

Calvary United Methodist Church
March 31, 2019

RISK TAKING
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

Children's Message:

Romans 12:3-8

I invite all of our children to come forth at this time for our children's message. Good morning! (I'm excited to learn about God today!) I'm glad you are excited to learn about God today. It's always a good day to learn about God.

Good to have you all here this morning. I want to read a Psalm to you this morning. It is a very important Psalm and it talks about God's goodness. Have you ever gone out on a starry night and seen all the stars? Maybe not all the stars, but all you could see? And there are so many wonderful things that we see that God does, but sometimes we forget them.

It says: O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. You have set your glory in the heavens. Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against our enemies. You silence the foe, the avenger. When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon, the stars which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You have made them ruler over the works of your hands. You put everything under their feet: the flocks, herds, the animals, the wild, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, all that swims in the path of the oceans. Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

That Psalm says it all, doesn't it? When we get up and see the sky and we feel the weather changes and we look at animals and creation and the fish of the sea and the birds, God said not only did he create it, he then trusted it to our care. That's pretty nice of God, isn't it? He trusted all of this. So when we go out...have you ever gone out and seen like the Milky Way at night in the summer? Have you ever seen that? It's pretty amazing isn't it? If you go out and you see a really clear night sometimes you see those things. Sometimes we see sunrises, sunsets. They are all...every one is like a finger print. They are never the same. And it's all God's creative hand.

If you travel around, but even if you don't travel, I'm sure you have books in school, you watch television, you see stuff on the net, you'll see some pretty spectacular places on this planet Earth, won't you? It's pretty gorgeous: the mountains and the snow-capped mountains and the streams and the water. It's just pretty amazing; even in the deserts. God has a very creative hand all around the world and says to these crystal blue waters or whatever it is that we have: I created it.

Have any of you ever seen a brand spanking new baby? Brand new. Some of you have been

there, right? I'm amazed when I go into nurseries and I see these little fingers and toes and little faces and little bodies and they grow and they grow and they grow and all of a sudden they look like you. When they are all grown up they look like us, even grown up more. God is pretty spectacular that way. God is so creative and babies just don't come in human beings, they come in all kinds of critters, don't they? Birds of the air, fish of the ocean and little animals that we see around in the spring. I've never gone into the deep corals of the ocean, but you've seen photos of the beautiful creativity that God has to show us of the sunsets and sunrises and all the critters of the world that God is really really creative.

How many of you like to eat apples? Anybody eat apples? Do you pick many of them in the wintertime? No. The trees in the winter look like this, don't they? They take a nap. How about that. Fruit trees won't grow in tropical areas because fruit trees need a nap. God has such a perfect plan he even said we need to work so many days and then take a day of rest, it's called a Sabbath, to worship God and to rest. It gives us new energy. If you had to go to school seven days a week, would that be good? If you had to go to work seven days a week, well, some of you probably do, but it's not good. You need a day of rest. And so what happens when they rest over the winter, in about a month, a month and a half, you are going to see all the apple trees looking like this. And the pear trees and the cherry trees and the plums and peaches. And then, in a few more months, guess what? By fall you will be picking fruit because God has a plan. God is creating.

It's planting season. Pretty soon people will be putting all kinds of plants and seeds in their gardens and they grow and we harvest corn, we harvest all these crops and we eat them because God has a plan, because God is good. When we see this creation, how easy it is to say: Oh, God, how blessed is your name in all the earth. Even the flocks of sheep, the birds of the air...A month or so I was over to see the birds at Middle Creek center. Hundreds of thousands of snow geese like this migrate through here. How do they know their way? God gave them a directional path.

It's amazing that all these things that God created by the thousands and hundreds of thousands and millions all have a plan according to God. And it's the very beautiful plan.

So, he says this: Lord, Our God, how majestic is your name in all the earth. What do you do when you get a gift? Do you say anything to people? (Open it.) We open it and then what do you often do? (Child speaks.) We decide if we like it or not, that's true. But we have probably been taught we say "Thank you" right? Sooner or later we get around to that. I'm like you: I like to open it first. In the midst of all of those things, God says we praise him, but sometimes we need to know what we are praising him for. They way this Earth works, all those plans is for you and everybody in this room to find our spot. Some will be gardeners. Some will be taking care of the animals and the birds and the fishes. Some will be taking care of families in other ways. I can't tell you what it is that God wants, but when you seek that, God has a gift for you.

