

Moving Out
Steven M Conger
July 29, 2007

Luke 19:11-27

11 While he had their attention, and because they were getting close to Jerusalem by this time and expectation was building that God's kingdom would appear any minute, he told this story:

12-13 "There was once a man descended from a royal house who needed to make a long trip back to headquarters to get authorization for his rule and then return. But first he called ten servants together, gave them each a sum of money, and instructed them, 'Operate with this until I return.'

14 "But the citizens there hated him. So they sent a commission with a signed petition to oppose his rule: 'We don't want this man to rule us.'

15 "When he came back bringing the authorization of his rule, he called those ten servants to whom he had given the money to find out how they had done.

16 "The first said, 'Master, I doubled your money.'

17 "He said, 'Good servant! Great work! Because you've been trustworthy in this small job, I'm making you governor of ten towns.'

18" The second said, 'Master, I made a fifty percent profit on your money.'

19" He said, 'I'm putting you in charge of five towns.'

20-21 "The next servant said, 'Master, here's your money safe and sound. I kept it hidden in the cellar. To tell you the truth, I was a little afraid. I know you have high standards and hate sloppiness, and don't suffer fools gladly.'

22-23 "He said, 'You're right that I don't suffer fools gladly — and you've acted the fool! Why didn't you at least invest the money in securities so I would have gotten a little interest on it?'

24 "Then he said to those standing there, 'Take the money from him and give it to the servant who doubled my stake.'

25 "They said, 'But Master, he already has double . . .'

26 "He said, 'That's what I mean: Risk your life and get more than you ever dreamed of. Play it safe and end up holding the bag.'

27" "As for these enemies of mine who petitioned against my rule, clear them out of here. I don't want to see their faces around here again.'"

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Why is it that men have such a difficult time stopping and asking for directions?

I have become somewhat convinced that it is a genetic defect — since it seems to be a universal problem. Or maybe it is just stubbornness.

Think about it — men will drive around and around in circles, and eventually give up and go home, rather than stop at the gas station and ask directions.

The fascinating thing about the development of the GPS (Global Positioning System) is who it is being marketed toward. You would think that they would be marketing it to the male, but the truth is, most of the marketing is geared toward the wife or girlfriend, so that they will buy one for their perpetually lost male companion.

But while we love to poke fun at that unique male quality — maybe we shouldn't be so hasty. I think that there is something to be said for the willingness to take a risk — the willingness to not always play it safe.

Too many of us are reluctant to go on any excursion without precise directions and a detailed map. Would we even dream of starting out on any cross-country journey without hauling along a road atlas, not to mention a personalized "trip-tic" from the Automobile Club, or at least a GPS.

When I headed out to photograph churches in the north conference — that is what I did, I just headed out. No map, no coordinates locked into a GPS, just the spirit of the adventure.

I am fascinated by a speech that the late Edwin H. Friedman, rabbi, family therapist, sailor and map collector, gave. In it he argues that "map-knowledge" is really quite fleeting and transitory.

In his study of old maps, he discovered that the willingness to risk new models doesn't merely alter, add to or abolish old models, it:

"changes the context of experience and makes the very methods of conceptualization associated with the old model obsolete."

Friedman's study of Columbus, da Gama, Magellan and Drake makes clear that it is the very risking of a new thought or a new spirit that brings about a new frame of reference, a new context of experience, a new way of living in the world — and thus, changes reality.

"Not one's sense of reality," Friedman insists, "but reality itself."

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Columbus trusted his maps and calculations, considered his risks and sailed off to encounter the "new world."

Magellan based his charts and maps on the most current information available, then boldly circumnavigated the world.

A few centuries later, in their search for a northwest passage, Lewis and Clark struck out to cross the entire North American continent and drew the contours of a new nation.

All these explorers had at least one thing in common.

They all based their momentous journeys on maps that were completely wrong. All of their maps were hopelessly flawed or at best vastly mistaken.

