

Brookfield Congregational Church

Fourth Sunday of Advent

"I Love the Word Impossible!"

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised... And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. Romans 4:18-21; 5:5

Our Epistle reading this morning comments on a story that goes back to the earliest days of the biblical drama. Abraham and Sarah are told by God that they will have a child, go to a promised land and that their descendants will become a great nation.

The prospects for such a thing? ***Impossible!***

You see Abraham is getting old, Sarah is way past child bearing age and starting a new nation is beyond imagining.

But guess what? Abraham and Sarah's impossible dream of having a child and way more came to pass because Abraham, as Romans puts it, *"...had faith that God had power to do what he promised."*

Fast forward almost 2000 years and we have this amazing incredulous story about a teen age girl engaged to a young man who comes to her betrothed to say that she is going to have a baby and that notwithstanding that fact, had never been with a man.

And get this – she expects Joseph to believe that some angel came to her with this newsflash saying *"Don't be afraid... you will have a baby through the power of God's Spirit!"*

Really! Talk about an impossible dream.

Then there's Joseph's side of the story in our gospel reading this morning. I want to explore this text with you: Matthew begins with Mary's impossible predicament.

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

So how does Joseph react to Mary's claim?

Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.

So Joseph isn't buying the story and is actually very generous in his reaction. His love for Mary is such that he will not demand the public execution by stoning that was the standard penalty for this offence. He will simply quietly break off the engagement.

But once again, God breaks into impossible circumstances with an invitation to faith for Joseph that will change the world.

*But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, **do not be afraid** to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.*

And here is the world changing part:

She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.'

So whacha gonna do Joseph? This is a mighty long limb you are walking on!

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.*

In the traditional King James Version of the bible, the phrase "Fear Not" is used 63 times. Over and over again, at the most critical junctures of life and in the midst of impossible circumstances, the message comes to those who look to God in faith... *"Fear not!"*

- It is Moses standing at the Red Sea with an Egyptian army on his heels.
- It is Joshua fearfully standing at the threshold of the Promised Land
- It is a youthful David standing before the giant Goliath.
- It is Jesus' disciples in a small boat in the midst of a big storm.
- It is the Apostle Paul sitting in prison awaiting execution.

These were all impossible circumstances and insurmountable barriers. Later on in Matthew's gospel, a man whose son is seriously ill brings his boy to Jesus' disciples for healing. They find themselves unable to heal the boy and the father brings him to Jesus. Matthew reports on a private conversation between the disciples and Jesus. Listen... there is a *huge* lesson for us here:

"...the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, 'Why couldn't we help the boy?' Jesus replied, 'Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

The way to understand Jesus' answer to his disciples question as to why they couldn't heal the boy... *"It's because of your lack of confidence... If you place your trust in God and you focus on God's ability instead of your own inability, you could move mountains!"*

Now here is the central lesson I would like for you to grab hold of today. It is your spiritual homework for this Christmas week. You will be able to live and love with the heart of God when you resolve to grow in this concept:

Fear is when we can't see God thru our circumstances.

Faith is when we see our circumstances through God!

Joseph made the decision to trust God with his impossible circumstances and God gave him a love so powerful that he was able to embrace an impossible dream. And because of his trust and Mary's trust that with God all things are possible, we are gathered here today on the Sunday before Christmas!

To be truly Christian is to be people of the impossible dream! Some may say we Christians like Don Quixote de La Mancha are tilting at windmills with our dream of bringing the Love of God to every corner of a broken world. And the star we follow is that ancient star that people who long for God have followed since the Magi began their journey.

And my prayer is – "O Lord, count me in... as one of those dreamers!"

*To dream the impossible dream, To fight the unbeatable foe,
To bear with unbearable sorrow, To run where the brave dare not go,*

*To right the unrightable wrong, to love pure and chaste from a far,
To try when your arms are too weary, To reach the unreachable Star,*

*This is my quest, to follow that Star,
No matter how hopeless, no matter how far,
To fight for the right, without question or pause,*

*To be willing to march into Hell for a Heavenly cause,
And I know if I'll only be true to this glorious quest,
That my heart will lie peaceful and calm when I'm laid to my rest.*

[Audio of Luther Vandross' rendition [here >>>](#)]

We are people of the impossible dream!