Put your fist out like this, see that? Keep it as a fist. It doesn't hold things very well, does it? If you do it like that, but you can't do much with it. If you keep a fist, you've got to open your hands to receive gifts and we, as Christians, need to always learn to open our hands. God has so many gifts for all of us, not just the children, that we can share with one another. So we do unwrap the gift, exactly right, and we say thank you and then we find it, we find our purpose and we don't keep it. Whatever gift God gives you, we have to share. It's nice to share our gifts with God. We open them up and we give them to others and we just praise God.

So, I want you to remember this week: God is very good all the time. God has given us this wonderful creation. God has given us marvelous gifts and God will bless you. So I pray that you'll be blessed this week and you'll always think: what is it that God wants me to do with all the gifts I have.

Thank you for coming up today. We do have these fruit snacks for everyone to take. And thanks again.

Message:

I want to speak a bit today about risk taking. I've never been what I would consider a risk taker. You don't find me on a motorcycle going up steep banks or jumping the Grand Canyon or, you know, you've seen it in the news all the time. I shudder sometimes when I see what people do. I'm thinking: boy, they really are pretty bold people. But when it comes to faith, we are in the midst of this series about our fruitful gift and risk taking for the Gospel of Christ, risk taking for the Kingdom of God is what it takes for us to fill the Kingdom and bring it in it's fullness. To have that vision from Revelation where we will be a family and where God himself will be our God and we bring that on Earth, that's a great thing. It only happens when you and I are risking our faith to step out to...I don't know what. You heard the book that was read earlier about your gifts. Taking your gifts and stepping out in faith to risk whatever it is for the Kingdom of God.

A long time ago there was a young man named Jesus. He had a lot of talk with his father. He probably too looked up into the stars of the heaven and he knew a path that he was on and it was not going to be an easy path. And he constantly asked God just what it would be. And like all of us, we hear the Psalmists: Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon, the stars which you have set in place, what is mankind, us, that you are mindful of them. Human beings that you care for them. You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with the glory and honor. You have made them rulers over the works of your hands. You have put everything under their feet. That's pretty risky of God, isn't it?

God created it and then He said: it's yours. It's yours. And we're seeing in the world that we live it, it needs a little work right now, doesn't it? Not only just the environment when I

see the pictures of the ocean and the skies and the land and the pollution but our lives are polluted with things that ought not to be there that are breaking us and keeping us from what would be because we have to realize someone greater than you and I, who designed all of this, has a plan. I'm talking about a plan to make hundreds of thousands of different birds all look different. A plan that prepares for them to...who teaches them how to make their nests? And how to care for their eggs and roll them every 12 hours or whatever it is. Who teaches all of these things? Who manages the water and the tides? Could you have come up with that plan? I struggle to tie my shoes some mornings. God is great. God is good. And somebody greater than you and I has a plan.

And He asks us: will you risk something to bring my Kingdom? Will you bring it by loving? It's risky to love. It hurts sometimes, doesn't it? When we love and it's not given back; when we are pushed away. And so God says: I'm giving you my Son to show you how you can live this life. He gave us Jesus Christ to walk among us, to show us how we can love and care for one another and put our life out there at risk.

And, yes, it is wise to have some caution in things of life, but I'm going to give you a very quick blast, show a few other folks who have put it all there on a risk.

Do you remember a guy who everyone thought he was nuts because he was building a big boat called the Ark? Right? And I'm not talking the guy in Ohio. Probably him too. This man was building a boat where there wasn't a river, there wasn't an ocean, there wasn't any of this. And everyone said why? Well, God told me. I'm just going to listen. And it turned out the boat was needed.