What strikes me even more is that they had to know that the odds were that their maps were in error -- after all, no one had taken these journeys before.

Yet even though the maps they used were jokes, each of these adventurers went ahead, accepted the risks, plunged into unknown territories and ultimately, changed the world.

Of course, they didn't always end up where they thought they were going.

Rather than Columbus "discovering" America, the native Americans "discovered" him, lost and confused about where he was. What's more, as historian Francis Jennings has observed, Europeans did not find a wilderness in America, they made one. Neither Columbus nor Magellan proved that sailing west was a great shortcut for ending up in the East, and Lewis and Clark never found a secret inland passage. Still, because of their risk-taking, the face of the planet was re-drawn, and the dreams of future generations were reshaped.

Friedman gives this example of the relationship between risk and reality:

You're #317 in line for the Auschwitz crematorium and #318 turns to you and says, "Would you believe, in little more than a decade these people will feel so badly they'll give enough money to Israel to make the difference for its survival. Not only that, the Luftwaffe will be called Lufthansa and it will have the greatest number of flights to Israel per day?"

The finding of something more radically different than you can imagine can only come about because somebody has the spirit of adventure, not because their theory is right.

This is one reason why Friedman believes that all institutions who fund

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This is one reason why Friedman believes that all institutions who fund

research projects should set aside 5 to 10 percent of their monies for projects that totally contradict those projects they have chosen to fund. Only in this way can the human race "prevent its knowledge from keeping it from learning more" (Friedman, "Maps," 9).

But being a trail-blazer or a risk-taker, is not without its hazards.

If you don't have vision — to travel beyond the boundaries of your maps, to venture beyond the sight of the shore can be terrifying!

Since the days of Moses, there have always been those who clamor to go "back to Egypt."

Staying with what one knows, is always easier — even when the known is unpleasant.

Those without the vision, without the courage to risk, are quick to label those who do take risks as crazy, crackpots, or fools.

Did you listen carefully to the parable this morning.

While it is clear that this is about using what God has given us — I think it is also about taking risks. Jesus praises the person who took the biggest risk and criticizes the one who takes the safe route.

The bad servant thought he was "playing it safe" when he buried the single talent given him by his master. He also sought to escape the responsibility the master had given him for this wealth by getting it out of his hands and into the ground.

The master's judgment of this slave and his action suggest that if we wish to be disciples, to call ourselves faithful servants, we had better do more with the gifts we have been given than worry about their well-being.

I have become convinced that God has never been one to play it safe.

A God not interested in taking risks would never have created Adam in the first place.

But God not only risked creation.

God risked relationship — first with Noah, again with Abraham, eternally with David and the people of Israel. Finally, God risked everything with the incarnation.

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God risked relationship — first with Noah, again with Abraham, eternally with David and the people of Israel. Finally, God risked everything with the incarnation.

If God risked everything in the person of Jesus Christ, doesn't it seem likely that this same God might expect more than self-seeking, self-motivated, safety-conscious behavior from those who have been called to be his disciples?

One of the things that I have come to learn from my study of history is that the concept of "chance" in the past was negative. To talk of "chance" was not a good thing.

Today — we seem to use this concept as a standard way for describing life.

We now speak of life as being "fraught with chance" or as "episodic." We consider that "everything is contingent" and talk about "the need to take risks." How often have you heard me talk about that we live in the gray.

But talk is cheap.

Unfortunately, we seem to be cheapening the whole concept of risk by collapsing it into our notion of a lottery. Legalized lotteries have been touted as the salvation of the states. State-run lotteries usually try to validate themselves by designating the monies collected for some worthy cause, such as education.

No matter what the odds, if a jackpot gets big enough, everyone seems willing to throw in a couple dollars "just in case." Harmless fun? Perhaps. Perhaps not. What is certain is that "lotto-fever" is spilling over into other areas of our life.

Barbara Goodwin, wrote a book in 1992 called: *Justice by Lottery*.

