

Called to Truth
Matthew 10:24-39
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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I don't know about you, but I like safety. I like comfort. I like things that are low-risk.

Perhaps I should have chosen actuarial work for my profession, because I am assessing the risk in most every situation. Now that doesn't mean that I am not willing to take risks or to do things that feel risky, but it does mean that I will rarely, if ever, do so without having thought it through, and often will do so with a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. Just ask my child who recently returned from a trip to some of our national parks - he heard about *all* of the potential risks before he left home!

If I had my choice, I would likely choose a life full of the same feelings that I get on a winter afternoon cuddled up on the couch with a fuzzy blanket, a warm drink, and a good book. I think I could get used to a life where getting up to refill my mug was the biggest challenge I had.

And yet, I am also really clear that this is not the life that I have signed up for nor is it the life that the world needs me to live.

Now, don't get me wrong...I am one of those privileged people whose life overall has been pretty easy. Even in times of living paycheck to paycheck, I have always had enough including a roof over my head. I have had access to medical care and to education. I have had strong support from friends and family and congregations around me. So, I get away with an easy life quite often.

And I am aware that the life we commit to as people of faith is a life that asks us to do risky things. And if we aren't feeling that, then we are likely ignoring so much of what Jesus and the prophets before him said...we are likely ignoring the stories of risk that we see throughout the story of the people of faith.

See, too often we have talked about Christianity as if we got a script from a marketing firm. We have painted a pretty picture. We have made it look easy and desirable. We have advertised the benefits without talking about what being a follower of Jesus asks of us.

But I wonder if that has served us well. I especially wonder that when I listen to what the gospels tell us Jesus said. Because he seemed to have a different marketing plan. Rather than packaging the opportunity to follow him up with a pretty bow, Jesus was willing to be honest, to speak the truth, and to invite his followers into some risky business.

That's what we heard in the passage Kent read for us today.

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As retired New Testament professor Stanley Saunders wrote, “The disciples are granted remarkable powers, even to raise the dead (10:1, 8), but are warned repeatedly of the suffering and threats they will face (e.g., 10:16-18, 21-23, 34-36). Their closest and most important relationships will be ruptured (10:21, 34-39), and yet they participate in the most integral of relationships not only with Jesus, but with God.

Saunders goes on writing, “On the face of it, these seemingly contradictory conditions may sound like a crude way of motivating the disciples to face harsh realities: ‘you will suffer now, but your eschatological reward will be great.’ Warning and promise are here, however, not two, mutually exclusive points in a temporal series — risk now, reward later — but rather the two poles that together define the singular experience of discipleship (Stanley Saunders, [Commentary on Matthew 10:40-42 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)).

And that’s what we often aren’t honest about. Too often we name the benefits to us. Too often we pretend that following Jesus will make everything easy. Too often, even in the face of earthy difficulties, we distract people with heavenly rewards.

But Jesus, when he invites people to follow him, names the multiple realities, names that many things can be true at once. Being his followers *will* invite them into great opportunities and deep relationships *and* along with those realities, there *will* be great risk. In fact, if we pay attention to the stories of both Jesus and the early church we might be left asking the question: If my faith doesn’t take me to risky places, am I even doing it right?

And again, this goes against everything that marketing has taught us. In fact, commercials, like those for medications, that are required to name the associated risks have historically done so in small print or high speed. And when that’s not the case, when we hear a commercial say that a medication may cause you to lose your hair or turn your skin green, we simply think it’s absurd to announce that. Why would anyone take that medicine?

But that is Jesus’ strategy, too. Come, follow me...be part of this wonderful movement toward the reign of God, he said. *But* know that if you fully invest, people will push back against your choice...some of your closest relationships may even be damaged...you will have to rely on others for your basic needs...you might even get hurt or or arrested or die.

I wonder how many of us, if we had known Jesus and been invited to follow him, would have taken the risk?

But is that risk any different today?

Perhaps we have told ourselves it is. And living in a time and place where throughout the majority of our lives Christianity has not only been acceptable but elevated, that has allowed us to think so.

But the basics are the same.

In our passage today, verses 32-34 have often been translated as “confess” or “acknowledge” and have been taught to many as being about making a confession of faith to follow Jesus. Often we have heard this as if all we had to do is say we believe in Jesus, get baptized, and our faith is complete.

D. Mark Davis says this however, “I find it helpful to remember that, at the heart of confessing Christ is agreeing with Christ, or literally ‘saying (λογέω) the same (ὁμο)’ as Christ” ([Left Behind and Loving It: A Difficult Text for Difficult Crises](#)).

If we are followers of Jesus, then we are to make his same claims and model the way we live our lives after his.

So, what does that mean?

It means seeing and offering care and compassion, healing and wholeness to those our culture says don’t deserve our attention.

It means speaking hard truths even when those who hear us are likely to respond with anger or violence.

It means standing up against those in power when their actions are hurting the poor and the vulnerable, when they are choosing oppression rather than freedom and agency for those who are different from them.

Shaping our lives like Jesus means risking our lives for Jesus’ way.

We began worship today singing an old hymn that generations of people have sung for years. What if the words we sang were truly commitments we made? Take my life...take my hands...take my voice...take my silver and my gold...take my will...take my love.

What if we were honest enough with each other about what Jesus asks of us that when we claimed to be followers of Jesus, people saw that truth within the reality of how we live?

What if we were honest enough with the invitation to follow Jesus that when we said yes we were ready to truly commit and to strive to live like him?

What if we were willing to speak the truth as we invited people Jesus’ way of life, a way of love and service, of risk and sacrifice, of building together the kin-dom of God?

May it be so.