

## **Get In!**

*Rev. John Allen*

I heard a story this summer that was so good, I have to tell it to you.

I head this story from Rev. Traci Blackmon, the new minister for Justice and Witness of the United Church of Christ.

It is the story of Charles Blondin, renowned high-wire walker, who On the morning of June 30, 1859, set out to walk the span across Niagara Falls on a tight-rope.

Newspaper articles from that time report that Blondin drew a crowd of about 25,000 spread across both sides of the Falls.

Bookies were working the crowd taking bets on whether he would fall to his death.

And it seemed the smart money was on 'yes.'

But Blondin disappointed his more morbid spectators.

He crossed without incident.

But then, he did something few people suspected. He walked back out onto the wire this time carrying a large daguerreotype camera. He paused in the middle, set up the camera, and placing his head under the curtain snapped a photo of the crowd on back on shore.

The crowd went wild.

And Blondin's antics grew more and more daring.

He walked across blindfolded. He stopped in the middle and dangled from the wire by his legs.

As his performances became more and more dramatic over that summer, the crowds on the shore grew and grew.

Eventually, President Millard Fillmore came to see the spectacle for himself.

That day, Blondin had carried a stove to the center of the wire, where he was sitting, cooking omelettes and lowering them in baskets to people on the Maid of the Mist floating in the waters beneath.

He crossed at night.

He crossed with his arms and his legs in shackles.

And the crowds grew.

He did somersaults, and handstands.

And they cheered wildly with each new stunt.

And then one day, Blondin appeared walking through the mist toward the spectators on the American side of the Falls pushing a wheelbarrow across the wire.

The crowd roared with approval, and he asked. “How many of you believe that I could push a person across in this wheelbarrow?”

By now, nobody doubted it.

“You can do anything” Someone shouted from the back of the cheering mass.

“Great!” Charles said. “Can I have a volunteer?”

And for the first time that Summer, the crowd was silent.

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Jesus had been on the road with his disciples for a few years at this point.

He was doing things that people simply could not believe.

Restoring sight to the blind. Healing lepers. Walking across water.  
Multiplying bread. Standing up to the authorities of Rome without fear.

And as he journeyed around Galilee, the crowds grew, and grew.

Drawn to him, drawn to the wonders he worked, the miracles that seemed to follow him wherever he went.

People came, from all walks of life, just to be close to it. To be a part of it.

And just when those people were starting to believe, deep in their hearts, that he really could do anything....

Jesus looked out across the massive crowd, then turned to his most trusted friends, the disciples and began to teach them.

And he told them that the road they were on led to his suffering. And to his death.

And Peter wouldn't hear it.

He rebukes Jesus and says, "God forbid it Lord."

After Jesus does some rebuking of his own, he turns back to the group of disciples and says this:

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

Can I have a volunteer?

And for the first time, in a long time, they fell silent.

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We learn something about the disciples in that moment. Something a little uncomfortable. A little embarrassing. They have been all excited about everything that Jesus is about, everything he is doing and saying.

They have basked in the affection of the crowd. Loved every minute of it.

Up until this moment when Jesus tells them that the road they are on will cost them all. That it will cost them their comfort and security, it will cost them their old ways of being, it will cost them friends, and respectability, and maybe even their lives.

He tells them. If you want to be a part of what I am doing. Take up your cross.

And if that phrase 'take up the cross' doesn't work for you, if it seems a little too abstract and confined to history, then try this one.

Get in the wheelbarrow.

When the moment comes that your faith makes a claim on your life which will cost you more than just your attention or adulation, are you ready to get in the wheelbarrow?

If you heard a friend, or a family member, make a racist comment.

Would you say something, even if it might cost you an awkward moment, or a strained relationship?

Do you trust God enough to step out over uncertain waters in the name of love?



If you saw someone being harassed on the street, could you find a way to intervene, even if the mere thought of doing something so bold makes you queasy just thinking about it?

if you saw whole communities of vulnerable people being demonized or oppressed. Would you stand up and say it. Even if your voice shook.

Do you trust God enough to step out over uncertain waters in the name of love?

When ever we baptize someone here, or a new member joins, we share promises with one another. One of the things that the congregation promises to those who join our community is to “share with them the cost and joys of discipleship.”

I think everyone of us could name some way that we have shared the joy of discipleship together.

But what about the cost?

What does your faith cost you?

What would you be willing to risk for the sake of the faith and love that is in your heart?

What should we, as a community together, be willing to put on the line for the sake of our immovable belief that God's love for all people never fails, and never ends?

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Week after week here we read these ancient stories. We pray and bear witness to the ways that God is a part of our lives. We sing the songs that have carried our community through all manner of trouble and storms.

We stand here and marvel at the strength of God. The beauty of God's creation. The power of love in this community.

We watch God dance, and twirl. We watch God somersault, and walk backwards and forwards. We watch God dangle with one arm.

We'll watch God push a wheelbarrow across a high wire and and before long someone will say: "You can do anything, God!"

And God will say.

"Great."

"Get in."