

"Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be". John 19:24

The cross as an instrument of death was not the invention of the Romans. They did give it prominence in history one Friday afternoon when they placed Jesus upon it while their soldiers gambled for his possessions.

After the soldiers had completed their assignment, they followed the practice of splitting up the possessions of the man they executed. In this case there was nothing but a robe. "Instead of tearing it, why don't we cast lots for it". One of them walked away that day with the Galilean's garment.

The soldiers watched the rolling of the dice as Jesus paid the price of divine love to redeem. And, looking down, Jesus surely had pity on them...on them whose unpleasant task it was to drive the nails and wait.

Now, whatever we might think of the callousness of these servicemen as they gambled at the foot of the cross, they are symbolic of us all. For the abundant life is found for us as we too gamble at the foot of the cross. Living is always an enterprise in which many chances are taken, and the outcome of the risks is uncertain. Sometimes we cry about the unforeseeable future. Yet, if we reduce life to absolute certainties we would hesitate to live at all. If there could be an unprofitable existence, it would be that one from which the chance to win and to lose had been taken, one where

everything was sure.

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Faith and courage depend on hazard and risk, on uncertainties. If our forefathers had played it safe, Moses would not have left Egypt, Columbus would not have sailed the Atlantic, the Pilgrims would not have been pilgrims.

How unproductive a world like that would be, nothing ventured-nothing gained. Two farmers visiting in the spring had a conversation like this: "John, what are you to plant this year? Corn?". "Nope, scared of corn borer". "Well, what about potatoes?". "Nope, too much danger of potato bugs".. "Well what are you going to plant?" "Nothing, I'm going to play it safe".

To be sure, people need something they can count on, but they also need something they can take a chance on. The Christian faith offer both: a dependable God who can be counted on; and a kingdom on earth that each of us may risk our lives on to help establish.

For out there on Golgotha, it was not just a few soldiers who were casting lots, and not just a mere garment at stake. There was a gambled on the cross and the takes were high -- man's relationship to God, to neighbor, and to self. Jesus was playing for keeps, wagering everything as he plunged into the midst of human sin; venturing everything that God's kingdom comes as his will is done. Jesus on the cross bet his life that God would redeem those who trust and respond to



his love. In this day, we, who are his followers, must play for keeps too. And making a decision to join Jesus in the gamble to save men is an opportunity for us all.

1. Whatever is known about Jesus, there is no secret about this: He is in the same old business now as he was then - the business of redeeming lives, making gamblers of God's children, calling them to bet on the great hope of sinners turned from sin to God and turned toward one another in love. There is no higher stake for any of us than that.

It is really no secret. God in Christ gambles on our redemption, our salvation. And he awaits our fuller participation in his plans. How responsive do we care to be?

Since life, by its nature, makes gamblers of us all, let us be gamblers at the foot of the cross. We chance something in everything we do. The policeman enforcing the law risks, emergency personnel speeding to answer an alarm risks, the scientist working with a deadly virus risks. And the man who forgives his neighbor, risks on the neighbor's power to resist temptation tomorrow.

So, everything where the outcome is uncertain causes us to take chances. And the value of the Christian faith for guiding people in the risks they make is underscored by what Jesus was doing on the cross in contrast to what the soldiers were doing at the foot of it. As a Christian, just what is it that you are betting your life on?

2. One thing we know for sure. What we know is so meager that we must live by faith, believing and trusting where we are not absolutely sure. Even being a genius does not mean to have full knowledge, but rather a proficient tho incomplete understanding.

So we do not argue the greatness of Jesus on the basis of his knowledge of natural science anymore than we argue the greatness of Einstein on his knowledge of religion. The genius of Jesus is religion, the genius of Einstein was science. Einstein's formulae help very little in our understanding of man's relationship to God. However, Jesus' genius and teachings have had a profound effect on the ends to which science is put. He needs to have more.

We have cracked the atom but we are not sure that it is a wise crack; we have broken the sound barrier, but the voices of men are still discordant. Where are we to get the people with character and vision and commitment, with sense and wisdom and compassion who will help make the products of science bring us peace and happiness? Well, test tubes can make truly remarkable things, but only the power of God in Jesus Christ can make a sensible and wise person.

You see, this gambler on the cross showed us this: What a man thinks about God, and others, and self determine the the course of his life. We have been given incredible speeds but now we have the challenge of creating a faith that will



make us better people when we come to the end of the journey. Ours is not so much an excursion in a spaceship of science as it is an adventure on the wings of faith. Our companion <sup>(5)</sup> is Jesus Christ. Our gamble is the kingdom of God. Our goal is the reconciliation of mankind.

3. We stand on the frontier of this kingdom when we say: "I believe, help my unbelief". Jesus invites us to be risk-taking pioneers into the little explored areas of life where our finest potential awaits development.

The adventure to which we are summoned is not as dramatic as a Mars shot, but it is more significant. It involves sending our lives, not out of the world, but into it - redemptively, breaking thru barriers, and thru the entanglements of selfishness.

Let us dare to move into the spaces of misunderstanding, ill will, greed, hunger, prejudice and practice the love of Christ. That is the risk which we are called to as disciples.

Someone has figured that if the world's population was compressed, with everything remaining in proportion, into a 1000 people in a single town, then in that town there would be 60 Americans. These 60 would receive half the income. There would be 330 Christians, and 50 communists. Only 500 people would have heard of Jesus Christ. The sixty Americans would be spending better than \$1000 yearly for military; but less than \$5 annually to spread the faith to the 670 who were

not Christian.

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Here is the best possible venture into reality that you can possibly have..to gamble and probe the loftier relationships possible for the human family. The adventure begins for you when you, as Trueblood says, "Make a dangerous and uncalculated commitment". Risk draws our faith. Clovis Chappell has said: "Christians are like tea; their real strength comes out when they are in hot water".

4. There is no heroism without risking. And it might be that that is the reason your faith is so bland. We have never risked enough to make it useful. Something must be hazarded. The Christian, by his affirmation of faith in Christ, gambles on the proposition that God the father is in Christ reconciling the world to himself. He gambles his life on the belief that God is, at this very moment, engaging the souls of men in redemptive struggle. The finest credentials which a Christian has are his deeds which reflect faithfulness to such a conviction.

But risk is what keeps most from wagering heavily on Jesus Christ. We simply don't want to pay the price to be numbered among the faithful, the heroes of God.

What of the future for you..should you make deep commitment? No one knows for sure. What if you decide to become a gambler, patterning your actions after those of the gambler on the cross? Well, a grand uncertainty awaits you.

When Paul left Jerusalem for Damascus to ferret out Christians, no one dreamed that he would come back a different man. But the unforeseeable was out there along that crude highway, waiting in the form of a conversion experience, waiting to put his life under new management. And on this same unforeseeable possibility the people of God are wagering their time, talent, and possessions. The excitement of the Christian church, and the hope of the world, is aroused by the Damascus road possibilities in each of us.

Here is a frontier that shows no signs of passing away: the frontier of personal decision at which one casts lots with Jesus Christ.

Will someone here today accept this call to high adventure, its great risks, and its abiding joys? The gamble of the man on the cross is that someone will come to the foot of the cross and declare: "Lord, I bet my life with you".