

Rev. Kim K. Crawford Harvie
 Arlington Street Church
 5 March, 2016

Risk Everything for Love

*for Tina Rose, Chair of the Prudential Committee,
 and for Alex Zafiris, as she joins Arlington Street today*

Risk everything for love....
 Half-heartedness doesn't reach into majesty.¹

That's 13th century Sufi mystic Rumi. Risk everything for love.

Living in a body and stepping out into the world – everything we do – is inherently risky. Any attempt at anything carries the chance of complete failure. Most of the time, we don't calculate our risks; we're not aware of taking one risk after another, but we do.² And no outcome is ever assured. But I want to speak in praise of risk, because our willingness to engage it has a lot to do with creating a life worth living.

Author and entrepreneur Samier Mansur writes, “Four years ago [in Bangladesh] ... Dhaka's notorious traffic – among the worst in the world – brought me a gift. In the midst of the dizzying motor madness, rendered immobile amongst the thousands of honking cars, clamoring rickshaws, and throngs of people scurrying in countless directions, an ancient verse of graffitied poetry unfurled itself into view.... Every day, I would pass this vandalized wall ... and linger by it at a snail's pace until its message occupied a permanent place in my being: [It said, **GAMBLE EVERYTHING FOR LOVE**].

“... The message ... is a clear one: Our heart is a source of intuition.... In our love ... [and] our passions; ... in our work; in our service to others; ... our heart serves as our ... compass, guiding us towards our

¹ “Gamble everything for love, if you are a true human being. If not, leave this gathering. Half-heartedness doesn't reach into majesty.” ~trans. Coleman Barks

² Paul Hudson, “The Biggest Risk is Not Taking One,” *Elite Daily*, 4/8/14

highest aspirations in life. It's up to us to quiet our minds ... still our lives"³ and listen for direction. Listen....

Kate Wolf sang,

Give yourself to love
if love is what you're after
Open up your heart to the
tears and laughter
and give yourself to love
Give yourself to love.

What we hear may seem unrealistic or irrational, but at what cost do we ignore it? So much we love is under threat, and many of us are feeling spun around and around, called in a dizzying array of directions. The choices are not easy, but, as cellist Pablo Casals reminds us, "Not to decide is to decide." We deny the cost of inaction at our own peril.

Author Maggie Warrell writes, "[we] delude ourselves with the [empty] hope that our circumstances will somehow just get better ... and things will just 'sort themselves out.' We come up with excuses for why sticking with the status quo is a feasible option; why playing safe and not putting ourselves at risk of failing or looking foolish is 'sensible.' In reality, ... over time ... things that aren't working out well for us now only tend to get worse ... not better, and issues [that] remain unaddressed in our relationships and [our] lives tend to grow larger, not smaller."⁴

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Here's a reassuring little secret that Rumi didn't mention: Management consultant and business visionary Peter Drucker writes, "People who don't take risks generally make about two big mistakes a year. People who do take risks generally make about two big mistakes a year."

³ Samier Mansur, "Gamble Everything for Love," *The Huffington Post*, 3/17/16. Please see huffingtonpost.com/samier-mansur/gamble-everything-for-lov_b_9488946.html

⁴ Maggie Warrell, "Take A Risk: The Odds Are Better Than You Think," *Forbes*, 6/18/13. Please see forbes.com/sites/margiewarrell/2013/06/18/take-a-risk-the-odds-are-better-than-you-think/#537d1da245c2

The odds are in our favor. If we listen [to our heart’s directive,] ... then our journey will ... lift us – and all those around us – into majesty.”⁵

I’ve been sitting with these words about risk, written by author and journalist Paul Roberts: “Some experts say that courting uncertainty is the only way to protect the inner force [on which] America was founded ... or to define the self.”⁶ I’m not compelled by high-stimulation, adrenaline-seeking, death-wish-courting behaviors, which strike me as being on a continuum with addiction, but I also understand that risk-taking has ensured our survival as well as furthering our evolution as a species.

These days, we don’t need to court uncertainty: we get a full dose in every morning’s headlines. But we can appreciate the idea that the willingness to risk does protect the things that *truly* make America great, starting with reaching across differences, to enhance our diversity, and so becoming great Americans.

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Here’s the directive: We are called to channel our inner super-hero.⁷ Superheroes are just ordinary people who had something extraordinary happen to them. Let’s get in touch with both our ordinariness and our extraordinariness. Let’s fear regret more than failure.⁸ Let’s stand up to fear mongering – and fear! – and get our courage on.

