

# Risky Business

September 2006

Did you know that being part of the church is really risky business? It's not so much that you risk life and limb every time you enter the church (although in our building, you may risk getting beamed by the occasional glass bead coming loose from the chandeliers in the sanctuary).

It's more that being a Christian requires that you *take* risks. Really. I've been reading about John Wesley, recently, the feisty Priest in the Church of England who took a lot of risks to revitalize the Christian faith through what became known as the Methodist movement. He had a comfortable position in society, and in his work – he was well educated, from a well-respected family, in a well-respected line of work. He could have comfortably lived out his life without ever making a ripple.

He chose to make waves. He chose to give sermons standing on stumps where miners were getting off work. He chose to go visit prisons, and invite the poor and jobless to know God's love. He formed groups that met (*gasp!*) outside the church, to care for their own and each other's souls without priests to bless their gatherings.

He took personal risks too. He gave so much money away that he often had little to live on. He left all behind to go be a missionary in the American colonies for awhile. He lived out his faith in ways that raised eyebrows.

What have trouble seeing in hindsight, is that these were real risks. They did not occur under controlled circumstances that guaranteed success. And as a matter of fact, many failed. His mission to the Americas was a humiliating business, and he fled home in shame. His marriage pretty much flopped from day one (he was already married to his work, and bigamy is not a good thing). But in the midst of the failures, he kept risking. And some of his work succeeded in ways that affected the lives – physical and spiritual – of millions.

I've been trying to remember that. I know that some attempts to try something new fail – even ones that I didn't think were so risky! Silly me, I thought having communion in a circle on a traditionally low-attendance Sunday in August would be an intimate, powerful experience – little did I know that it would turn into an interminable fiasco in an overheated sanctuary. Believe me, I learned from that failure!

But I hope that what I've learned from failure – that what any of us learn – is *not*: “*Be careful! Take no risk!*” I hope what I've learned is, “*Well, that didn't do what I hoped it would. Let's try something else.*”

I'll continue to take some risks – in worship, in speaking up on issues, in trying new ways to address our financial struggles. Some will fail. But some will succeed – and God will do something through us that might never have happened otherwise – if we didn't take the risk.