Saving the Brome Lake Duck Festival!

By Revs Mead Baldwin, W. Lynn Dillabough, Lee Ann Hogle, and Carole Martignacco

1 The first law of wing-walking, I heard somewhere, is: Never let go of one thing until you have firm hold of something else. A good motto for leaders in life. In the sky, as it were, wing-walkers were those daring souls who defied gravity by performing acrobatic stunts, sometimes half an inch from the edge of a cliff or out of the cockpit to balance on the wing. And, if the plane was in flight. It’s still done today with vintage aircraft. All for the thrill of a breathtaking view, beyond anything one could safely see from the tarmac.

2 Risk takers seek adventure, ready and willing to take the leap and try new things. Playing the stock market, engaging in sports, traveling to new places, exploring new ideas, stepping up to the podium to speak in a room full of strangers - you don't have to be a gambler or a trapeze artist. Just being involved is taking risks. We risk venturing forth or learning something new even though failure or loss is possible. Changing jobs, moving across town or to the one side of the world, changing our minds or assumptions, growth of any kind - all are risks! We weigh possibilities, balance the odds and rewards against our own safety, before we decide to step out of our comfort zone.

When the outcome if I don't try is more painful to imagine than the embarrassment of failure - I'll go for it and let the proverbial chips fall where they may. Like standing for justice. I tend to avoid heroes, favouring everyday kinds of risk. Marriage and parenting felt a bit more lucrative careers to pursue ministry, but standing in the pulpit claiming my vision was truly scary. Equally risky choices lie at the heart of every story.

Let's look before we leap, by all means. Do the research. Assess the risks, the better to be prepared to meet them. But if your usual mode is to hold back and observe, ask yourself: Is being safe worth the risk of never testing your own potential for greatness? When was the last time you felt the thrill of truly being amazing yourself? What for you is worth the risk? Go for it - I double-dare you.

3 Recently a friend posted a photo on Facebook showing two climbers standing on a cliff face looking down. The ledge they stood on was rather narrow, and reminded me of a similar spot on a local peak. He expressed amazement at the risk they were taking, while I remembered standing in a very similar spot last summer. Where climbing is concerned, I guess I have always been a bit of a risk taker in life as well. I believe this comes from having great support and security in my family and church life.

This past summer I attended a major conference for our national church with the theme of "Risking Faith, Daring Hope." Our denomination is going through many changes as we plan for the future. I must admit that at first the expression "Risking Faith" was a novelty. The word risk does not immediately suggest faith. Other words: danger, recklessness, bravery, carelessness, even stupidity, more likely come to mind. It took me a while to comprehend that for many, faith is risk. Faith can bring us out of our comfort zone and lead to action, life changes, even danger. Sometimes to choose faith may alienate us from more cynical friends, or perhaps make us seem less fashionable to others. Some colleagues have given up more lucrative careers to pursue ministry that may be less conventional.

Looking back at my life, I see there have been many risks, physical and emotional. One story that comes to mind is the one of a life of writing colleagues. Risking faith has led to great rewards and a lifetime of meaning. How about you - what do you risk in your life journey?

4 If we take a risk, it means we are willing to lose something. Loving someone deeply, for example, means risking rejection. Intimacy means risking betrayal. My example of risk, as a follower of Jesus, is that I may lose something very dear to me. To eat and drink with sinners and tax collectors he risked his reputation. To have close circle of friends he risked betrayal. To save the world, and show us the way to God, he risked his own life.

Jesus didn’t hold anything back. In his short years of ministry he spent time with lepers, got into many arguments with his fellow religious leaders, and drove the money traders out of the temple with a whip. He knew that his friends would turn on him, betray, and deny him. He knew that he would be arrested and killed. And, still, he persisted, risked everything.

Sometimes I feel shy. Sometimes there is something I should do, some one I should talk with, and I hold back. Maybe you can relate to this. Putting yourself forward at all can feel like a risk.

At a recent youth event the leaders had us find someone in the room that we did not know. In pairs, we took turns walking slowly toward the other person, and repeating after each step, “I can be hurt by you.” This simple and profound exercise was all about risk. I can be hurt by you. And, yet, most of the time, I choose to risk.

One word, four voices - and now it's your turn to reflect: What for you is worth the risk?

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