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Life is risky, though many days we don't think much about it. I mean, if you stop and think about it, our planet is hurtling through space at 67,000 miles per hour, and our solar system, which contains our earth, is whirling around the center of our galaxy at 490,000 miles per hour.<sup>1</sup> At that speed, if something is moving toward us, we can't just stop our planet or get off at the next stop. We're a captive audience without anywhere to go.

I doubt any of you woke up this morning worrying about the speed of our planet, for we have a lot of other things to worry about: a pandemic, our declining health as we age, the polarization of our nation into us vs. them, whether our finances will make it through retirement, the safety of our children or grandchildren, and even the future of our congregation. That's a lot of insecurity, isn't it?

Sometimes we can put plans into place to make life a bit more secure, such as in the 1930s with the building of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco.

The construction company didn't install safety devices during the first part of the project. Twenty-three workers fell to their deaths. For the last phase of the project, a huge net was deployed for the staggering cost (at the time) of \$100,000.

At least 10 men fell into the safety net and were saved. That was a marvel in itself. But the most remarkable thing of all is this: from the day the net was hung, the steelworkers accomplished 25 percent more work. That's how important it was to be assured of their security!<sup>2</sup>

Providing security is a good step, but some may try and find security in those things that don't really offer security, which is something Dr. Jerome Frank, Professor of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University discovered in a conversation with someone next to him on an airline.

Listen as he tells his story:

Whenever I am flying, and I engage people in conversation, a confession is almost always forthcoming when they find out I am a psychiatrist. A few years ago, before all of the modern security measures were installed at the nation's airports, a man I was sitting next to on a coast-to-coast flight told me, "You know, I used to be deathly afraid of flying. It all started after that man brought a bomb on board a flight to Denver to kill his mother-in-law. I could never get it out of my mind that someone on board one of my flights might be carrying a bomb."

I asked, "Well, what did you do about it?"

He replied, "Well, I went to one of those special schools for people who are afraid of flying, and they told me there was only one chance in a hundred thousand that someone would be on board my flight with a bomb. That didn't make me feel much

better. The odds were still too close. But then I reasoned that if there was only one chance in a hundred thousand that one bomb would be on the plane, there was only one chance in a billion that two bombs would be on board. And I could live with those odds.”

So I asked, “But what good would that do you?”

He quickly replied, “Ever since then, I carry one bomb on board myself just to improve the odds.”<sup>3</sup>

In the biblical story of Ruth, we find a family who faced insecurity, not due to worrying about the speed of our planet or carrying bombs as their solution, but they found a way to improve the odds of their survival. Naomi and Elimelech and their two sons left their home in Bethlehem due to a famine, and they traveled to the land of Moab. Naomi’s husband died, and her two sons married Moabite women, who were considered outsiders by any faithful person listening to this story during their day.

When both of Naomi’s sons died, insecurity once again entered the story, for now three women were abandoned, and although we know that single women can do very well in today’s world, during the time when these three women lived, their risk was much greater. Naomi and her one daughter-in-law, Ruth, found a way

to beat the odds: they traveled back to Naomi’s home in Bethlehem, even though she tried to discourage Ruth, reminding her she had no more sons for her to marry.

Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to abandon you, to turn back from following after you. Wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.” From one perspective, Ruth seemed to make a foolish decision that led to insecurity, for she was going to a land of people who viewed her as an outsider; but on the other hand, placing herself in the space of insecurity provided security for all of us listening today.

If you’re thinking of going home and reading this short story this afternoon to find out how she has improved your life, plug your ears, for I have a spoiler alert: Ruth married, and from her came the descendant of King David, and generations later, Jesus. Due to risky action, she has offered great security to all of us, for she paved the way for Mary and Joseph to raise their son, who offers each of us hope and new life.

What if Mary had said “no thanks” when the angel announced to her that she would bring hope to the world? What if Joseph had taken the more secure path

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and dismissed Mary once he learned she was pregnant with an unexpected child?

Sometimes taking a risk is beneficial, not only in the short run, but in the long run as well. Or think about Moses—what if he had taken the easy path and remained in the Pharaoh's court, rather than running into the desert and discovering his family's true identity and helping them escape to freedom? No Passover meal with bread and wine. No reminder from Jesus to break the bread and remember him. No gathering here today for communion.

Life is filled with risk, and sometimes God hopes we will choose the more challenging path, reminding us along the way that God will be with us each step of the way.

You might say those who traveled this path before us offered us saintly security, for these ancestors remind us of what God has been doing in the world all along: offering hope and security in an insecure world. They tie us together in love. There have been many saints who have gone before us in this community of faith, and our memories of them on this All Saints' Eve remind us that we have saintly security—reassurance from the past that gives you hope today. Who are those who continue to give us hope, even though they no longer sit among us? I invite you to name them...

May we give thanks to God for all these saints, who continue in these uncertain times to offer us saintly security.

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<sup>1</sup> How fast is the earth moving? October 26, 1998, [www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-fast-is-the-earth-mov/](http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-fast-is-the-earth-mov/)

<sup>2</sup> HomileticsOnline.com,

<sup>3</sup> Hodgkin, Michael. *1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #817.