

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

Matthew 28:16-20

The Second Sunday in Lent

If we have never heard God calling us to do something impossible, it is likely we have never heard Him at all. Calling folks to do the impossible seems to speak of the expectations He has of folks like you and me. When Abraham was called to father a nation of people set apart for God, it must have seemed impossible for he and his wife Sarah were very, very old. When Moses was called to set free the enslaved Hebrew people, it must have seemed impossible for he was on Egypt's Most Wanted List. When David went up against Goliath, all the bystanders deemed it to be impossible situation for David was just a shepherd boy going up against a gigantic seasoned warrior. When Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, victory seemed to be an impossible thing for it was one against 450!

When the angel spoke to young Mary and told her about her the uniqueness of her upcoming pregnancy, it seemed so impossible that the angel was caused to say,

*For nothing will be impossible
with God. (Luke 1:37)*

When 5000 gathered and there was only a few pieces of bread and fish, it seemed impossible that everyone was going to leave for home filled with baskets of leftovers which could have fed even more. When Peter heard Jesus telling him to walk on stormy waves, it seemed impossible. When Paul heard the missionary call, it seemed impossible that God would want anything to do with this man who had done such harm to the Jesus movement in the world. When Jesus was hanging on the cross, dying, it seemed impossible that He and the message He preached would still be alive over 2000 years later.

If we have not heard God calling us to the impossible, it must only be because we are not listening. If we have not heard God calling us to the impossible, it must only be that we have not really heard this Word of God read this morning from the book of Matthew. It says,

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father, and
of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching
them everything that I have commanded you.*

(Matthew 28:19-20)

What is clear from such a word is that Jesus expects you and me as His disciples to change the world. He expects us to transform the world. He expects us to use our lives for the purpose of advancing His Kingdom on this earth. When we hear the Great Commission clearly, we realize Jesus is calling us to change the world.

The problem the church has always had with this word is understanding that the method of Jesus for changing the world is not some grandiose plan which will cause everyone to stand back in amazement. It bears no hefty price tag. It does not require a seminar to educate, train, and motivate. It does not require the skill of an outside expert. It is not a complicated thing. In fact, it is so simple that it is mind boggling. When we finally hear and understand, our first reaction is that there must be something more. Of course, our first reaction is to declare the impossibility of such a thing. The world has been like it is for a long time. Some would say the only change is seen in the way it is spiraling downward. It has changed only to get worse. To think that one of us, or any handful of us, or even a church full of us can change the world is only something which we see as being an impossible thing. Yet, here is Jesus saying something which is simply stated with the words, "I want you to change the world."

What has become abundantly clear to all of us is that real change is not something legislated for legislated change only affects the behavior seen by others. It does nothing to change the heart. Only when the heart is touched can there be true significant change in the world around us. When Jesus talked to Nicodemus and pointed him toward being born anew, He was telling the Pharisee that his heart needed to be changed by a touch of the Spirit of God. Until his heart was touched, his view of the world would remain forever the same. So, if we really want to be a part of the solution to the problems which all around us, if we really want to be a helper to those who have lost their way because they are only listening to the seductive voices of a value system permeated with ego seeking and self adulation, if we really want to make a difference in the world around us, then we will make sure that our heart has been touched and transformed through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

We cannot really put someone else in touch with God's love until we have experienced it ourselves. We cannot really communicate the depth of what divine grace and forgiveness means until we have received in our life. We cannot really understand the difference it makes to be rightly connected to God unless that connection is solid in our own life. In other words, we cannot really talk about and live out of something we personally know nothing about. Real change is possible when real disciples whose lives have been changed by the grace and mercy of God set out to do what God has called them to do. He has called us to go forth into the world as disciple makers. His plan is for each one of us to take seriously the call to invite others to know and experience life in Jesus Christ. That is God's plan for changing the world.

It becomes possible because as disciples of Jesus Christ we are able to go into the world armed and equipped in a unique way. Jesus spoke of that uniqueness in the last few words he uttered as a part of that Great Commission. After telling them to go and do the impossible, He said,

*And remember, I am with you always,
to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20)*

We do not alone go into the world to do the bidding of Christ. We never take even one step alone. In these Words spoken so long ago, He assured all who took this mandate to change the world seriously that they would not be out there alone. Whenever we stand in that moment of witnessing about the power of Jesus in our life, He is standing there alongside of us. Whenever we turn the other cheek and bring an end to the cycle of retaliation, He is standing alongside of us. When we make the difficult decisions to forgive someone who has not sought it, or to love someone who casts verbal arrows at us, He is standing alongside of us. When we choose to go to someone in need, wondering what we can do and what we can say that will make a difference, He is standing alongside of us. When we say “yes” to His call to be instruments of change in the world, we can know the impossible is possible because we stand not alone, but as a partner with the all powerful Jesus Christ who lives and reigns now in our hearts and in our world.

This sermon preached by the Rev. Bill Strickland at the Richmond Hill United Methodist Church in Richmond Hill, Georgia on February 28, 2010.