

## **Drawn In: Risk - Matthew 25:14-30**

Norwalk Christian Church, February 10, 2019, Drawn In Worship Series, Epiphany Year C, Non-Lectionary

---

The end of an 116 year era is over. It all began in 1866 in Massachusetts, when the New England Confectionery Company (NECCO) started printing messages on various shaped candies. By 1902, the candy assumed it's familiar heart-shape, with simple messages printed on them like: "Lov U", "Kiss me", "Be mine."

How many grade school romances were begun by these Necco Conversation Hearts? Valentines Day in 2nd grade, you exchange valentines with the class, and leave that one heart that says exactly what you want it to say on the edge of her desk.

It was simple, yet risky. People have proposed marriage with the "Marry Me" heart. This little piece of candy, able to say something that comes from deep within your heart.

A while back, the company started taking risks themselves. First, they added new, more "modern" messages like "Groovy" or "Fax Me". (I gotta say, if someone can find a way to fax you a love note today, then you probably better marry that person on the spot.)

And a few years ago, Neeco changed their recipe. As interest in health foods has grown, the idea of candy that needed no packaging but a cardboard box and could taste the same no matter how long it set in your desk drawer, was...well, unappealing. So Neeco made the candy less toxic, more chewy. And people were outraged.

How dare they take such a risk! "Gone are the classic flavors I once loved," someone wrote. "Seriously, how do you just up and change an American candy staple like this."

The candy that taught us to take risks with love, was now being pummeled for taking a risk of its own. They actually ended up tweaking the recipe again, and settled on one that was well received. But damage had been done.

Last May, the New England Confectionery Company, the longest continuously operating candy company in the United States, was sold off in bankruptcy. It used to take 11 months to produce the needed 8 billion hearts to meet the Valentine's Day demand.

Today, it's only factory is shuttered. There are still knock offs, of course. Sweet tarts, brachs--but the original, chalky, Conversation Heart central to our childhoods are gone.

Had they not risked of messing with the recipe, would NECCO still be around? We may never know. But isn't that how it is with risk? You never know until you take the risk.

---

Like the risk of asking someone out. I remember asking Marti out for the very first time. We were with some friends in my and my roommate Wes' apartment, senior year of

college. And I'm not supposed to tell you this, but she's not here this morning...see she and I had already kissed a few nights before. And it was, well, it was a good kiss.

So, I thought, why not. Take the risk. And I said something like, "Hey, we should go out." And of course, she immediately responded with a resounding, "Yes, I thought you'd never ask!" Which, if she was here, she would tell you that is a resounding lie.

The truth? She laughed at me. "You're not serious?!" But I was. I asked again. And probably again. And eventually, a few weeks later, she said yes. Five months later we were engaged, and three months after that married, and 16 years later here we are.

Love--it's always a risk! And as a risk, you never know what may happen.

The risk of a business opportunity. The risk of helping someone. The risk of forgiveness. The risk of joining a church. The risk of changing the formula in a beloved candy. It could succeed beyond your wildest dreams, or it could all fall apart.

Have you ever thought about God as a risky God? Creation was a risk. Partnering with a couple like Abraham and Sarah to form a new nation was a risk. Becoming human. Living among us. Re-creating the world through the church--this is a risk.

We're talking in this series about the Christian life as a creative process. Two weeks ago, we spoke about "dreaming" which is the beginning of any creative process--to dream something new. Then we spoke about "Hovering", or as Sarah Pratt called it, "The Mosy", when you take your time, ruminate over what you've dreamt up. But eventually, you must act. The art must begin. That's the risk--and it's often a huge leap of faith.

But today, I want to declare, that our God is a risk-taking God. Jesus, whom Christians teach is God in the flesh, taught his disciples this very thing in our parable today. Now, the parable of the Talents is an often misunderstood parable. First off, a talent is a unit of money not something you audition on America's Got Talent.

In fact, a Talent was a large unit of money. If we had a coin worth half a million dollars, that would be about it's equivalent in Jesus' day. One talent was worth 6,000 days of work for a typical worker. This is a jaw-dropping amount of money.

And as Jesus' parable goes, this wealthy master gives his slaves this ridiculous amount of money to care for while he was away. One gets five talents. One two. And one one.

What would you do? The ones with 5 and 2 talents take them, and they invest them. Maybe they gamble. Maybe they start a business. However they do it, they take risk with the master's money. And it pays off. The one with 5 talents risks it all and gets 5 more. The one with 2 does the same, and gets 2 more. They double their money.

But the guy with one talent...God bless him, he saves it. He buries it in a hole, where no one can find it. See, he was scared of the master. He was scared of what would happen if he had lost the talent. So he plays it safe.

When the master comes back, he praises the 5 and 2 talent slaves--well done, good and faithful servants. You have been faithful with a little; I'll give you more. But to the man who saved the talent, who feared the master, he said--you could've at least saved it in a bank and gotten a little bit of interest. But because you feared me, then I will kick you out--and because this is the Gospel of Matthew which likes dramatic endings, the master throws the slave out into the utter darkness.

So, what do *we* do with this?

Interesting we're talking about taking a risk the day we will finalize our new building renovation. I didn't really plan this, it just sort of worked out this way. But yes, this is a big risk. We've prepared the best we could. We've gone over and over plans and budgets, tried new ideas, and we think it will all work out. But it is a risk. It's always a risk.

Life is a risk. Everything worth doing is a risk. But our parable today, is not intended to give financial advice or even love advice, per se. And I think it helps us better understand this parable if we replace the money in the parable with grace. Grace, it has been said, is the currency of the kingdom of God. Everyone of us have been given grace.

What have you done with the grace God has given you?

I grew up in a tradition that believed grace was something you buried. We celebrated the grace we were given, but we never risked it. God was a harsh judge, we thought. Best be safe. Keep out those who don't fit in. Don't rock the boat. Don't take risks with God.

But grace is *inherently* risky. It cannot be anything but risky. Grace compels us to accept and love--not out of merit or worth, but just because. Grace, love--these things don't make sense. That's why they are so risky.

And if we are to live in the kingdom of God, we must be comfortable with risk. To risk the idea that God gives *you* grace--copious amounts of grace--even when you know you don't deserve it. And God asks that you do the same. That we don't bury your grace, but that we risk it in human relationship. We invest in grace. Grow grace.

And we may fail at times. That's part of risk. And the NECCO conversation hearts may be gone forever, but the risk of love they represented is alive and well.

Take the risk, Jesus says. God won't be angry at you for risking grace, risking love. In fact, it might be the most God-like thing you could do.  
Amen.