

My sophomore year of college, several friends and I heard about a cliff overlooking a lake about 20 minutes away from our little town. So of course, we did what any college kids would do: immediately hopped in our cars and set off for the cliff.

The only *slightly* weird thing was that it was about 9:00pm when we left. Which meant that, by the time we got to the site, got a little campfire going and were ready to jump, it was a little after 10 pm.

Which means we were jumping by moonlight. You could see the ground just fine, all the way to the edge of the cliff. But past that? Just blackness. The cliff was allegedly about 25 feet above the water, but we couldn't see any water down there.

One guy had thoughtfully brought his giant maglite flashlight, so standing at the edge of the cliff, shining the thin flashlight beam into the darkness, we could tell that there was, in fact, water down there. Probably.

Just kidding. There was definitely water.

It's not very hard to talk me into a stupid idea, so the maglite guy and I volunteered to jump first, along with one other guy. We took our shoes and shirts off, got about 5 yards back from the edge, sprinted to the edge of the cliff and then jumped!

Have you ever jumped when you couldn't see where you're going? It's thrilling and terrifying - thrillifying. Falling 25 feet actually seems to take quite a long time when you can't see the bottom, and then all of a sudden, you're slamming into the water and all that thrillification turns into exhilaration because YOU DID IT! You took the plunge, you make the jump and you were scared out of your mind but you did it and you MADE IT!

What makes the rush so amazing is the terror we feel when confronted with the risk. The scariest part isn't the fall, it's just before the jump. Because before the jump, you're safe. You're where you know, on firm ground, where everything's predictable.

And you're looking into an abyss. The unknown. By its very nature, it's unpredictable. And the jump represents risk. You're abandoning what makes you comfortable and trusting something that may not be trustworthy.

We all face risk in our lives. Particularly when we choose to follow God. Because choosing to follow God means abandoning the ground we've always known, the ground where we're safe, where we feel comfortable.

I can't tell you how many times I've heard someone say, I don't want to give my life to God because I don't want to get called to move to Africa. I've said it myself! That's risk-aversion. Here is comfortable. There is unknown. And if I surrender to God, if I jump in with both feet, *I don't know what will happen!*

We're afraid of all kinds of things. If I jump in, I'll have to forgive that person. If I jump in, I'll have to give up that habit. If I jump in, I'll have to start acting like a weird church person. If I jump in, I'll have to do what God wants, not what I want.

Always, at the heart of that aversion to jump, what keeps us from risking is fear. I'm afraid that the life God will give me isn't as good as the life I have now. I'm afraid that if I jump in, if I leave the things that make me comfortable, it'll cost too much.

Here's what I know about you: If you're here today, then God is calling you forward. Maybe you've never followed God before. Maybe you've been following God for a long time. Either way, here's what you need to know:

Jesus' resurrection is proof that God's Way is better. The fact that Jesus came back to life and walked out of his tomb is all the assurance you need to jump with both feet into the life God is calling you to.

We don't think of Jesus' resurrection like that. We talk about the Empty Tomb as something that saves us from our sin. We think, It's nice that Jesus came back from the dead, because that means that we can go to Heaven when we die.

But the Resurrection is much more than that. The Resurrection saves us *for* an exciting life with God *right now*. The Resurrection is an invitation to join God *right now*. One of the first followers of Jesus was a guy named Paul. When God called him to follow Jesus, he jumped in with both feet. He abandoned his whole way of life and traveled all over the world telling people the good news that Jesus was raised from the dead. Listen to these words he wrote about Jesus' resurrection to a group of Christians living in the city of Corinth:

Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first fruits of a great harvest of all who have died. So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back. After that the end will come, when he will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, having destroyed every ruler and authority and power. For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet. And the last enemy to be destroyed is death. -- 1 Corinthians 15:20-26

Paul uses a farming metaphor to explain why Jesus' Resurrection is such good news. He calls Jesus the "First Fruits". In agrarian cultures, every planting season was a risk. You sowed all these seeds and you had no idea how the harvest was going to turn out. Was there going to be enough sun? Enough rain? Come harvest time, would you have enough food for your family, or would you go hungry during the winter?