There is another guy who had water experience who is called Jonah. You know, after Noah said: I'm going to listen to you, Jonah said: I'm not going to listen to you. There were these people in Nineveh who were going away from God and God said: Jonah, I want you to go there and I want you to tell them if they don't change their lives in forty days I'm going to be destruction on them. Jonah didn't like them. I bet you have people you are not too fond of. And you don't wish them best. And God said: that's not the way it will be. I want you to not only pray for these people. I want you to go and warn them, to tell them there is a better way. He jumped ship. He got on the wrong boat to Tarshis because he didn't want to go to Nineveh and the men threw him overboard. Because of the storm, he was swooped up by the whale, you've heard the story. He gets spit out on Nineveh. He preaches to them forty days change and guess what? He took the risk and they changed. He heard the voice: come follow me.

You see, there was a young man in the Bible called Joseph. He had a coat of many colors. If you remember the story, he had about a dozen siblings. He was spoiled. Any of you the youngest child? Your parents are in a better way now; they know a little bit about children and they give you more. They have more money, more time, more everything and they felt spoiled. And they didn't like him much; they were going to put him in a pit and let him die,

but they found out they could sell him into slavery. He went off into slavery, worked for someone and the plagues came and the draughts came and his brothers came into the kingdom only to see their brother was now second to only the king. He was in a place to destroy them and they feared him and bowed down and he said: don't do that! You are my brothers. What you intended for harm was God using it for good. I'm in a position to save you. You see, he was willing to take the risk and he listened: Come, follow me.

There was a man named Jesus who called a lot of disciples and they were fishermen and carpenters and who knows what else they did. They were risking all, they gave it all to come and follow him and he said: you know, I don't want you to just stay with me. You see they are turning around and going the other way. I'm sending you. We don't come in here to keep this Good News. He said: when you leave here today, go out, tell somebody about God's love. Show it. Be the light of Jesus Christ. And guess what? They followed, at a high cost. A lot of them were martyred through the years and people continue to be martyred for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

There was a man named Zacchaeus, a little short guy. He was a tax collector. You know about that this time of year, right? Not real popular kind of guys. Jesus said: I'm coming to your house today, Zacchaeus. He went and his life was changed. He listened and he followed and he gave good news.

There was a woman...again, it's just endless stories...who no one had much respect. She talked to Jesus and Jesus told her to go and sin no more and she went and told everybody everything he knew about her because she was willing to follow.

There was Paul who was thrown into prison and said: if it weren't for these bars I wish you could be just like me, to take a stand, to be light in a place that was nothing more than a pit. They weren't colorful prisons like we might imagine today. They were pits. And he still became a light; he still became a witness. He still told other people and in his darkest days he reminded them that other than the chains that bound him, he wished everyone could be as he was in Christ because he heard and he took challenge to take the risk to come and follow.

I don't know much about risk taking for you. We say we don't do it, but I bet a lot of you have had a mortgage payment some time and you weren't sure sometimes how you were going to do it or a car payment or insurance or bills or you have children. All of those things involve risk.

I always loved cartoons growing up, but taking risks, there is a difference between, if I can read this: there is a fine line between taking a calculated risk and doing something really dumb. I've done a lot of dumb. I bet some of you have done that, you know? Done things that we shouldn't; by God's grace we're still here.

The risk of having a child is not quite as bad as it used to be, but a lot of women died in

childbirth. We have wonderful medical practices today that save a lot. People still have children, they are still willing to take that risk.

The risk I don't understand...do you ever see these people? They are not happy just riding a bike. No, I want to jump out of an airplane with my bike onto a cliff and ride down into the canyon. Now, I think that's getting closer to the dumb line, right?

Now, this isn't the great white shark that kills people, but we have people now that pay to get in shark cages just to see how close they can come to death, right? We even have grandmas and grandpas and presidents who hook on to someone at 80 or 90 and want to do their jumping out of an airplane.

I watch these guys who do these things. You see how far the water is down below. It looks like it is about 14 miles if I were up there. I would probably be on the cliff like this and not even on the bike.

Risk taking...we have risks in schools, peer pressure, all the time we hear of the destruction of lives. Sometimes we pick on that, but we are risk takers when we overeat and I'm in that group for blood pressure and heart attacks and strokes. You see, we don't abide too much with risks. Some people step into it. Those who serve and some never home and some come home wounded. Those policemen and firemen who when you are running away from danger are going into danger. And all of these things of risk taking. God says: Let me think. You'll do this for the world, for your pleasure, but you say you won't do it for my kingdom. Isn't there something wrong when we say with our lips how worthy of praise you are, but we ask people: what is it about risk that you are willing to do?