In her novel *Paradise*, Judith McNaught writes, “You can’t outwit fate by standing on the sidelines placing little side bets about the outcome of life. Either you wade in and risk everything you have to play the game, or you don’t play at all. And if you don’t play, you can’t win.”

⁵ Samier Mansur, *op cit*

⁶ Paul Roberts, “Risk,” *Psychology Today*, 6/9/16. Please see psychologytoday.com/articles/199411/risk

⁷ AJ LeVan, Risky Business, in *Psychology Today*, 10/22/12. Please see psychologytoday.com/blog/flourish/201210/happiness-is-risky-business

⁸ Thanks Margie Wardell for this concept. Please see forbes.com/sites/margiewarrell/2013/06/18/take-a-risk-the-odds-are-better-than-you-think/#1622e77b45c2

When he was diagnosed with a fatal lung disease, Art Shirk, our former Prudential Committee Chair, had the words “Make Every Breath Count” tattooed in mirror image on his chest. Every morning, as he stood at the bathroom sink, he was reminded of the preciousness of life – and that his time was short. Make Every Breath Count.

Art died last month. In his memory, he asked that each of us do something of which we’ve been afraid, and do it without worrying about failure or success.

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There are risks to be taken in our personal and professional lives, and there’s a lot of important work going on in our community about taking the leap from bystander to upstander in response to the administration’s vilification of a long list of marginalized people. Author and educator Laura Collins Lyster-Mensch is particularly undone by the recent decision to throw transgender people back into harm’s way, and she has an invitation for the rest of us.

“I’ve suspected since early last November that I was going to be arrested for something in 2017,” she writes. “I just didn’t know quite what. I think I know now.

“I’m going to be arrested,” she continues, “for using the wrong bathroom. And I hope you’ll all join me.... This is a call to action.

“.... I’m still living my gender assigned at birth, comfortably, and no one in my family is struggling with their gender identity, as far as I know,” she continues. “[And] that’s the point.... It can’t fall to those who are being discriminated against to do the job of standing up against prejudice. It really has to be the ones [who are] unaffected:

“Those of us who walk up to the choice of ‘male’ or ‘female’ and feel welcome and unafraid inside the one we enter. Those of us whose kids don’t have to be sent to the nurse’s office to change for [Phys. Ed.].... We’re going to have to cross the modern equivalent of the ‘color line’ and start using [the other] bathroom [We’re] going to have to step up. Well, sit down....

“It’s going to be uncomfortable,” she says, “.... and the ones who are going to have to do it first are those of us who are least likely to get punched for it: old women....”

“No one will dare ... look at my grandmother-like demeanor and ask me to ... show ... my birth certificate.... And if someone did, well, they’d have to deal with my matronly face of disapproval. Because I’m a mom. I’ve been a mom for a long time. And I know how to deal with immaturity and insecurity and lost causes.

“Why are we, in the United States, going through this weird drama over public toilets? Transgender people have been [using them] forever: It’s not new. This isn’t an issue because a bunch of activists are causing a fuss. This is an issue because some people are being brave enough to be themselves, finally, and it has revealed the foolishness that gendered bathrooms really is. What’s new is learning that our segregation by gender is weird.... We confuse gender with sexuality, and that scares [people]....”

“This old lady ... has enough of a memory to know that people used to hiss and spit, ... fight and faint ... over what bathroom people used because of the color of their skin.... We haven’t stopped to think about how that ... ‘separate but equal’ idea ... worked out.... You know what: We got over it. We’ll get over this. There are countries where you could die for choosing the wrong door: This isn’t it. Yet, at least.

“So ... I have hatched a plan. I think it’s genius: [We need to] start occupying bathrooms. Just by using them....”

“I’ve chosen what is going to get me arrested in 2017,” Laura Collins Lyster-Mensch concludes. “...I never thought I’d be a Rosa Parks of toilets, but the cause is just and [everyone has to go].”⁹

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Beloved spiritual companions,

Life is risky.

In your love and your passions,

in your work and in your service to others,

⁹ Laura Collins Lyster-Mensch, “Old Ladies Occupying Bathrooms: It’s Time,” Huffington Post, 2/22/17. Please see m.huffpost.com/us/entry/us_58ae14f2e4b0ea6ec3d03546?

May your heart serve as your compass.
Give yourself to love.

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May we fear regret more than failure.
Let's get our courage on,
and
channel our inner super-hero.

I'll meet you in the bathroom.