They didn't know until the first harvest. The first plants that bore fruit would indicate what the harvest would look like for the whole harvest. They were like a sneak peek at what was in store for this harvest season.

So when the first fruits appeared, the village would go harvest them, and if it was a good harvest, they'd throw a big party. Because they knew what was in store. No more risk. No more wondering. No more questions. They knew what was coming.

And Paul says, when we see that Jesus was raised from the dead, he's like the first fruits of the harvest. We know now what's in store for all of us who take the plunge and follow God.

Because Jesus followed God's Way no matter what. At multiple times in his life, he could've turned away from God and done his own thing, and had a much more comfortable life. In fact, it was staying true to God's way that got Jesus killed.

You could look at Jesus' death and say, See?! That's why you don't risk. That's why you don't follow God's way. Jesus took the plunge and hit rocks instead!

But Paul says, No! God is faithful to Jesus. And faithful to us. God promises that following God's Way leads to life. And *nothing* will get in the way of God's promise. Not even Death.

How do we know? How can we be sure? Look at Jesus. God raised him from the Dead. And that *wasn't* a one-time thing. That was the first fruits. That's how we know what's in store for us!

Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we can jump into God's call fearlessly. Look at what Paul says next:

And why should we ourselves risk our lives hour by hour? For I swear, dear brothers and sisters, that I face death daily. This is as certain as my pride in what Christ Jesus our Lord has done in you. And what value was there in fighting wild beasts-- those people of Ephesus-- if there will be no resurrection from the dead? And if there is no resurrection, "Let's feast and drink, for tomorrow we die!" -- 1 Corinthians 15:30-32 (NLT)

Paul says, You want to know how I can face everything that happens to me and still be confident that God's Way is the right Way? Because Jesus was raised from the dead.

You want to know how I can forgive those who hate me, who try to kill me? Because Jesus was raised from the dead!

You want to know how Christians who face execution at the hands of the Empire because they won't renounce Jesus have the strength not to give in, to welcome Death before dishonor? Because Jesus was raised from the dead!

So what's the risk you're avoiding? What is the thing that you know deep in your soul God is calling you to do that you're afraid of?

I can tell you what mine is right now: since I was a kid, I've dreamed of writing a book. But as I got older, met authors who are better writers than I am, who talk about how hard it is, I got scared. I came up with a whole list of excuses why I shouldn't - what if no one reads it? What if publishers don't even want it? What if I just end up a big failure?

But I know, deep in my bones, that I was created to write. So I'm taking the plunge. Not because I got a book deal already or I have a guarantee. Because I know that this is what God created me to do. So I'm going to do it and let God worry about the rest.

What's yours? It's probably not writing a book (though it could be - we have some terrific writers in our community here). And it's probably not moving to Africa (though it could be - that's what God called Jon and Ashley Barchus to do. They've followed God's call and now run the Arbre de Vie orphanage we support in Benin).

What is God calling you to? Following Jesus for the first time? Letting go of that past hurt or anger and stepping into forgiveness? A new relationship? A new job? An opportunity to serve?

God is calling us all forward. And we're all scared of the risk. We're all tempted to stay where we're comfortable. But God raised Jesus from the dead as proof that following God's way is better. Taking the plunge, jumping with both feet into the life God is calling you to is the path to life. And it's thrilling and exhilarating and amazing. You don't want to miss out. Take the risk. Make the jump. It's worth it. It's better.

Baptism SetUp

The Church celebrates Easter by baptizing those who've chosen to follow Jesus. Today, we have 21 persons who have taken the plunge, who are following Jesus. Baptism is a symbolic action. A person publicly announces their commitment to follow Jesus, and then they're immersed in the water, representing that they're dying to their old life, sprinting away from that safe, comfortable old life that only brings death.

Their emergence from the water represents Jesus' resurrection. The baptism is a symbol of our trust that Jesus is the first fruits of our harvest. Because he was raised from the dead, we are confident that we too will share in God's life forever. And that's a great reason to party!

Meet this year's baptism candidates: [[video](#)]