In it, she argues the case for seeing the lottery as possibly the best system of distributive justice of any system.

She suggests that we ought to distribute the justice we all want and think we deserve through the lottery system.

What that means is that: the person who is illiterate, the person who is educated, the person who is cultured, the person who is uncultured, the person who is rich and the person who is poor, would all be determined by the chance of the lottery.

In other words, the lottery becomes a metaphor for justice itself.

Is this the kind of risk God wants from us?

I don't think so!

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The risk called for in our parable this morning is the willingness to open our

lives to a power beyond our own.

If anything, the lottery is most like that servant burying the master's money in the ground. Trusting in the lottery system takes away personal responsibility. Its method of "investment" is based on faithlessness — no faith in yourself, no faith in God's ability to work through your life, no faith in the power of discipleship itself.

Lotteries have always been a subtle but consistently regressive tax.

The lottery of the rich is known as the stock market.

The lottery of the poor, the numbers racket, is actually "a freely accepted form of taxation of the less privileged layers of society," argues Belgian physicist David Ruelle. "The lottery ticket that you buy, rather cheaply perhaps, is a little bit of hope of becoming rich"

It seems to me that something is wrong when we are taxing poor people's hope, through the false risk taking of the lottery.

The risks God would have us take are for the sake of others.

Risking ourselves, not just our money or our status — that is the genuine risk of discipleship. Other people should be the focus of our risk-taking. Relationships are the riskiest business around. Risking to love and serve, risking rejection and ridicule, risking despair for the promise of fulfillment — those are the truly profound risks that God wants us all to take.

I was shocked at Rotary this last week. I guess I need to be honest — every week at Rotary we have a speaker come in and share some important information with the group. 9 out of 10 times, I listen politely and forget it as soon as I leave the room. But not this past week. Dr. Katheryne Pavey from the Discovery Alliance was our speaker.

Anybody familiar with the Discovery Alliance?

She made the statement that 52% of the adults (persons over 16) in Lake Country cannot read above a 5th grade level. And in Gary that number is 79%.

That is criminal!

We wonder why crime is so high in places like Gary — I think that you can make a direct correlation with the literacy rate.

Now if you are like me, the first thing that came to mind was, I know almost nobody who is illiterate.

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But is that surprising?

Who do I hang out with?

Highly educated and literate people
I don't spend a lot of time with people who are not "like me" — and my hunch
is that you are pretty much the same way.

Why am I telling you this?

What if we as a church made a decision that we would impact literacy in our
county.

What can I do you might be asking?

Some of you here this morning are 10 talent people, some of you are 5,
but you all have at least some talent — because I know that you can read.

Some of you might want to volunteer to teach an English class, others of you
certainty could read to a kindergarten or 1st grade class.

The question is, what are you going to do with the gift that God has given
you?

There is an old baseball saying: You can't be charged with an error unless you
touch the ball.

Nadine Stair, 85-year-old patient of Bernie Siegel, who was facing death wrote
this poem that I want to conclude with:

If I had my life to live over ...

I would take more chances, I would take more

Trips, I would scale more mountains,

I would swim more rivers, and I would

Watch more sunsets. I would eat more

Ice cream and fewer beans.

I would have more actual troubles

And fewer imaginary ones. You see ...

I was one of those people who lived

Prophylactically and sensibly and sanely,

Hour after hour and day after day

... I've been

One of those people who never went anywhere without

A thermometer, a hot water bottle, a gargle, a

Raincoat and a parachute

If I had it to do all over again,

I'd travel lighter, much lighter,

Than I have.

I would start barefoot earlier

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In the spring, and I'd stay that way
Later in the fall. And I would
Ride more merry-go-rounds, and
Catch more gold rings, and greet
More people, and pick more flowers,
And dance more often. If I had it
To do all over again.
But you see,
I don't.

So how are you going to use the gifts that God has given to you?

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