

February 6, 2022

ALL IN—The Risk of Saying Yes

SCRIPTURE READING John 3:16-17

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

SCRIPTURE READING Luke 5:1-11

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

5 Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, 2 he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. 4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” 5 Simon answered, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” 6 When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. 7 So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” 9 For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” 11 When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

This morning we’re starting a new preaching series entitled—ALL IN that will help us consider what it means to go ALL IN as disciples of JC.

Throughout the month & in subsequent series we will cont. finding ways to claim our new mission statement—LOVE GOD-REACH PEOPLE-SERVE ALL and integrate it throughout our worship and life together as a faith family, who is ALL IN for Christ!

When we face important decisions, seek direction & explore opportunities in our lives, we often weigh the pros and cons. Sometimes we’re desperately searching to find reasons to avoid change, Or to stay in our comfort zone and keep doing things the same way. But there comes a time when we must decide friends, are we going to play it safe or go ALL IN?

Today’s scripture readings will help us Understand what it means to go ALL IN for Christ, As we explore the Risk of going ALL IN for the Lord.

Friends when we say “yes” to following Jesus...it means we say “yes” To the risk of a new adventure; a new path; a new opportunity—While trusting God each and every step of the way.

Webster dictionary’s definition of risk as a noun is: “The possibility that something unpleasant or unwelcome will happen.”

*When we RISK, it means there’s a chance we can fail.

*When we risk, we or someone we know and love might get hurt or harmed in some kind of way perhaps.

*When we risk...things can change and be uncomfortable

But I’ve discovered that with every risk I’ve taken...Ones that were amazingly, awesomely life-changing & successful **And** ones that were abysmal, flat-out, complete failures; with each risk whether successful or not—I was changed, I learned about myself & life; About Faith and trust, courage & hope, *Each risk has shaped and molded me. By risking to go ALL IN, I have become a better disciple of Christ, a better pastor, better wife, mom, daughter and friend.

Oh there are so many risks I’ve taken over the years, that lead to formative changes in my life.

One story I’d like to share, As a sophomore in HS, I had been part of stage crew since 9th grade, Because my big brother Scott was always the Lead in each play. He was so talented, outgoing and a natural leader. I was incredibly, painfully shy and a bit of a loner. My brother got me to be a part of stage crew, then kept pushing me to try out for our final show that year & his last as a graduating senior.

Well his persistent encouragement gave me the courage to risk actually auditioning for the musical comedy, “A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum.” I was a hot mess at the audition, but I risked standing in front of teachers and seniors of the Cast; said my lines and croaked out a song. Oh...I was awful!

But I remember, off to the side looking so proud was my brother Scott, who gave me the biggest hug after. Well I didn’t get the part I auditioned for, but I got one of the most hilarious, “non-speaking” roles as a courtesan, whom my brother, as a lead, eventually falls in love with. I went ALL IN, scared as all get out, to stand on that stage and open up...but I did it! That courageous risk began the journey of me coming out of my shell and just released new gifts I never knew I had...But my brother did, and so did my teachers. *All from the risk as a 15 y/o, shy loner who dared greatly and said yes.

This week’s message had me really reflect upon all the life-altering and transformational risks I’ve made over my life:

- I Risked saying yes to Rich’s proposal 37 years ago.
- Risked applying to the NJ State Police Academy and became one 23 women selected; then I risked dropping out after the first week, because I discovered that this wasn’t who God was calling me to be.
- I Risked saying yes to a mission trip to the Dominican Republic

- Risked quitting my job as a Senior Probation Officer to enter seminary in Bangor, ME with Rich and our twin 2 y/o daughters.
- Risked saying yes to each new appointment the Bishop asked of me

And friends, each and every one of these RISKS brought instances that were unpleasant and unwanted, as well as painful failures. BUT each one, without exception brought change and new life for me, my family, my work & my calling; over & over again. I had fears and doubts, losses, and pain—But I also had hope and joy, new opportunities and growth; when I said “yes” to risk going ALL IN.

Some of my favorite quotes come from those who know that the biggest risk, is the one not taken. Eleanor Roosevelt said, “Do one thing everyday that scares you.” TS Eliot wrote: “Only those who will risk going too far...can possibly find out how far one can go.”

John, the author of the 4th Gospel, shared one of the biggest risks ever made:

“For God so loved the world... God gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.” (Jn 3:16)

This one verse, John 3:16, sums up powerfully how God is committed to being ALL IN for the world. God doesn't simply create the world and then wait to see what happens. God loves the world so much, God risks going ALL IN, And gave Jesus Christ, God's very own self—for US.