Jesus wasn't the only one who went out there and started thinking. I bet you have spent a few of those nights, if not under the stars, around a table in prayer, frightened at big decisions you are making. Jesus had the decision. He spent a night or so alone with his God, to risk or be safe. He could have risked it all. He had the choice. He didn't have to follow his Father's advice. He choose to take the path. He went to the garden and he prayed: Not my will, but yours. Have you prayed that lately? You are wondering where you should be, what you should do in your family, what you should do with your resources, what you should do with your time. Lord, what is it that you would have of me? He chose the risk and it ended by giving of his life. You see, he stayed the course by taking the risk.

Are you willing to stay the course, to take the name of Jesus Christ and say: I want to be Christ-like at all times? I want people to see his light in me; I want them to hear a witness from me. I like the calm. There's a lot of times I really like to be comfortable. I bet you do too.

The best investment in my entire adult life was the cozy chair I sit in when I go home from church. Oh, yeah, that's just where I want to be, right?

God doesn't call us to be cozy. God calls us to serve. Now, not everybody is going to be out of their comfort zone. You might be called to serve right where you are now, but I'm asking: ask yourself every day, Lord, what is it that you'll have of me today? Is there a neighbor I could invite? Is there someone I could serve? Is there someone sick or in prison? Is there someone I should be speaking too, in my family with my children and grandchildren and neighbors? What is it that you will have of me?

You see, if we are not willing to take the risk of the unusual, you'll have to settle for the ordinary. Folks, the Kingdom of God is anything but ordinary. It's awesome. The Kingdom of God is all power. Jesus said: when I leave you will have more power than I to do great things. And what are we doing on it? We are sitting on it.

We have the power, the life giving power, filled with the Holy Spirit, to bring the Kingdom of Heaven upon Earth by taking risks. And part of that risk is opening up our lives.

I get in enough circles that no matter where I get, I hear people talking about the latest brewery that opened in the Harrisburg area, the latest winery and are we going out there. We talk about sports. We talk about our family. We talk about our friends. We don't talk about Jesus Christ and the fact that God makes any difference in our life whatsoever. It's time. We are on Facebook and all those things and we don't take the time to talk.

I occasionally open my door of my refrigerator, mine doesn't have leftovers, and it just gets green. But it happens from time to time, stuff that's leftover, right? Eat it one day, two days and then you ditch it. One of the things I have realized through most of my ministries is that most of us give God our leftovers.

I worked in disaster work a lot. We claim, you know, there's a flood in Nebraska, let's send them stuff. People would bring shovels with broken off handles and rakes that...cleaning out their garage. Let's give them all the junk and help those poor people. I'm serious. We do it in the church. We say we don't have time to read the Bible, to pray, to study, and to serve. Last time you checked your cell phone, it tells you how many hours you spend on social media. How long does your television set stay warm? How long are the books you are reading and the newspapers you are reading? How long are your conversations, the sports games you watch and the entertainment we involve ourselves in? If I have time I'll give some to God? It just doesn't work that way.

We spend endless hours on these social media things and talking to people on phones and stuff. There is an old photo in every church you go into in one form or another of Jesus knocking on the heart inviting you. When was the last time you asked what Pastor Bob this morning: invite somebody, somebody. We are not high pressure here. As much as I would like to see them at Calvary, I just say: hey have you found a church? Find one somewhere. It will help you. When you hear them, their stories and their losses and the difficulties: have

you tried God?

You see, we have that privilege to knock on a door of someone's life, to talk to someone. And what about service? What about it? We struggle to get people to sign up for welcoming once or twice a year, to work at the center or to be greeters at the door or to be ushers or to be lectern readers. They aren't all your gifts, I know that, but are you doing something? And it doesn't always have to be in the church. It can be in the community. But if you are not serving, who is going to? You see, God calls us to give of ourselves for the brokenness that we see in the world won't go away by itself if you and I don't do something about it. And one of the most difficult things is when we talk about money, all those people talk about money all the time. Didn't we just read a Psalm? Everything, all the heavens, everything is under the feet of God who has entrusted to us.

