

# Impossible

April 17, 2022

## Impossible

Impossible! The scripture we just heard from the Gospel according to Luke tells us that the male disciples' response to the women's account of finding the tomb empty is that it was an idle tale.

Impossible. I don't know about you, but I can empathize with both the male disciples' incredulity and the women's experience of not being believed.

Impossible! It's impossible that he's gone. It's impossible that I'll ever reach that goal. It's impossible that we'll ever find our way out of this political mess, or thwart climate change, or heal this relationship or that.

Impossible!

Friends, Easter is our celebration of the impossible. While the male disciples' first instinct is, "There's no way," Easter is our reminder that "with God, all things are possible." And we're not just talking about Impossible Burgers, those vegetarian burgers that claim to have achieved the impossible and actually taste like meat. We're talking a black woman on the Supreme Court. We're talking finding happiness after death or divorce. We're talking health after hitting rock bottom with addiction. Where the male disciples saw impossible, over the next 40 days, God shows us that life is stronger than death.

## Dawn

It's important to note that this account of the empty tomb comes to us at dawn, not in the light of full day. Easter is the first glimmer of hope, the first proof that darkness will not last forever. Easter does not emerge fully mature out of the tomb. Easter comes on the wobbly legs of a foal, the delicate petals of a tulip, the tenacious but fragile life of a newly hatched chick.

I'm reminded of something I read recently about the phrase "baby steps." We tell people to take "baby steps," implying that they should move slowly and deliberately, but with a new walker in my house, let me tell you that baby steps are wobbly and unsure, grasping, and full of falls and often tears.

Easter isn't a magic wand that says, "everything's perfect and resolved now."  
Rather, it's a "profound assurance that a new, irrevocable era has dawned and in the end, love and justice, shalom and joy, will have the final word. The sun will rise!"

(Salt Collective Easter 2022)

There's a lot to despair in our world right now. The polarization and social divides that we've lamented have been growing for years have now led to an epidemic of book bans. An unhinged dictator with nuclear capabilities is waging an unprovoked war resulting in mass destruction. And many people, many of us gathered here, have our own despair: estrangement from people we love, divorce looming on the horizon, personal struggles that we just can't seem to shake.

Into that despair, Easter breathes hope. Into the experiences that lead our minds to say impossible, God is saying, “I’m not done yet.”

### **A Correction**

If your default response to despair is impossible, if your tendency is toward skepticism, you’re not alone. The disciples were right there with you. In fact, there are at least two ways to miss a miracle: the first is to dismiss it, to reject it too readily, as if astonishing things never happen; but the second is to domesticate it, to accept it too readily, as if it isn’t astonishing at all.

(Salt Collective)

The passage that Phil read for us today from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah is such a powerful commentary on the ways of God.

We read from the voice of God:

I was enraged by their sinful greed; I punished them, and hid my face in anger, yet they kept on in their willful ways. Having seen their ways, I will heal them; I will guide them and restore comfort to Israel’s mourners, creating praise on their lips.

(Isaiah 57:17-18)

### **This is Easter!**

Humans behaved abhorrently, and God’s response is to heal us, to guide us, to restore comfort and create praise. This is an important corrective to a theology that has become dominant. Many of us grew up with a theology that said that God sent Jesus to atone for our sins, that Jesus stands in for the punishment that we deserve, and in doing so buys our salvation with his suffering and death.

Friends, if that’s the only way that God can figure out to be reconciled with us, that’s not a God I can worship. But substitutionary atonement isn’t the only way to read the scriptures. Like our passage from Isaiah today, there are numerous passages that lead us to a substantially different understanding of the cross and resurrection.

Rev. Donna Schaper, part of the Still Speaking Writers Guild, reflects on this passage from Isaiah:

“You messed up. Then you messed up again. Then you started to believe that you were a mess. Then you started to believe that other people were a mess. You placed one negative thought after another into the universe, and you really p----- me off. I created you. I made you. I wanted to have fun with you. Instead I have a lot of whining and crying and impotence and febrility and fragility. Seriously? I could walk out right now and just leave you cringing in your well-accessorized corners. But instead I am going to surprise you. I am going to stop being angry at you, the way you always want me to be angry. I am going to give you another chance. I am going to restore praise to your chapped lips. I am going to make your heart grateful again.”

Or, said a different way:

“You aren’t so bad that God needed to kill Jesus in order to be able to love and forgive you. Empire killed Jesus for being a good Rabbi, telling the truth, and therefore being a threat to the power structure.”

(Holy Week PSA)

So, instead of thinking of the crucifixion and Easter as Jesus buying our redemption, instead, think of it as Jesus modeling what true love actually looks like. True love is the:

“act of interrupting injustice without mirroring injustice, the act of disarming evil without destroying the evildoer, the act of finding a third way that is neither fight nor flight, but the careful, arduous pursuit of reconciliation and justice. It is about a revolution of love that is big enough to set both the oppressed and the oppressors free.”

(Shane Claiborne)

### **Conclusion**

Almost sounds impossible, doesn’t it? But a lot of us have friends who contracted AIDS long before there were any treatments and who are somehow living today.

Impossible! Many of us have friends whose business careers seemed dead, but somehow they came back.

Impossible! Many of us have relationships that we thought were over that somehow, by the grace of God, have gotten a breath of new life.

Impossible!

\*It’s important to note here that in the scriptures that come after the women tell of the empty tomb, folks consistently have a hard time recognizing the risen Jesus. I remind you of this every year, because one of the critical components of resurrection life is that it looks very different than the life we had before the grave. Easter doesn’t tell us that our dead loved ones are coming back or that the marriage that was destroyed in a dumpster fire will magically return with stability. What it does tell us is that love wins. That life is stronger than death. That God hasn’t written your last chapter yet, and therefore you shouldn’t either.

So, this Easter Sunday, I invite you to join with Alice from Lewis Carroll’s “Through the Looking Glass” by believing “as many as six impossible things before breakfast.” Easter, resurrection, is God inviting you to look at that which you see in your life as impossible, through the eyes of faith.

Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed!

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