

Malachi 3: 1-2, Luke 1: 26-38 "Nothing is Impossible with God" 12/9/18

On this second Sunday of Advent, as my to do list grows longer and the number of tasks I have actually completed grows shorter, I am grateful for Luke's text, that can be summarized with today's sermon title: "Nothing is impossible with God." It is a bumper sticker, it is a living room wall hanging, it is a banner being pulled by a plane across the sky in Ellen DeGeneres style, it is a message in a bottle tossed into the sea and washed up on a distant shore... a pithy phrase that rings true without any context. "Nothing is impossible with God." It is like a proverb which doesn't require a "who said it to whom or what or where," it is just true. It offers promise in every orphanage and hope in every nursing home. It is the truth. It is sort of like those phrases my Grandma used to spout daily: It is better to be safe than sorry...An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure... A bird in the hand is worth 2 in the bush... and Grandma Warner's personal favorite – an apple a day keeps the doctor away. Grandma was all about checking with her grandkids to make sure we all had our daily bowel movements and if not, it was another apple before bedtime. It was sort of like a checklist when we spent the night at her house – Janet Lynn (...why do they always say your middle name when they are serious?) Janet Lynn, did you brush your teeth? Yes, Grandma. Did you put up your toys? Yes, Grandma. Did you have a bowel movement today?... To this day, I still view apples with a bit of suspicion.

Nothing is impossible with God. Jason was born with spina bafida with his upper torso being fully formed but his lower torso severely stunted. This meant he grew up in a wheelchair, his shortened legs unable to hold him upright. His parents would not coddle or spoil him, expecting him to do as much as he physically could do without assistance from others. They

rarely let him get away with phrases like “I can’t” or “it’s impossible.” Doctors told the family he would probably never get past grade school. Not only did he graduate high school but attended college and went to work at the local college library in software tech. When I couldn’t get thru to Ivy, my daughter, who deals with titanium rods in her back from double scoliosis, webbing on her joints due to Escobar syndrome, and a prosthetic leg, Jason would shake some sense into her about feeling sorry for herself. Ivy would tell him she would never have a boyfriend because who could love someone like her. Jason would point to his wife of 15 years, Leah. Ivy would complain she couldn’t go snow skiing or ride a bike like other kids and Jason talked about wheeling himself a mile to and from school. Ivy expected to die before she turned 30, due to all her health complications, and Jason or Leah would speak of the different times the doctors had come out of the ICU to say Jason probably wouldn’t survive the night. It would be impossible for his body to recover from whatever illness had gripped him this time. Jason has now gotten way past 30. Leah recalled her mom’s cancer diagnosis where the doctors had said it would be just a couple months before her mother was dead, but her mom had other ideas. Nothing is impossible with God – she lived many, many more months after that, savoring each day as a gift. Ivy now has a boyfriend, whom she is pretty serious about... she snow skis, goes hiking, and can ride a bike thanks to an amazing robotic leg. Nothing is impossible with God.

A young couple with a 3 year old lost everything in the Carr fire. They were one of the lucky ones to get a local apartment, taking it sight unseen since it was all that was available. Without renter’s insurance, they moved in what they had on their backs to that small space with no furniture. They had no idea how they would furnish it; their FEMA check wasn’t

enough to get much but a few basics. With pending health issues and their job situations in flux, it seemed impossible that they would ever get back what they had lost. Then Saturday morning they walked into the newly established Donations warehouse off Eastside Road and were guided through brand new items, theirs for the taking. The mom cried as did the greeter, the dad just shook his head in wonder – how could this be? Their baby would have a new bed, they would have bedroom furniture, a washer and dryer, a living room set, dishes, and more. Nothing is impossible with God.

A young girl named Mary, a descendant of King David, is visited by an angelic messenger. “Don’t be afraid,” says this messenger, “for you will conceive and bear a son.” The messenger’s words echo prophets from centuries past – promises of a leader who will bring the people into the promised time. Mary asks, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel replies that the Holy Spirit will come upon her, so the child will be conceived by the power of God. “Nothing will be impossible with God,” he says.

Nowadays, some of us may suspect that Luke made this story up about Mary to echo Isaiah’s prophecy about a son being born of a virgin, just as he may have invented last week’s story of cousin Elizabeth conceiving in old age to echo the story of Abraham and Sarah. It is tempting to quickly assign both stories to the category of primitive, prescientific legend and be done with them. After all, both stories, are, to scientific minds, simply impossible. But Brian McLaren asks, “What if that is the point? What if the purpose of these stories is to challenge us to blur the lines between what we think is possible and what we think is impossible?” Consider if you will, could we ever come to a time when swords would be beaten into plowshares? When the predatory people in power – the lions- would lie down in peace with the vulnerable

and the poor – the lambs? When God’s justice will flow like a river to the lowest and most “god-forsaken” places on Earth? When the brokenhearted would be comforted and the poor would receive good news? If you think, “It will never happen; it’s simply impossible,” then maybe you need to think again. Maybe it is not too late for something beautiful to be born. Maybe it is not too soon, either. Maybe our present moment is pregnant with possibilities we can’t see or even begin to imagine. In this light, maybe the actual point of these pregnancy stories which are rich with divine messengers is to dare to hope, like Elizabeth and Mary, that the seemingly impossible is possible. We are being challenged here to align our lives around the “impossible possibilities” hidden in the present moment.

Mary’s child is born and in spite of the fact that he was mistreated, abandoned, made fun of, mocked, beaten, whipped, and executed, wherever he goes, people’s hearts are lifted. Fred Craddock notes that it is this news that prompts people to become kind and generous. They will empty their pockets for other people’s children. Things happen like the annual Stuff the Bus campaign of the Salvation Army experiences more gifts of toys for children being given than in recent other years. People who remember Jesus will repair their neighbor’s house when their own roof leaks. They will drive a bulldozer through roaring flames to save people stranded by the wildfire. “Is there any way I can help?” they say. People will love even their enemies, turn the other cheek, and go the second mile. All because a messenger said, “You’re going to have a child and you’ll name him Jesus.” And Mary said, “I don’t get it.” And the angel said, “Nothing – absolutely nothing – is impossible with God.” In case we, like Mary, still don’t get it after over 2000 years then consider this: If God can give a child to an old couple in a tent in Saudi Arabi and change the world; if God can give a baby to a teenage girl in northern Israel

and change the world, why should we every give up hope and wonder to be consumed with despair and failure shrugging our shoulders in defeat? Nothing is impossible with God – Write the message over the door at your house. Write it on the hallows of your mind. Write that across your heart. It will come in handy before another Sunday in Advent comes our way. Nothing, nothing is impossible with God.