Folks, we say we don't commit to the church, we don't like that, we don't believe in that. I've committed to my mortgage, my gas, my oil, my water, my sewage. If you have credit cards...you commit to them. If not, guess what? They are knocking on your door, aren't they? How can it be the one that we say we praise we can't make God first. First in service, first in giving, first in time.

I see so many young people and families pushing them into anything from whatever that little booboo was to the sports, music and entertainment. I want to tell you as a young man I was in a lot too. It is important that our children are well rounded. They get in sports, it's a good thing. They get in music, they get in entertainment. But if you've not also given them God, we failed as parents and grandparents. We have failed. Or at the end of the day, someday they won't be playing the games of entertainment and they won't know Jesus Christ and they won't know God and they won't know where to turn to in their difficulties. God is before all of those other things and if we don't make that so, if we don't stay on the course, guess what? The Kingdom of God won't come in its fullness.

We, those of us who are committed to Christ, must say on the course. These are the words when Jesus came to the region of Casoria, Philippi, he asked the disciples: who do people say the son of man is? They replied: Some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. But what about you, he asked. Who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered: you are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Jesus replied: Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood but by my Father in Heaven and I tell you that you, Peter, on the rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades or Hell will not overcome it.

God needs a rock today and that rock needs to be you. It needs to be you. How else will your children and grandchildren and neighbors and friends and coworkers know where to come to if someone can't be a rock? If someone can't show them who Jesus Christ is? In the end we only regret the chances we didn't take. Let me tell you, if you've not taken a chance to talk to your neighbor or your friend and you see them sinking and going down for the third

time and you say: boy, I wish I would have taken time to talk to them about God's love.
Don't wait.

The Kingdom of God, it's you. God counts on us. There is an easy way, there is a hard way. There is the good and the evil and God tells us that we come to him through trust. When God sent Jesus, Jesus had to trust his Father that all would be okay, even to the cross. It's quite a risk.

When I was a young man at one point my parents gave my...I'm sure it wasn't given...older sister a car, who gave it to my younger sister who then I got it. You know how that went. But when the day came and I finally had my license I had these keys. It's a trust. Here they are. You got to take care of the car, take care of your life, the lives of those around you. It's a lot of responsibility, to take care of the fuel, the insurance and all those kinds of things.

God, in this hymn this morning that we've sung, He gives us the keys to the Kingdom. He said: it's yours. It's yours. Be responsible with it. It's not this way or the other, it's one way. It's God's way. You and I are to lead.

When I was given the car, I was also given responsibilities. You and I have responsibilities. When you have a gift, you say thank you, but don't you do something? We've been given the gift of life. Life is inherently risky. There is only one big risk you should avoid at all costs and that is the risk of doing nothing. We've got a lot of folks in this world who are doing nothing. We say we're reaching for the stars? We're not reaching high enough because when I look at the global community that is broken, it is because we who start small with our families that are broken and not finding God and our communities and our nation, we are healers in the name of Jesus Christ. We have power.

When you turn the keys of a car, you are given a gift, right? You've been trusted, you've been given responsibility. Now you have power and God's counting on you. God's counting on you to do something with all that you have been given because we have unwrapped this gift. And he says we need to bring changes and when we confess as we've talked again this morning about: Lord, I'm not yet who you want me to be nor who I want to be, then do something about it. Invite the power of God, the Holy Spirit, to come in to help us be and do all we can be by putting God first, in our service, in our time, yes and our giving. When we put God first, everything else is going to come in line.

When I read that Book of Revelation that we shared earlier today, I long for it. It's commonly read at funerals: a day when no more sorrow or crying or pain any more will be made new. I want it now! I don't want to wait until I die. I would like the Good News! I'm glad it will be there when I die, but you see, together you and I can bring that Kingdom right here right now. It comes with taking up the responsibility of the cross. It's risky, but you can do it.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, thank you for trusting us with your Kingdom. Help us find our place that we can be your light, that we can be your witness, that we can be a rock to those around us. We ask in Jesus' most precious name. Amen.