

## 2024-05-26 Worship Service

How Is It Possible?  
John 3:1-17  
Norma Duerksen

It is so good to be with you this morning. I wasn't planning on being a wheelchair when I accepted the invitation to preach here but I injured my knee last week and the MRI shows that....So for now I can't put weight on that leg. My husband, Phil, reminded me that Jesus sat down to preach, so may I could too.

Just to catch you up on our lives as former members here: We live in Marion. Phil continues to teach science classes at Centre Schools near Lost Springs. I have retired from pastoring and am now making myself available to preach once a month somewhere. There are many churches without pastors or in-between pastors, or have part-time pastors. So I am happy to help where I can. We are members at First Mennonite Church in Hillsboro.

That brings us here today looking at the gospel reading from John 3 and the question of how is it possible?

So I ask you:

What "impossible" things have you done so far today?

None?

Really?

Did you perfectly poach your breakfast egg in 45 seconds in your microwave?

Did you log on to your e-mail site, facebook, or twitter and read a messages or see pictures from friends, business associates and maybe even your grandson?

Did you get out of bed and stroll pain-free around your home using an artificial hip or knee?

Did you swallow a simple aspirin and so reduce your chance of a heart attack?

Did you drive to church in a car that has a built-in satellite system so that you always know exactly where you are or where you are going?

Did you make a phone call from your car while on your way here?

Did you stop at an ATM and pay a few bills or get some cash for the offering plate?

Did you stop at a 24-hour Taco Bell and grab a burrito with extra hot sauce for breakfast on your way to Sunday school?

All of these things, and a million more, would have been rejected as "impossible" only a decade or two ago. Today, home electronic gadgetry, microchip technology, medical, surgical and pharmaceutical wizardry, and a culture with 24/7/365 services has made much of what seemed impossible a decade ago part of common everyday experiences.

Everyone knows certain people who would rather deny that the impossible is now possible than to learn new ways of doing things or to risk the possibilities of some new experiences in their lives. Some people would rather cook in the same old scarred and seared saucepan they have been using for years rather than try the convenience of a microwave. Some people would rather hobble around on a painfully arthritic knee or hip rather than allow some strange new joint into their body. Some people, like me, refuse to believe that anything other than "snail mail" is a legitimate or trustworthy form of communication and refuse to do banking and financial transactions online.

In today's gospel text, Nicodemus is like one of those folks so resistant to change that they keep claiming that new possibilities are still impossible.

Nicodemus's religious standing in the Jewish community is that he is a Pharisee...a ruler of the Jews. However, Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night. Why does he come to Jesus in such a secretive manner? Maybe there is some tension between Nicodemus and the Pharisees he represents. Or maybe there is tension between Nicodemus and Jesus. Does he really want to know and understand Jesus, or is he just tricking Jesus to reveal something to him in order to report back to his critical colleagues?

Nicodemus didn't really ask a question but Jesus answered him, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.

Nicodemus is so flummoxed by the unexpected nature of Jesus' images and the possibilities of his promises that all he can keep stupidly stammering is "How is this possible?" "How is this possible ...?"

- How is it possible for us to be born "from above" after our first physical birthday is long past?
- How is it possible for us to see and enter into the "kingdom of God"?
- How is it possible for sinful men and women to "ascend into heaven"?
- How is it possible that mortal creatures such as ourselves may gain "eternal life"?

The answer to the question, "How is it possible?" is "We've got an Impossible God!" That is to say, a God who defies what is possible, who transforms a "no-way-José-unbelief" into obedient faith. Our impossible, too-good-to-be-true God outlines the core of this reality in this memorable verse: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). Indeed all things are now possible because "God so loved the world ... [and] gave [us] his only Son." Indeed, Jesus is proof of God's commitment to doing the impossible.

J.B. Phillips argues in his classic, *Your God Is Too Small*, that "we can never have too big a conception of God, and the more scientific knowledge (in whatever field) advances, the greater becomes our idea of his vast and complicated wisdom. Yet, unless we are to remain befogged and bewildered, and give up all hope of ever knowing God as a Person, we have to accept his own planned focusing of himself in a human being, Jesus Christ. If we accept this as fact, as the

Fact of history, it becomes possible to find a satisfactory and comprehensive answer to a great many problems. (New York: The Macmillan Company, Inc., 1961), 120-121.

