

Expect to Take Risks

Mark 8:27-38

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Friends, let us pray:

God of particular scandals, you call us to uproot ourselves in uncomfortable ways. You raise us up for our safe passage, ultimately, returning to you. May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you our rock and redeemer.

Fall is a time where I think about, migrations. Honking geese, quaking ducks, fluttering Monarchs. But not all migrations are so easily seen or season bound. Some migrations are found below the surface, in the channels of our rivers, and the wells of our spiritual selves.

This past Thursday evening. The public was invited to tour the Sturgeon Passage Project on the Menominee River. Children and families gathered around large concrete tanks where giant lake sturgeon are sorted by DNR workers. These faithful few literally “lift” the sturgeon into elevators where they are transported over the dam. These are old, old fish. Some well over 100 years of age. They are also friendly, coming over and brushing their whiskery faces against peoples hands out of what appears to be curiosity. People are encouraged to interact with them- to touch them. These ancient gentle creatures migrate in and out of the Menomonee, and many other river systems (including portions of the Fox River) throughout the year. The sturgeon population stands at about 1% of its historic size in this river.

Last April, the Wisconsin DNR announced that a tagged sturgeon had been captured at the Lock 26 Dam near Alton, Illinois. Biologists confirmed that this

sturgeon was initially tagged on the Chippewa River, swimming an impressive and harrowing 651 miles from Jim Falls. It took almost 30 years for this to happen.

The engineering project on the Menomonee cost taxpayers nearly \$6 Million Dollars and has taken a multi-generation effort to complete. Many leaders who helped forge this path to a more just and hope-filled future, received their fair share of harsh criticism and attacks. Yet even the dam operator, Eagle Creek Renewable Energy, ultimately made generous financial contributions themselves. Andy Yate, lead dam operator said:

"Do we value having these creatures here and keeping them for our children, our grandchildren, to see it? I think that the answer to that- is yes."

Our indigenous peoples, the Menominee, teach us to value the sturgeon. They hold the Lake Sturgeon with a deep, sacred respect. Their creation story resulted in- the sturgeon clan. The massive fish has long provided them with sustenance and medicine during harsh Wisconsin winters, and for that, the Menominee thank the Creator.

David Grignon is Menominee National tribal historic preservation officer. He simply says, "Sturgeon is part of us".

Some would argue using taxpayer funds for this project is wasteful, ridiculous, perhaps- scandalous given so many competing needs. But I wonder how differently the nature of this scandal might be viewed by indigenous peoples.

I am guessing it might up-end many of our assumptions.

Our whole scripture passage is nothing but a scandal, or a series of scandals. First you have Peter sharing that "Jesus is the Messiah" which immediately causes Jesus

to silence Peter as if he had uttered the unspeakable. Then “The Messiah” himself, goes right into another scandal- his own suffering and death, which itself, seems to undermine the very honorific title placed upon him. This all ends with a rather bleak and cryptic call to discipleship to “lose one’s life”. Who in their right mind wants to have anything to do with this scandal?

Scandals are undesirable by association: when was the last time you received an invitation into a life changing way of being and the first line read something like “You are invited to scandal of all scandals! Come, enjoy the shame and humiliation with us! Endure the indignity and indulge in outrage! All who are willing to be dishonorable in the eyes of the world are encouraged to RSVP ASAP!

Pass- thank you.

The scandal of Christ is what theologians call “The Scandal of Particularity.” This scandal required that the God of creation in a marvelous and mysterious way, became lodged in unique human form, indivisible, inseparable, and incomparable. This particular scandal means we encounter God- in a person, the infinite in the finite. Here is God’s holiness amidst a mess of suffering at the hands of corrupt peoples who place self-preservation over eternal joy and well-being.

One theologian says this:

*This passage makes it clear that the title “Messiah” is being reinterpreted. This helps illumine why Jesus Rebukes Peter, saying, “You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” Although this might suggest a strong dualism of divine and human world, it is better understood as a clash of understandings of what it means to be the Messiah. According to human conceptions of “Messiah” suffering should be conquered rather than embraced, but according to “divine things”*

*suffering and death are necessary to being God's anointed.* – Martha L. Moose-Keish

I find myself hesitant and worried about the risks of going down such a dangerous path; a journey that flips rational decision making based upon my faith in a man, who lived with such humility and grace and trust.

This requires a lot of trust. This is a risky path to follow. This world seems so complex and overwhelming, isn't it a better idea to cling to what I see and know and wall myself off from different perspectives, different people, and my own sin? Can I trust that against all odds that God will be there to lift me up, to provide for my safe passage and a fertile future?

What sets this scandal of Christ apart from all other human scandals is this: The scandal of Christ is the one scandal we cannot risk ignoring. Because in Jesus Messiahship God reclaims the whole of human existence, in totality and individually. Gods embrace claims the whole of creation and thereby consecrates it as Holy. And holiness, in our midst, ordained by our Creator- well that's terrifying- because it changes everything.

“And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “

Like Peter, sometimes we want to take God aside and talk some sense into God. Like Peter, we are so sure that what we have is what we need. We are so convicted in that which we can see and touch and hold, that we neglect the meditation, and faith, necessary to re-form ourselves by churning and unseen power of the currents Holy Spirit. Yet Christ called his disciples to practice abandonment, his immediate invitation to Peter is to abandon a fear driven rebuke- and carry the cross together. Christ calls us to concrete forms of abandonment, especially of security and comfort.

“Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

This is the invitation Peter receives to follow him, to abandon coercive powers, warped principalities, retribution, self-indulgence and violence. Christ also calls us to follow. Christ lays out an invitation to kinship and a willingness to serve.

Then we are challenged “For what will it profit you to gain the whole world and forfeit your lives?” Now God plunging into the unseen, murky, airlessness of dead-end worldliness; to make an everlasting way for our migration home, for our return to the headwaters. This is God saying that life in Christ necessitates- risk.

This is God proclaiming that hope, hope spawns from the faithful waters of the Jordan, the tannin-stained Menominee, and the frothy Fox. Hope is rushing towards us. Hope surges when we confront opportunities where God MUST lift us up; not because we want to be carried, not because of our own merit and determination, but in a scandalous and selfless act, where the holy and unholy collide.

You know, all of this is a multi-generational project we have here; the preservation of a faithful way of life- requires taking risk. Being a person of faith- requires risk. The Isaiah Project- requires risk. Proclaiming social righteousness in America- that requires risk. But even though there’s all this risk, I think we value what is happening here today. I think we do want our children and grandchildren to see this way of life. I believe God raises up faithful people in all times and all place to meet the risks required to unlock a more just, abundant, and enriched future for the beauty of all things! And so, our answer to loosing this life and embracing this particular scandal, I believe, is Yes.

Now, because maybe it's time to take a new risk? You never know, you might just brush up against some new, or something old, something unseen and loving in these acts of compassion and justice.

Friends, I want to invite us into a closing prayer together, a prayer of abandonment. Would you hold your hand out, palms up, a sign of invitation to the unseen holiness of God and a willingness to expose ourselves to new forms of servanthood?

Let us pray:

Father,

I abandon myself into your hand;

So, with me what you will.

Whatever you may do, I thank you:

I am ready for all, I accept all.

Let only your will be done in me,

And in all your creatures-

I wish no more than this, O Lord.

Into your hands I commend my soul:

I offer it to you with all the love of my heart.

For I love you, Lord,

And so, need to give myself,

To surrender myself into your hands,

Without reserve,

And with boundless confidence.

For you are my father.

- Charles de Foucauld

Amen.