

March 17, 2021

Dear Friends,

Jesus was a risk taker. This is most evident in the story of His final actions during Holy Week. As we've pondered during this Lenten season, His movement from the entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to His arrest in Gethsemane on Maundy Thursday, we realize that He pushed back against complacency and stuck expectations every step of the way. He risked resentment and challenges and loss of friendship and more, in order to fulfill His mission of love and salvation.

Following Jesus is no walk in the park. It means risking those things that we desperately want to cling to, thinking that they will bring us stability, security, success and satisfaction...and a sense of abundant life. In the end, however, that is never true. The only thing that we can count on for abundant life is to trust in Jesus and His way of living into God's mercy, grace, compassion and love.

During this extended time of COVID, the desire to cling to the familiar holds us in its pervasive grip. Yet, the reality is that we have been forced into change, and while some things will return to "normal", some other things never will. Perhaps, though, some of the things that we've gripped so tightly needed to be lost. We were just afraid to risk the loss before we were forced into it.

Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber posted a beautiful prayer on social media this past Sunday. It speaks well, I think, to the prayers rattling around inside of me...and perhaps you, too.

"Dear God who made us all, a year ago we did not know that we were about to learn: What we could lose and somehow live anyway. Where we would find comfort and where it would elude us. Whose lives matter to whom. Why we have kitchens in our homes. In mid-March 2020 all I knew for sure is that hoarding toilet paper doesn't make you safe - it just makes you selfish.

But God, it feels like the world is about to open back up. And I'm both thrilled and kind of scared about that. Because I'm not who I was a year ago. I want so badly to hug my friends again, and laugh...again. And have amazing conversations again. And yet I am not sure how long I could do any of this before crying or just getting really quiet. My emotional protective gear has worn so thin, and grief just leaks out everywhere now.

I am so afraid that I will never be who I once was. And I am also afraid that I will be. (Not to mention, I'm not entirely clear what size jeans I wear as the me I am now.) And yet, when I quiet my anxious thoughts, I start to suspect that I am now closer to the me you have always known and always loved. So, help me trust that, Lord. As things change, help us be gentle with ourselves and with each other. We are all wearing newborn skin right now. Amen."

As we've grappled with Jesus' risk...and our own...during this Lenten season, I pray that you, too, find yourself closer to the you that is known and loved by God. I pray you've known God's nearness and strength that has carried you and continues to carry you through this long time of challenge and change. I pray, too, that you've discovered that risking in the way of Jesus' self-giving love is extremely worth it.

Risking in the way of Jesus means doing what we can to help alleviate the need in our community, country and world, that has only intensified as a result of COVID. Won't you join me in donating to this year's Easter missional offering, to help spread God's love and care in both the local community and out into the world through your United Methodist Wider Missions. Written checks should designate on the memo line: "Easter offering." If you're able to worship in person with us on Easter morning, you may bring your check to drop in the offering plate. Otherwise, simply mail it to the church office, or donate online by going to www.stpaulsumc-coloradosprings.org and clicking on the green online giving button.

Risking God's love for all people, in the way of Jesus, is what it means to be the church. While we are still in transition and change, we can still be the church together by passing on the abundant life of Jesus to those who need it this year more than ever. Won't you join me in risky, extravagant, faithful giving this Easter?

I wish you many blessings and Easter joy.

Leslie