

These are the types of situations that sane, safety-loving people tend to avoid. Yet Jesus never avoid them: he embraced them. He was a risk-taker. And, if you are a follower of Jesus, it means that you are called to be a risk-taker too, like it or not.

In the fourth chapter of Mark we find Jesus and the disciples in another risky moment. They're packed into a boat sailing across the notoriously volatile Sea of Galilee. We don't know why they're there; Mark only tells us that it was Jesus' idea for them to take a cruise. And, as was prone to happen in those waters, the group found themselves being tossed about by a strong and sudden squall. Jesus, however, was unfazed by the adventure at hand. Mark tells us that *Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion* (v. 38).

Roused by his disciples, Jesus does more than calm the seas. He teaches them a lesson. Seeing their anxiety and fear, Jesus asks: *Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?* (v. 40). And with these words, Jesus makes it clear that this isn't just an opportunity to prove his divinity by demonstrating his power over nature. It's a lesson about the nature and substance of faith itself.

The disciples were far too focused on their circumstances. They were far too consumed with where their feet were located. Were they on steady ground or in a rocking boat? Had Jesus led them to another crazy cliff's edge or were they safe and sound in a synagogue where a rabbi and his disciples *should* be?

When Jesus dragged their feet someplace scary, then the disciples' faith tended to be shaken. Yet, by implying that faith was still possible, still the goal, despite their crazy location, Jesus makes it clear that their faith must not be in the ground on which they stand, but in the person with whom they're standing. Their faith could not be contingent upon circumstance, but must be clinging to the company of Christ. As long as they were with him, they were going to be okay.

Not much has changed for the followers of Jesus. He's still leading his people to dangerous places. He takes us to places where we are surrounded by enemies, and he urges us to pray for them. He leads us to situations where we must consider what it means to be faithful and kingdom-minded with our money and our possessions. Jesus goes with us to work, and stirs up empathy toward our unbelieving friends, urging us to invite them to church. Jesus grabs our hands, and pulls us into a terrifying awareness of our sins and of our deep need for divine

forgiveness. And Jesus walks alongside us, guiding us in valleys of death, despair and personal tragedy.

Jesus still leads his disciples into some very scary places. Every time we take a leap of faith, it's a rooftop experience. Every time we reach out to someone in need it's a rooftop experience. Every time we attempt something new and different in the name of Jesus, it's a rooftop experience. Jesus calls us up to the rooftops, out onto the ledges, into the storms of life.

As a congregation, we've had some rooftopping moments lately. When we took on feeding people at the Salvation Army it was a rooftopping experience. When we created the boxes of blessings to give comfort to cancer patients it was a rooftopping experience. When we travel to Guatemala or Colorado on mission trips, it's a rooftopping experience. Whenever we step outside this sanctuary and engage God's people in God's world, it's a rooftopping experience and a lesson on the nature and substance of faith itself.

There are crazy risk-takers in this world. And, truth is, they're only getting crazier. Last year 16-year-old Justin Casquejo was arrested after breaking into and climbing to the top of the then unfinished 1 World Trade Center skyscraper. The teen spent two hours atop the 1,776-foot-tall building snapping pictures of his daring escapade. The other was of Google executive Alan Eustace who set a record for the world's highest skydive, dropping from an altitude of more than 135,000 feet or 25 miles. And it was all caught on tape. Those daredevils had every reason to be overcome by fear. Not only were they doing things that were incredibly dangerous, but they were doing them alone.

Followers of Jesus will often feel alone, as though they have been stranded by Jesus, left out on a limb. But, the truth is that followers of Jesus are, in every dark moment, joined by him. Jesus does not take his people where he does not reside with his people. That's the point of the promise that ends Matthew's gospel, *Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (28:20). Jesus is with us on the edge, and this Jesus who takes us to scary places has on his resume what no other risk-taking rabbi does: an empty tomb. It's one thing to stare down death. It's another to defeat it. If you have to be out on the edge with anyone it might as well be the only one who has risen from the grave by his own power.

Jesus was a risk-taker. And if you're following him it means you're called to be a bit of a risk-taker, too. He will lead you where you do not want to go. And when he does, the temptation

will be to give in to fear as you focus on your feet. When that happens, take inventory of just who is with you. Lift your eyes off of your crisis and on to Christ. The ground beneath our feet will always give us some reason to fear; but, for now, our companion, our Savior, is mighty to save.

**Prayer:** Lord, in every need let me come to You with humble trust saying, "Jesus, help me." In all my doubts, perplexities, and temptations, Jesus, help me. In hours of loneliness, weariness, and trials, Jesus, help me. In the failure of my plans and hopes; in disappointments, troubles, and sorrows, Jesus, help me. When others fail me and Your grace alone can assist me, help me. When I throw myself on Your tender love as a father and savior, Jesus, help me. When my heart is cast down by failure at seeing no good come from my efforts, Jesus, help me. When I feel impatient and my cross irritates me, Jesus, help me. When I am ill and my head and hands cannot work and I am lonely, Jesus, help me. Always, always, in spite of weakness, falls, and shortcomings of every kind, Jesus, help me and never forsake me. Amen.

**Sources:**

- "Justin Casquejo, teen who climbed World Trade Center, sentenced." cbsnews.com. Retrieved December 18, 2014.
- "'Near-space dive' sets new skydive record, 25 miles above earth." npr.org. Retrieved December 18, 2014.

## Faith, Risk and the Sky-High Selfie

**Sunday, June 21, 2015**

**The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN**

### **Mark 4:35-41**

Sometimes taking risks can be fun. In my younger days I was quick to take risks, particularly if there was a bet involved. To win a bet I ate rattlesnake and crocodile (both quite tasty!). I tried to jump a parking meter to win a bet (I failed and bruised two ribs). I sawn with sharks on Australia's Great Barrier Reef (not on a bet, just a really, cool experience). Fortunately, or unfortunately, there is no photographic evidence of these exploits, so you will have to take my word for it.

Nowadays, then there are some extreme risk-takers, those who run toward adventures that the rest of the world tries hard to avoid. And while there have always been the crazy few who go and do what no one else dares attempt, something has changed in the world of risky behavior. The crazy ones now have cameras. It's no longer enough to experience the adrenaline rush and then tell the story to buddies later. It's no longer about staring death in the face. It's about getting the perfect shot, of you, staring death in the face.

That's the big idea behind "rooftopping," a term used to describe the latest fad in death-defying behavior. Rooftoppers climb to some insane height, be it the top of a building or the edge of a cliff, and they snap a picture. But it's not just any picture: the rooftopper's entire goal is to snag a selfie – a picture of themselves - showing the world just how high and how crazy they are.

Jesus was a risky guy, too, but he wasn't a self-indulgent daredevil, taking on risk for risk's sake. Jesus managed to find himself in a number of truly treacherous situations, often by his own design. Jesus surely knew that a particular crowd would eventually get rowdy and demand more miracles, or that a certain religious leader would call for his arrest, or or that a demonic power would surface, screaming at the very sound of his voice.