

Risk Taking: Mission & Service

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Today, upon returning from the Holy Land, our topic is one of the Five Core Values – **Risk Taking Mission and Service**

And it occurred to me as I have been walking where Jesus walked for ten days

Travelling across the Sea of Galilee (picture)

Walking on the beach where he appeared resurrected to his disciples

Seeing the mountain where he fed the 5,000,

Standing where he gave the beatitudes at the Sermon on the Mt and reading them all again

Being in the Upper Room where he had his last meal with his disciples

Walking the path he walked carrying the cross

Touching the Golgotha rock

And then seeing the Garden Tomb, (picture) entering it, and reading the words on the door

“He is not here, He is risen”

It occurred to me that there was no greater risk ever taken
And no greater service or mission ever performed
Than when God Almighty, Yahweh...decided to take on flesh and
become like us to enter into our lives, in the history of our existence,
and show us his mercy

There were three things that I will take away from this trip that I want
to share with you this morning...

The first is this. After trudging through the Holy Land and Israel I have

1. A renewed appreciation for Jesus' humanity

I realized that as 21st century Christians we have known Christ
spiritually as an invisible being all our lives

Sometimes Jesus humanity, his flesh and blood reality, can get
overlooked – at least it does for me...

Sometimes the complexity of what it means to be a human being –
when I think about Jesus being human - can get a little diminished in
my mind or vague...maybe that's true for you too

That vagueness isn't there for me anymore after this trip

Friends this really happened...and we have documented evidence in history that Jesus Christ walked this earth

As a human being

And Jesus had a pumping heart that sometimes raced in fear, and a sweaty body after a mountain climb (Jesus climbed a lot of mountains – I learned that too), he had limbs that ached after a long walk, and hunger pangs in his belly, and a deep weariness at the end of the day like you and I often have; he had concerns for the future, the sadness for those suffering, he wanted to belong with people, and he savored the small happinesses of each day that make life worth living...we don't always think about Jesus having these feelings and desires and physical sensations – human reaction

We can whitewash it away and make Jesus into a spiritual being who is above us and beyond us....but the miracle is that

Jesus was flesh and blood like us...and for me I needed to recover a sense of that...

He felt pain

He knew agony and cried... real tears...he sobbed his heart out

He felt doubt, and fear, and loneliness, exasperation and exhaustion

He also knew joy and friendship and had moments of great ecstasy and triumph

And I realized this in a new way as I walked where Jesus walked

I almost had a vision of heaven before Jesus came, as I stood by the Sea of Galilee and watched the sunrise outside of our hotel one morning...And I could almost hear a dialogue between God the Father, and Jesus the Son

God saying, *"I need humanity to know who I really am. They are trying to find me through their own efforts to be good and it is hopeless."*

And Jesus without hesitation saying back, *"Father, Abba, I will go. I will go to them."*

God saying, *"But it is a great risk. You walk into such darkness. You will have to limit yourself. You will not always know the future. You will experience the confusion and chaos of their darkness, and you will have to trust me the way they do without seeing me. And you will be betrayed, and you will be tempted to do wrong, and you will have*

to die painfully because the world can't stand the goodness you will bring."

And Jesus again responding, "I will go. I will take the risk of temptation and that all will reject me, for the sake of just one person who will respond – I will serve them on their level. I will become like they are, so that they can see you father, in me. So that in the end Father they can rejoice in your great love for them. Let me go to them."

And God responding, "It will mean that you will also have to experience alienation from me, for that is what they experience all the time."

And Jesus again saying, "I am willing to do whatever it takes. Send me."

The reality of Jesus humanity comes through John's pen as he scratches the words on a canvass scroll...

That which we have touched with our hands, that our eyes have seen...the word of life made flesh...yes...let your joy be complete.

This trip has given me a renewed appreciation for Jesus' humanity... and the risk taking mission and service that he willingly walked into when he took on flesh and came to earth.

The second thing that I take away from this Holy Land experience is this...

2. A renewed awareness of people's hunger for God.

I was astounded by the number of people who were at the sites we were visiting.

People came in droves pouring out of tour buses, clamoring, pushing their way to see the places where Jesus had been or where an OT story had taken place. In some places, it was a madhouse. One time I actually bribed a man to let us sit in his air conditioned storage closet because there was nowhere to sit.

From all walks, young and old, and all countries speaking all different kinds of languages

Kissing rocks where Jesus had supposedly stood, lying prostrate before altars and in churches, weeping, calling out to God, people streaming in constantly – it took us two hours just to see a place where we think Jesus was born – standing in line waiting.

Tim and Doug had to stand like body guards so that we could get down the stairs without being jostled by the many who were trying to push their way in.

At first I was super annoyed by the crowds and wished for more serenity and peace in these places where I could meditate and pray so I could have some kind of spiritual experience.

