

Risk Taking

And Jesus said to him, "Follow me." And he got up, left everything, and followed him. - Lk. 5:27

I come from a long line of people who hoe. We prefer not to pull weeds. We put a bevel on our hoes that would shame a Gillette Mach 3 razor blade and hoe them.

So I was interested in a poem by John Updike titled "Hoeing."

*I sometimes fear the younger generation will be deprived
of the pleasure of hoeing;*

there is no knowing

how many souls have been formed by this simple exercise.

The dry earth like a great scab breaks, revealing

moist-dark loam –

the pea-root's home,

a fertile wound perpetually healing.

How neatly the green weeds go under!

the blade chops the earth new.

ignorant the wise boy who

has never performed this simple, stupid, and useful wonder.

Sounds safe and easy as Updike describes it, but then I realized that he has left out the **SNAKE**. My family hoed first and foremost in cotton fields. You could say we "followed" furrows. And in West Texas, there is no such thing as a cotton field without snakes. (N.M. is much the same.)

I used to help my uncle hoe his place each summer when I was in high school. The first summer I came across a weed positioned exactly between two cotton stalks. I couldn't hoe it without damaging the cotton plants, so I reached down to pull it out by hand. Feeling something cold and strange, I pulled my hand back quickly. Cautiously separating the leaves of the plants, I soon found that I had placed my hand on a diamondback rattler. Fortunately for me, it was early morning and the snake was still sluggish from the night's cool, but my cousin Curtis was greatly amused by my response.

A couple of days later I almost stepped on a coiled snake as I rounded the last stalk of a cotton row to head to the pickup to sharpen my hoe. People watch Chinese martial arts movies and laugh about how these characters defy gravity by jumping to a third-story window from the ground or by having fights while suspended in midair. I don't know how they do it, but it's not hard when you're about to step on a coiled snake. My uncle, who was having a drink of water at the pickup, witnessed me fly thirty or so yards through the air.

He then told me that my cousin Curtis, who was off changing irrigation water, had killed the snake, a hognose snake, earlier that morning and placed it exactly where he did, largely concealed, so there'd be no chance that I wouldn't step on it. But I got him back. When he wasn't looking, I took the snake and wrapped it around the flashlight in his glovebox. I was in bed when he went to change the water at midnight and from a distance heard him call my name when he found it.

Hoeing is not without its risks – I had an aunt who almost died after being bitten by a rattlesnake while hoeing her garden – nor is following Jesus without its risks. If we take a

stand against a bully or argue for what's right or value character above financial reward or support legislation for the good of all or share the gospel in certain settings, we soon find out that there are snakes in every field.

A fellow told me that he used to say to people upon parting, "Take care." But then he got to thinking about it. We live in a society in which people take too much care. (Think about all the things you ate and did growing up that would horrify parents nowadays.) And although safety measures in and of themselves are not bad, we cannot insure or safeguard everything. We follow Jesus when we give up our security blankets rather than hold on. So, this fellow has changed his parting words to, "Take risks."