

You may have missed it in the news. A bridge is being built in the Sea of Galilee at Capernaum at the site where Jesus walked on the water 2,000 years ago. Notice that I did not say this bridge will be built OVER the Sea of Galilee. This bridge will be built IN the Sea. It will be slightly submerged so that visitors walking on the bridge will have the illusion that they are walking on water just like Jesus. The bridge will not have rails, but lifeguards and rescue boats will be stationed nearby in case of accident.

There were no lifeguards and rescue boats nearby when Simon Peter tried to make that famous walk. Neither was there a slightly submerged bridge. You know the story well. Jesus' disciples were in a boat. Jesus was on the shore. The wind and the waves were beating against the boat. Jesus went out to them, walking on the water. The disciples were terrified. But Jesus said to them: "*Take heart, It is I; don't be afraid.*" Simon Peter wasn't afraid. As usual, he acts on impulse. "*Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water.*"

I would love to have seen the expression on Jesus' face at that particular moment. Surely he worked hard to suppress a smile at Peter's audaciousness. That's one of the things he loved about Peter. **He was a doer--a man of action.**

"Come," Jesus said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But the wind kicked back up and Peter grew afraid and he began to sink. He cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said to Peter. "*Why did you DOUBT?*" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then the disciples who were in the boat and witnessed this turn of events fell down and worshiped Jesus, saying, "*Truly you are the Son of God.*"

WALKING ON WATER IS A COMMON EXPERIENCE IN HUMAN LIFE.

Risk-taking, we call it nowadays. And everyone does it, even though some of us may not admit it. Of course, some people go to extremes.

Do you recognize the name Anna Taylor? It's just as well. On October 24, 1901, Anna was the first person to go over Niagara Falls in a barrel and live. That's too much risk-taking for most of us.

Do you know what the last words of a redneck are? "*Hey, guys, watch this.*" Some risk-taking is just plain dumb. And yet some people, by their very nature, are risk-takers.

Christopher Columbus was a risk-taker. So are race car drivers and many celebrities. These people have a personality trait researchers call "novelty seeking." Researchers say novelty seekers are usually outgoing, excitable, short-tempered and eager for new experiences. They're also likelier to have a gene that fosters this thrill-seeking temperament. Studies by Israeli and U.S. researchers, published in Nature Genetics, have linked novelty-seeking behavior with a gene that affects the body's response to the brain chemical dopamine. Dopamine helps stimulate the feeling of euphoria. It affects how we perceive pain, and it plays a role in the sensations produced by some addictive drugs.

The researchers found that people with the gene for the D4 dopamine receptor were likelier to seek new experiences than people without this receptor. How they pursue their novelty seeking, however, will be determined by their experiences. A novelty seeker encouraged to be athletic, for instance, might try bungee jumping, while someone from a cerebral environment might become an inventor. The drive for excitement can also be shaped by other personality traits, such as sociability and persistence. For instance, a novelty seeker who is also sociable and confident might start a business, while an unsociable, fearful risk-taker might be prone to alcoholism. By pinpointing novelty-seeking and other personality-defining genes, researchers hope to develop new treatments for destructive behaviors such as smoking and alcoholism.

Of course, we don't need scientific studies to tell us that some people by their very nature, are RISK-TAKERS. Common experience tells us that. Some of these risk-takers do foolish things. If you are a parent who has a risk-taking child you live in fear that one day he or she will take a risk from which there is no return. **But walking on water is a common occurrence in human life.**

WITHOUT PEOPLE WHO TRY TO WALK ON WATER, THE WORLD WOULD NEVER MOVE FORWARD. No one would ever be cured of Covid-19 if there wasn't a RISK-TAKER. Why? We need those who are willing to be the Guiney Pig so that drugs can be tested on them, so that....

No one would ever get married if we took risk-taking out of life.

A woman is walking down the street when she hears a voice shout, "Stop." And she stops, and a piece of metal falls from space just in front of her--perhaps debris from a satellite. If she had gone one step farther, she would have been killed. She looks around to find the person who saved her life and sees no one. A few days later she is about to cross a street and she hears the same voice boom, "Stop." And a car, out of control, zooms by in front of her--missing her by inches. She looks around again for the source of the strange but life-saving voice. She sees no one, but this time she hears a voice. "Do you know who I am?" the voice asks. "No, I don't," she answers. "I am your guardian angel," says the voice. "I am here to protect you from harm." Instead of voicing her gratitude, the woman was indignant. *"There's just one thing I want to know," she said, "Where were you when I got married?"*

All of us take risks. We would never have anything if we did not. No new relationships would be formed. No new businesses would be started. No new homes would be built. Helen Keller got it right when she said that, *"Life is either a daring adventure or nothing."* Hockey legend Wayne Gretzky put it this way, *"You miss 100% of the shots you never take."* Mark Twain waxed poetic when he wrote: *"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."*

Even churches can know what it is to WALK ON WATER. Wes Seliger is an unconventional Episcopal clergyman who loves motorcycles. He tells about being in a motorcycle shop one day, drooling over a huge Honda 750 and wishing that he could buy it. A salesman came over and began to talk about his product. He talked about speed, acceleration, excitement, the attention-getting growl of the pipes, racing, and RISK. He talked about how the good-looking girls would be attracted to anyone riding on such a cycle. Then he discovered that Wes was a minister. It always happens, doesn't it? Immediately the salesman changed his language and even the tone of his voice. He spoke quietly and talked about good mileage and visibility. It was indeed a "practical" vehicle.