Because God is ALL IN for us, we are liberated-freed-from sin & death. We are freed for relationship with God, and with each other; Freed and called to be ALL IN for God. To live out fully, with humble gratitude & great joy, our love for God!

Oh friends, God's being ALL IN for us is the foundation of this series, It's the foundation of our hope, the foundation of our strength & power, It's the foundation of our church and calling.

Now as Pastor Jess reminded our kids in the Young Disciples Time...And us too...not all risks are worth taking, Some can be foolish and dangerous. And today's 2nd reading from Luke 5 provides a great example of the kind of risk worth taking...it's the risk involved in following Jesus.

Its actually the very first time in Luke where Jesus calls disciples, where he says: “Hey you guys in the fishing boats...I'm going to ask you to start fishing for people!” In this call story, we learn that Simon is willing to throw his fishing net “all in” the deep waters, amid exhaustion and fear, because Jesus tells him to, and he trusts Jesus. He has been listening to Jesus teach the crowds and knows that this is someone he can trust, even if it doesn't fully make sense yet...(he & his friends have been fishing there all night with nothing to show for it!).

But the risk pays off with a huge catch of fish, even though there are some scary moments along the way – the nets beginning to break, the boats beginning to sink. Simon Peter's reaction is

very human. He is in awe of what Jesus is doing and exclaims, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”

This reaction shows that he does not believe himself worthy...worthy to be a part of the amazing things Jesus is doing. *Yet Jesus calls him not to be afraid, but to follow him anyway, sin & all. Fear not! I need you to fish for people! Sound a little familiar? Fear not Simon Peter, I want you to do a new thing! Despite how scary it is, leaving their boats, their livelihoods, their families, Simon Peter, James, and John go ALL IN with Jesus.

This doesn't mean they are unafraid or that they won't make mistakes along the way; in fact we KNOW they do! Repeatedly! But in response to what Jesus has done on that day on the lake, they take the “leap of faith.” They do not negotiate with him (to be a part time disciple, to bring their boats, to get other things done first). NO...They commit to fully following Jesus. The go ALL IN.

This calling of the very first disciples is a huge teaching moment for us! What does it mean for you...for me to go ALL IN for Jesus? What does it mean for us a church to go ALL IN for Jesus? Like Simon, some may have doubts about our worthiness or our own capabilities to fully follow Jesus. To take a risk, like those very first disciples, can be scary. But I firmly believe that God's call to each of us is unique and hope-filled! Jesus does not ask us to be perfect! He simply calls us to follow him!

And like the very first disciples before us, we do not have to know the outcome ahead of time or to be sure of ourselves. We just have to risk taking that first step in faith & commit to the journey, Knowing the path will absolutely have some ups and downs, and that we will make some mistakes along the way.

Friends, going ALL IN as a disciple of Christ can look so completely different for each of us.
~For some it might mean joining the praise team or the choir, even though you're shy,
~For others it might mean telling a coworker your story of faith, or a youth inviting their best friend to youth group or Sunday service, even though they may fear rejection.
~For some it might mean increasing giving to the church—through your time, your talents and your treasure.
~Still for others it might mean you change your work or school schedules to attend that Bible study, or youth group or mission project, or you simply stop doing something else...to go ALL IN for Jesus.

Our New Mission Statement and our 5 Year Vision Statement are both First steps, that we as a church, have taken by FAITH...And in commitment to Jesus Christ to be his Church. We boldly proclaim that as a church we RISK discovering & doing what it means to: LOVE GOD ~ REACH PEOPLE ~ and SERVE ALL.

We are going ALL IN—knowing that there will absolutely be ups & downs, understanding that we do not have to know the outcome ahead of time or be sure of ourselves or be perfect...

We are going ALL IN because we know that God is fully with us each and every step of the way...Trusting that as we LOVE GOD we can Risk going ALL IN and that we will keep growing and learning and becoming all that Christ hopes and dreams for us as his church. For we too are fishers of people...who love God, desire to reach people and passionately serve all!

As we journey together—

May we have the courage and faith to go ALL IN...

Bringing all that we are to Christ...

Sharing all that we have with Christ...

Offering ourselves, as imperfect as we are, for Christ...

AND Following our Lord's greatest example of love in Christ...

Let's Risk going ALL IN!

Amen and amen.