

Sermon, August 9, 2020

Matthew 14:22-33; Romans 10:5-15

“Seeds: Growing in Grace: Taking the Step”

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ABC's Wild World of Sports was one of the longest running sports anthology shows of all time. In fact, when I looked it up, I was surprised to see just how long it ran. Wild World of Sports began in 1961 and didn't end until 1998.

For 37 years, people watched, hearing those words spanning the globe “the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat as skier Vinko Bogataj fails spectacularly in a ski jump.” See, now you have a bit of trivia we are giving you for free. The skier who experiences the agony of defeat's name is Vinko Bogataj. It might not win you a game of trivial pursuit, but it's fun to say.

The show highlighted all sorts of interesting sports not usually covered by the media. One of my favorites was when they would show the Cliff Divers in Acapulco. Have you seen these? The divers stand on a cliff about 135 feet above the water and dive out doing all sorts of acrobatics before they hit the water below. It's athletic and thrilling, graceful and dangerous as you can imagine. The water they dive into is typically about 14 feet.

So how did the cliff diving begin? I imagine you probably have a good idea. Cliff diving all began when two fishermen in 1934 dared each other to jump off of the cliff. Now, you knew that had to be a big part of it, right? They dared each other. That's what young guys do. I will if you will. And then, of course, once the challenge is laid down, they had no choice. They had to jump. And others got challenged, began to try to out-do another, people came to watch, and soon entrepreneurs saw there was money to be made.

The divers have a lot in common with Alan Eustace. Doing the cliff divers a one-up, in 2014 Eustace claimed the record of the highest free fall ever. He jumped with just a parachute from a height of 135,908 feet and free fell for 12,334 feet. Or more generally put, jumped from a height of 25 miles up and free fell for 23 miles. He exceeded speeds of over 800 miles an hour. Spectators reported hearing a sonic boom. Why? Again, because he wanted to break the height record of the person who did this in 1999.

Eustace and the Cliff divers have a lot in common. Bravado, for sure. But also the ability to calculate, to take as many of the risks out of it as possible. Both in their own ways calculated, did the math, made a safe plan, talked to others who have done this before. But for all the calculations, the bravado, they both have one single thing in common that made all the difference.

At some point, they jumped. Had the two fishermen not jumped that day in 1934, the Acapulco cliff divers might never have existed. Had Eustace not pressed the button that released him from his balloon and before him had the previous record holder not stepped out, the records would not have been set, a sonic boom by a person in freefall not been achieved.

Now, one could hardly blame them if they hadn't done it. One could hardly blame the cliff divers if they had looked over the cliff and said nope, I'm out. That makes sense, it's the sensible thing to do. Certainly no one would blame Eustace or Baumgartner before him if they went up and said *you know, trying to achieve a sonic boom in free fall is just an incredibly stupid thing to do. I'm not doing this.* No one would blame them, but records and greatness would not have achieved. There are times when the only way to achieve greatness, do great things, is to jump. You can weigh the risk, but at some point if you aren't willing to launch out, you'll never know what you can do. Sometimes you have to sow seeds of faith and jump.

We've been talking about sowing seeds over the past several weeks. We have quoted more than once Rudyard Kipling's quote on gardens, Gardens are not made by saying oh how beautiful and sitting in the

shade. Sitting in the shade is nice. It's comfortable. But there are some things you can only experience by sowing some seeds and taking the plunge and not knowing exactly what might happen.

We see this in our Gospel Lesson this morning, don't we? The Disciples are in a small boat out on the Lake, and an unexpected storm blows up. And it must have been a bad one to cause concern for a boat containing some pretty experienced fishermen. They look out, and they see Jesus walking on the water. Understandably, they freak out a little bit. Peter says "Jesus, is that you?" And Peter says "if it's you, let me come out into the water, let me walk out to You."

And Jesus says "come". Now, Jesus had several options, didn't He? He could have said *let me get closer so you can see it's Me. Let Me calm this storm so you can see Me clearly. Let Me get a bit closer so it's safer for you. Let Me calm the Sea before you get out. Be careful. Don't get hurt.* Instead, Jesus simply says "come". Why? Because Jesus knows there are some things about God, about faith, and about ourselves that we can't experience by playing it safe. There are some things about God and ourselves you only discover when you jump out of the boat in the midst of the storm. When you take a deep breath and jump off the cliff. When you press the button and go into a free fall. There are some things about God, our faith, and ourselves that we will never know or experience until we are willing to launch out.

I have to believe that's where many of us struggle today. We've stopped being, if we ever were, risk-takers for God. We've fallen into this idea that the church and Christians are to be reputable and well respected by society and culture. That going with the flow, which is admittedly easier, is the best way to bring about the Kingdom of God. We've become spectators rather than participants in the redemption of the world. Why? Because its easier to watch from inside the boat, from the living room watching the cliff diver or in front of a laptop watching a free fall than actually stepping out ourselves. We've become comfortable with a low-risk faith.

I think, in part, it comes from a misunderstanding of God as our Heavenly Father. We picture God as a helicopter parent constantly worrying about our safety and our success. Wanting to be safe, not risk anything. Who spiritually put on a helmet and wrist guards and knee pads before go out the door.

But that's not the Heavenly Father we see depicted in the Scriptures or we see in Jesus. God is more than the father encouraging His child to jump off the high dive saying *you can do it.* Who lets him try to ride a bike knowing that yes, the child will skin their knees and scrape their hands dozens of times before they get it right. But who also knows that the thrill of racing that bike down a hill at top speed is worth it. The Father who sees the only failure is not in not getting results but in being afraid to jump in the first place.

Does that mean we throw caution to the wind? Of course not. We pray. We make our calculations, we do all we can beforehand. But for all our planning, there are simply some things about God, ourselves, our

faith, we will never discover if we aren't willing to get out of the boat. I'm convinced there are some things we will never accomplish for God sitting in the shade of our porch. Some seeds can only be planted by being willing to step out.

Is there a place in your life where God is saying to you, Be Not Afraid? Is there a place in your life right now where God is saying to you *jump*? Free fall, Get out of the boat? Is it possible God is calling you into a deeper relationship with Him, a deep place of discovery, a greater impact on the Kingdom of God that can only happen when you jump? Is God calling you to step out and let Him catch you? Amen.