one can plan for when sailing. Perhaps this is why sailing does **not** interest me. I don't like uncertainty. I am ashamed to say that, while I might not have challenged Jesus to his face about what I could bring with me, I

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<sup>1</sup> Joan S. Gray, *Spiritual Leadership for Church Officers: A Handbook* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2009); p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 3*, p. 216.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>4</sup> Brené Brown, PhD, LMSW, *Rising Strong* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), p. xvii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

might have gone home to say my goodbyes **and** to stealthily ask who knew someone in the town where I was headed so I could try to steer us in that direction. I admit that I am more willing to take a hop of faith, rather than a leap of faith. But I'm trying.

And Dr. Brown pushes me in another uncomfortable direction – she emphasizes from her qualitative research in the social work arena that there is a very communal aspect to taking on risks – some components are individual and some components require us to lean on others – the whole of risk requires a combination of work on our own and together. When I say “I'm trying” I usually mean me, alone. Brown doesn't just suggest but insists that I try, with the help of others. I can't speak for you but the entire goal of my formative years, at home and at school, was to make me independent, able to do for myself. If I needed the help of others, I was doing something wrong. But we read in Luke that “the Lord...sent them on ahead of him in **pairs.**” Really? C'mon. I am **supposed** to work with others?

We are each, as individuals and as communities of faith, asked to take leaps of faith to do God's will, but never to do it alone. Maybe that is our biggest leap of faith in doing God's will – risking our trust in others. Charles Feltman, in his book *The Thin Book of Trust*, defines trust as “choosing to risk making something you value vulnerable to another person's actions.”<sup>6</sup> And therein all my struggles are silenced when I realize that this was the life of Jesus the Christ. Choosing to risk making something you value vulnerable to another person's actions. His life. His message of hope and love. Vulnerable to another person's (or pair of persons' or church-full of persons') actions. This is yet another lens through which we can see our call as people of faith. Christ risked his life and his message to our actions; are we willing to make our lives vulnerable to Christ's actions? So may it be for you and for me.

Let us pray: Equip us, send us out, and guide us, God, and grant us the daring to risk for you. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> Brené Brown, PhD, LMSW, *Rising Strong* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), p. 198.