One time I bought a custom-made bright purple silk dress to wear to my sister-in-law’s wedding. The dress was beautiful, fit me perfectly and had exquisite stitching. I enjoyed wearing it to the wedding.

After the wedding, I hung the dress in my closet. When I chose what to wear every day, I would see the dress in the closet and admire its beauty. I even thought about wearing it, but did not do so because I was afraid I would spill something on it and it seemed that no occasion was special enough for the dress. I eventually gained weight and the dress no longer fit. It’s a shame I didn’t wear the dress while I had the chance. I had something great, but had been so afraid that either the time was wrong or that I would do something wrong that I failed to use what I had and, eventually, lost the opportunity.

God has given us great gifts much more precious than a custom-made silk dress. Chief among these gifts is the Gospel – the reality that God loved us so much that He gave his only Son to live as an example for us, to die out of love for us and to rise again conquering death for us for all eternity. God wants us to use and spread these gifts in ways that take us out of our comfort zones, that feel risky. Taking these risks, pleases. Burying the Gospel, spreading it while only in our comfort zone, does not please God.

Here is a reading of verses 26-30 from the Message, a contemporary translation of the Bible. Verse 26 begins with the master’s response to the servant who buried the talents rather than taking the risk to invest them.

The master was furious. ‘That’s a terrible way to live! It’s criminal to live cautiously like that! If you knew I was after the best, why did you do less than the least? The least you could have done would have been to invest the sum with the bankers, where at least I would have gotten a little interest.

**28-30**“‘Take the thousand and give it to the one who risked the most. And get rid of this “play-it-safe” who won’t go out on a limb. Throw him out into utter darkness.’

We are the church – those whom God redeemed with His love, those to whom God has given gifts to be used to share His love. God entrusted the Gospel to us not only so we could just talk about it within the safety of our four walls. God gave us gifts not so we could just use them with one another in love. God gave us all this not so we could just do what is comfortable. God gave us all these things so that we could take the risks to do ministries we’ve never done before, to go boldly out into the community, to be willing to try new things, even though we might fail in spreading that Gospel. God wants us to go out on a limb in telling others about what we have in Christ and what we have in these places – in these Christian communities of St John and St Andrews.

Now, being out on a limb isn’t particularly comfortable, especially after we get to be a certain age. What if the branch breaks off the tree? What if we fall? Or what if we can’t figure out how to get down from the tree if we need to? Perhaps we try something new and fail to see the success we wanted. We try a new program and only a few people come? Does that mean we’ve fallen off the tree?

I don’t think so. In the first place, who says that the only way the success of our efforts is judged is through numbers? And who ever said all success would be immediate? It might be that people who read the sign about the new program never attend that program, but two years later – when their lives are in crisis and they most need Jesus— they wander into our church because our name is in their subconscious? Perhaps the only person who comes to our program is exactly the right person God wants our church to embrace right at that moment.

What if we choose a program and its succeeds so well that we can’t sustain it? Have we climbed out on the limb so far, we can’t get back? Again, I don’t think so. Perhaps at this point we are meant to do the program with a partner or with another church.

What if we go to all this effort – and yes – climbing trees to the furthest end of their limbs is effort – and then we figure out we chose the wrong program to devote our attention to – essentially that we are way out on the wrong tree? Can we recover that energy again to go back down that tree and choose another? We can, because we don’t just operate on our own strength – we operate with God’s and the less of our own strength we have, the more of God’s strength we use.

*St John’s is at a pivotal time in its history – a time of great opportunity to go out on a limb, to try something new with the gifts we have been given, to take the Gospel where we haven’t taken it before. That’s scary. But God will offer for us a soft landing. The taking of the risk, the showing of faith in God pleases Him. God wants us to go for it.*

*St Andrew’s is a healthy, vibrant parish with a long history and a bright future. Yet the more we have been given, the more God calls us to risk –to come out of our comfort zone. While we continue to do those ministries we’ve always done and that are fruitful, those ministries that feel comfortable, God also calls us to try some new things, to choose a new tree and go out on the limb.*

The essence of the Gospel is that God is love. Within that love is no fear. We need have no fear before God because Jesus supports us. We are called to go out on a limb to share all the precious gifts God has given us – the most important of which is the Gospel -- and to live in faith that Jesus won’t let us fall too far and will always let us climb back to the safety of His arms.

Amen