And then I started to realize – that's not the way it was for Jesus when he came to earth. He found time alone with God – yes – but for the most part he was pushed and jostled by so many people who just wanted to get to him to touch the hem of his garment...it says in one place that all who touched him were healed.

Nothing has changed, I thought. People are still just starving for God! Reaching out for him. Trying to find him.

I thought of another place in scripture where Jesus was being pressed in upon so much that they had to put him in a boat and push him out from shore and he taught the people from the boat – just to give him a little reprieve from the stifling crowds.

We actually got to see a boat that was 2,000 years old, recently discovered in the mud by the sea of Galilee. There it is...It seems that after it was discovered there appeared a double rainbow in the

sky. Who knows? This could have been the very boat Jesus taught from.

As I thought about Jesus and the crowds I remembered a time when he tried to get away from the crowds.

Jesus and his disciples had ministering all day, and Jesus said let's cross the Sea of Galilee and go to a quieter place. And they did, but when they got to the opposite shore where they were going the crowd was there! Agh! All those people had run around on foot on the shore anticipating where Jesus was going...and it said Jesus had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he got out of the boat and began teaching them... even though he was probably physically just spent. That evening is when he does the miracle of multiplying the loaves and fish so that they don't leave that desolate place hungry.

As people came in droves to these sites in the Holy Land to touch a rock, to kiss a stone, to light a candle or shove a prayer on a tiny piece of paper into the crevice of a rock where Jesus had been, it reminded me of these Biblical stories and the hunger the longing, the passion, people have to connect with the eternal God. I began to

replace my irritation with a sense of compassion and an awareness of how important ministry in Jesus name is...and the importance of the church and its mission to minister to the world. To be Jesus Christ to others.

So given these two take aways from the trip for me, I had to ask myself upon my return...What is my response to all this...to Jesus who risked everything...Almighty God becoming flesh for me...and also peoples insatiable hunger for God.

What am I doing in response? What am I risking in Jesus name?

What are we risking as a church to show to people who God is?

What limbs are we going out on? **How are we NOT playing it safe?**

Our tendency is to play it safe. To not take risks. To sort of plug along in a way that is familiar and easy. But the final take away for me from this trip was this.

3. Give your all to the mission of sharing Jesus Christ just as he gave his all for you. Risk everything for it. Go the distance. Let

nothing stand in your way. The world is longing for it, and Jesus risked everything for you and for me.

I remember when this core value was adopted by Session almost 8 years ago one elder saying, “The risking part of this core value is that we have to go the distance, launch out in whatever we can to spread the gospel and in so doing also be willing to fail. But we can’t hold back because we are afraid...We must move forward even when it is risky.” I just loved that statement.

Friends, Jesus didn’t play it safe – otherwise he never would have come. The world is aching for God just as much now as 2,000 years ago. Our response has to be an all out response.

How are you not playing it safe today? What are you risking right now to spread the gospel? What am I doing that is not safe...that pushes me a little bit to the brink where I have to trust God and go the distance even when it is not necessarily safe?

Because if we are not risking anything we probably don't think sharing Jesus is all that important.

If we are not taking risks, in our giving and in our living, we also don't have the opportunity to grow in our faith as we see God coming through for us again and again in the pinch...

(examples of taking risks...giving til it hurts, volunteering our time in the midst of busyness, sharing about Jesus with words even if it means being embarrassed, leading a new small group, helping with AWANA or CZ, TAKE A RISK...do what needs to be done now for the sake of the gospel.)

One of the things we did when we were in Israel was to go to a Nazareth remake of how it had looked when Jesus was alive...

They had real donkeys, a sheep, a shepherd, they showed us how they spun wool, how a wine press worked, what the temple probably looked like. **(picture here would be great)**

When we first got there we were served a Biblical lunch with lentil soup, chicken, and apples with chutney. It was really good.

It turns out that the young people serving us the meal were from Young Life. They had gone through training to do this work, and were also actively involved in the community making relationships with Arabs and Jews and Christians alike. This was not a popular stance as they were crossing religious and cultural barriers and faced potential persecution in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with sometimes pretty hostile groups. I interviewed one of the wait staff there...asking him what the greatest risk was for him in serving Jesus in Israel. He didn't mention all of the things I thought he would mention such as fear for his own safety as he moved cross culturally between Arabs and Jews. Rather his concern was all about communicating in a very religious environment :where everyone has to have a religion – that faith in Jesus Christ is not a religion – it is a relationship....And I thought this kid is all out for the gospel. He isn't even thinking of his own safety but has given his life to give back and bring Jesus to those who would never otherwise know him.

Here is an excerpt from our conversation... VIDEO PLAYS....

(still in process of getting this...will send tonight.)

Concluding thoughts and closing prayer....