

Taking Risks

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany
Published in the Ministry District of Yorke Peninsula

Sunday, February 20, 2022

One of the things that seems to have developed over recent years, is in the area of extreme sports. These sports (if you could call them that) are about risk taking and pushing equipment and the human body to the extreme. Those participating talk of the adrenalin rush that engaging in these activities produces as the principle reason for doing so. To the participants, there is some essential element of life that is tied up with risking death. Now it does not seem that all of us, are inclined to leap off of cliffs with a parachute on our backs, or race down mountains on mountain bikes, but it does seem to me that there is something about our humanity that is tied up in risk taking.

But if you think about it for a moment, each of us in our daily round of activities is called upon to take risks, to be human it seems, is about taking risks. As we grow up, the whole process of Growth is about risk taking. We leave the security of our mother's arms, to crawl, to walk, to climb and to run. To grow means to take the risk of falling, the risk of failure. And as we grow from childhood to adulthood, we are still called to take risks. The first date, the first kiss, the first boyfriend or girlfriend. We leave behind the security of the family love to find that new and special love.

As we grow older, the risks change, but still, we gamble, or run a red light, or speed when there is no one else around. Or we eat that cake or chocolate. Perhaps the risk involved is the most alluring thing about an extra-marital affair. Risk taking is part of our humanity.

Jesus himself was a risk taker. His incarnation was a step into the constraints of time and space from the majesty of heaven and his ultimate destination, the cross was a risk as well. The one who could not die, faced an undeserving death.

As his followers, we are urged to take risks also. Perhaps this is a hard concept to appreciate, for when we talk of the church, we generally think of it as a conservative group, or the establishment.

Our Gospel reading this morning, should challenge this way of thinking. Jesus teaching suggests that we ought to turn the world upside down. Listen again to the proposition:

- Love your enemies,
- do good to those who hate you
- bless those who curse you,
- pray for those who abuse you.
- If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and
- from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.
- Give to everyone who begs from you; and
- if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.

These are not just a few good ideas that are strung together, but a way of living, which would radically change the world (and for that matter, the church). Indeed when these have been adhered to, they have.

And these things cut across our usual thinking, our usual strategy for living. As we grow, we tend to reduce risk and to take the safe option. We withdraw from others for fear of hurt and learn to be very cautious in our reaching out. The plague of divorce upon our society means that many of our young people are scared to take that risk. To make themselves vulnerable, holding back the very last of these things. But these principles imply that we should risk self for the sake of others.

So entry to the church by baptism, is not something that asks us to prop up a structure or some form of social organisation. It is a call that his life will be different and lived out in terms of values that will contrast those of the world. This calling is upon each of us through the basis of our baptism and to the extent that we live it out will be the extent that we will impact our community as God's people. That we will show the world that there is another way to live.

And the reading goes on to point out how these things are achieved:

- Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.
- Do not judge, and you will not be judged;
- do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.
- Forgive, and you will be forgiven;
- give, and it will be given to you.

All the baptised, we - you and I are called live by this formula. Unless we do, we short-change our community of the experience of what Jesus sought to create. We give to them a less than perfect vision of the Kingdom.

I know that as I look at this list, I struggle to see how I am achieving it. There is the temptation to see that success is always going to be limited and to achieve two or three of these things will be enough. But more than a way of life, these are a very description of the nature of God.

In our quest to reflect the image of God, these things will be what should show out. Not that we can achieve them alone, but God has given each of us at Baptism the Holy Spirit to indwell us and to start the process. Not that this will happen until we in our own minds free the Spirit to start work. So rather than a list of qualities to adopt, these are a list of the areas in our life that the Holy Spirit will work on. It is not so much a matter of saying that I must love my enemies, but that I must say, Holy Spirit teach me to love my enemies. As we release God's Spirit into action in our lives, then these changes will take place.

So as we look down the list, let us ask God to begin to work in our lives to help us to become what he has called us to be. It is not something that we can put off. Let our new life start today.

AMEN