Wes observed: "Lawnmower salespersons are not surprised to find clergypersons looking at their merchandise; motorcycle salespersons are. Why? Does this tell us something about clergypersons and about the church? Lawnmowers are slow, safe, sane, practical, and middle-class. Motorcycles are fast, dangerous, wild, thrilling." Then Wes asks a question: *"Is being a Christian more like mowing a lawn or like riding a motorcycle?"* "Is the Christian life safe and sound or dangerous and exciting?" He concludes, "The common image of the church is pure lawnmower--slow, deliberate, and plodding. He said, *"Our task is to take the church out on the open road, give it the gas, and see what the old baby will do!"*

Is our church a lawn mower church or a motorcycle church? Maybe it's time we took more risks for God. Maybe Jesus was testing Simon Peter when he allowed him to jump out of the boat. Maybe this is why Jesus made Peter the leader of the tiny Christian fellowship after his ascension. **He needed somebody willing to WALK ON WATER.** Jesus didn't need a lawn mower church two thousand years ago. He needed a motorcycle church. Whenever the church has had an impact on society it has been because it has traded in its lawn mower for a motorcycle. **When Martin Luther started the Reformation...he and others who followed him, were willing to "get out of the boat" and step out on the water.**

It makes me realize how safe and secure we have made Christian faith. There was a time when the church was challenging its young people to go out as missionaries all over the world into lands that were hostile and foreboding. **And young people by the thousands traded in their lawn mowers for motorcycles.** During the Civil Rights movement there were Christians who risked their lives to promote the notion that all people are created equal. Some were beaten, some were HATED, and some died. **Where is the battlefield today? Where is the challenge? Has the world gotten that much safer, that more loving, that more just, that more like Jesus--or have we Christians retreated into our own safe little habitat?** YOU ALL KNOW THE ANSWER TO THAT. May God have mercy on our souls. The loss is ours. Because only as we attempt great things for God do we experience how great God truly is. **Only as we attempt to walk on water do we feel God's strong arms holding us up.**

And that brings us to a final thing to be said: RISKING GREAT THINGS FOR GOD IS NO RISK AT ALL.

When we attempt to do great things for God, we find that God is with us each step of the way.

Robert J. Morgan, in his book, On This Day, tells about missionaries Dick and Margaret Hillis. These committed Christians found themselves caught in China during the Japanese invasion of the Second World War. The couple lived with their two children in the inland town of Shenkiu. The village was tense with fear, for every day brought terrifying reports of the Japanese advance. At the worst possible time, Dick developed appendicitis, and he knew his life depended on making the long journey by rickshaw, a small two wheeled cart, pulled by another person, to the hospital. With deep grief in her heart, Margaret, his wife watched him leave.

Soon the Chinese colonel came with news. The enemy was near and the townspeople must evacuate. Margaret shivered, knowing that one-year-old Johnny and two-month-old Margaret Anne would never survive as refugees. So she stayed put. Early the next morning she tore the page from the wall calendar and read the new day's Scripture. It was Psalm 56:3: *"What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee."*

The town emptied during the day, and the next morning Margaret arose, feeling abandoned. The new verse on the calendar was Psalm 9:10: *"Thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee."*

The next morning she arose to distant sounds of gunfire and worried about food for her children. The calendar verse was Genesis 50:21: *"I will nourish you and your little ones."* An old woman suddenly popped in with a pail of steaming goat's milk, and another straggler arrived with a basket of eggs.

Through the day, sounds of warfare grew louder, and during the night Margaret prayed for deliverance. The next morning she tore the page from the calendar to read Psalm 56:9: *"When I cry unto Thee, then shall my enemies turn back."* The battle was looming closer, and Margaret didn't go to bed that night. Invasion seemed imminent. But the next morning, all was quiet. Suddenly, villagers began returning to their homes, and the colonel knocked on her door. For some reason, he told her, the Japanese had withdrawn their troops. No one could understand it, but the danger had passed. They were safe. Margaret glanced at her wall calendar and felt she had been reading the handwriting of God. **Taking a risk for God is really not a risk at all, for God is always with God's own.**

How long has it been since you took a risk for God? Perhaps you were in a group in which someone said something degrading about a person of another race or another religion? Did you rise to the occasion? How long has it been since you took the simple risk, WALKED OUT ON THE WATER, a risk like inviting a neighbor to join you in church?

How about our church? What great risks are we taking for God TODAY? God needs people who are willing to leave the safety of the boat, people who are willing to trade in their lawn mowers for motorcycles. **We don't have a submerged bridge like they're building in the Sea of Galilee, but God is calling us to walk on the water, too. WHAT "RISKS" ARE YOU WILLING TO TAKE FOR GOD TODAY...REMEMBER YOU CAN DO ANYTHING IF YOU ARE WILLING TO DO. JUST "TRUST" IN HIM—AND REMEMBER TO WEAR A MASK!!! Amen.**