How is it possible? Because so loved the world. If we read the Bible from the Genesis to Revelation, we read God's love story for the world. It was, after all, love that stirred God's heart at the pleading of the slaves in Egypt, and love that offered them both the guidance of the law and security of the promised land. Thereafter, whenever inequality or injustice threatened the welfare of the poor and the powerless, God's love raised up prophets who declared God's desire for compassion—shown not just to insiders, but also to sojourners and foreigners within the boundaries of Israel.

How is it possible? For God so loved the world. It was divine love, stronger than well-deserved judgment, that carried Israel during the time of exile, and the love of God that was celebrated with the psalms of adoration in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. It was God's love that sent Jesus, God's Son, to be incarnate in the world, where he taught that love is not merely for those who look and think and believe like us but even for our enemies and those who persecute us. It was love that stirred the first-century church to open the doors of communion not only to Jews but also the Gentiles, not only to those seemed worthy but also to those whose very existence was troubling, the lame, the blind, the eunuchs.

Even in our own day, when established powers have sought to limit God's love by the exclusion of others from full participation in the community, divine compassion for the oppressed and divine passion for justice have called forth prophets to declare that God's love includes all, regardless of age or race, nationality or creed, gender or sexual orientation, or whomever's sin you think is greater than your own. The cumulative weight of the biblical record and the multifaceted experience of salvation within the contemporary church seem clear: God so loved the world!

It is possible to imagine a world in which God's love is at work yet again among the oppressed, the outsider, the sinner. It is possible that if Christ is the light of the world, then all else must be in darkness. It is possible to join in the creation of a community in which God's love is regarded not as being in short supply, open only to those who have seen and confessed Jesus as the Christ, but rather as poured out upon the entire world.

How is it possible? Precisely because Jesus is the Christ, the sure and confident sign of the very best we know that God so loves the world.

There is a story in the January 8, 1992, Journal of the American Medical Association called "A Doctor in the House," written by Bernadine Z. Paulschock, M.D., about another doctor that illustrates how Jesus makes the impossible possible. A physician went to visit and treat a sick mother whose children had chicken pox. She gave advice to the mother and then left. The pediatrician came later to see the children. The next day when the first physician called, the mother said, "Doctor M. did something really great for us. After he left, he went over to the supermarket and brought back milk and juice and barbecued chicken and bananas. I was so surprised. He didn't even let me pay him. He really is one terrific doctor."

Paulschock says, "That is how we heal — in those small acts between one human being and another."

We love because God first loved us.

When doctors become involved in their patients' lives, they can cure in ways they may not expect.

What had been impossible for these patients to experience became possible when someone cared and loved enough to get involved. John 3:16 is the ultimate expression of how Doctor God became involved with Patient Humanity.

The most "impossible" obstacles that stunt our lives are not technological challenges or physical disabilities or the realities of time and space. The most debilitating "impossibilities" we face are those that are rooted in wrong relationships, eroded emotions, hurtful habits and bad behavior. Every one of us faces in life some looming "impossibilities."

I don't know what "impossibles" you are facing in your own lives. But I know that God loves you and gave his Son for you and God is an impossible God.

Maybe you don't think you can face another day of working at your "impossible" job. But I do know that God so loved the world, loves you, and love makes the impossible possible.

Maybe It is "impossible" for you to manage staying in your house by yourself any longer. But I do know that God so loved the world, loves you, and love makes the impossible possible.

Maybe you can't seem to get control of your "impossible" drinking/eating/gambling/pornography addiction. But I do know that God so loved the world, loves you, and love makes the impossible possible.

Maybe you have "impossible" monthly bills that now outweigh your monthly income. But I do know that God so loved the world, loves you, and love makes the impossible possible.

Maybe you are facing an "impossible" situation with your kids. But I do know that God so loved the world, loves you, and love makes the impossible possible.

Maybe There is a problem in your church's life that you are finding it "impossible" to face. But I do know that God so loved the world, loves you, and love makes the impossible possible.

God's intention is never to condemn but to save, that is to make life whole. That love is ever constant, but never coercive. It is invitational and hopes for a response to complete the circle of love. May we interpret reality with new eyes, eyes that expect the unexpected, look to new truths, and come to understand the world in new ways. Such contemplation suggests believing in a God of the Possible. For God so loved the world and gave His only Son that whoever believes in him may have everlasting life.

May you believe in a God of the Possible and love accordingly.