

Luke 1:26-38

As in so many compelling stories and movies, the story of the Annunciation that we just read in Luke's Gospel of Angel Gabriel appearing to Mary to announce that she has been chosen to bear the Christ child, we have been invited to witness the impossible becoming possible.

Think of some of your favorite movies – the scenes in which we see the impossible becoming, sometimes shockingly, possible, in ways that the human mind can't comprehend at face value.

Like the opening of the Matrix when agents and police surround Trinity and begin chasing her from rooftop to rooftop over high rises, jumping from one roof to another until they reach a building that is many, many yards away – and Trinity takes a running leap and makes it across while all the police stop dead in their tracks and the camera focuses on one officer who says wide-eyed and stunned, "That is impossible."

Or in The Field of Dreams – when the Iowa corn farmer Ray hears a voice speaking to him in the middle of his corn field to build a baseball diamond: "If you build it, he will come." The movie's tagline: "If you believe the impossible, the incredible can come true."

In Back to the Future Part II Marty McFly gets a letter from the future from a Western Union man and says incredulously, "A letter to me? That's impossible!" Or the Princess Bride when Westley as the Dread Pirate Roberts is climbing the cliffside and gaining on the Giant Fezzick who is holding Vizzini and Inigo. Vizzini says three times that's "Inconceivable!" (okay – I think that's another word for impossible). To which Inigo finally responds, "You keep using that word, I do not think it means what you think it means."

My friends, I believe I hear God whispering the same thing in our ears whenever we believe or exclaim that something is "impossible." I could easily hear God saying, "You keep using that word, I do not think it means what you think it means." Because the angel Gabriel, who gives that "impossible" news to Mary – that she, a young, unmarried peasant girl from the wrong side of the tracks is not only highly favored and chosen by God but that she will miraculously conceive and bear the Son of God – is assured that: "Nothing will be impossible with God." (And if that is true, then nothing is impossible!)

And so this dialogue and pattern we see in this story of the Annunciation is the pattern of calling that we can so often trace in our own lives. What we think is impossible, is in fact possible when we add God to the equation.

So I invite you to ponder: What impossible things are you confronting in your life right now? Or have you confronted in the past? What walls have you hit that appear to be impossible to scale? Or overcome? What calling, dream, or invitation do you feel God has given you that might seem inconceivable? Completely improbable? If not totally impossible?

I know I have hit many such walls in my life. And I have witnessed the impossible become possible in the lives of others as well. A particular example came to mind while I was watching a homeless man hobble across my path at a crosswalk last week. When we see someone completely destitute – like a homeless man or woman walking through the streets on a cold day – we (or at least I) are tempted to think, "Now there is a hopeless case. Whatever could have been in store for them is long gone." But our God, the God of the possible does not think the way we do – God's ways are not our ways. And sometimes the simplest intervention can have a major impact that we could never predict.

I have a friend that I am going to call "Jose." Jose was suffering and in great need while living on the streets in Portland Oregon when he began attending the homeless meal that my former parish offers every Sunday afternoon. Jose attended for quite some time, hungry and desperate for a warm meal. Jose was homeless, in his late 40's, all alone with no family, and had never been married. A string of bad decisions and bad luck seemed to follow him through his life. But God was working on him – working on his heart and mind, calling him into a new life. (Just as I believe God calls all of us.) After a few years some of the pieces began to come together for Jose because he felt called not just to be served, but to serve others. Jose began volunteering his time to help other homeless men and women and eventually all that volunteering he did turned into a paying job for a local nonprofit that served the poor of the community. When I met Jose he was working hard, living in a great apartment, was saving up to buy a house, and had just met a wonderful woman named Judy. Jose was working the same job he'd had for a few years but by then he had become a supervisor that, as he described it, enabled him to make a difference in people's lives every day. Jose was deeply joyful and his laugh was contagious. People loved him and his warm

heart. The more I got to know Jose the more I saw that he reflected God in everything he did.

It was my privilege a year later to officiate the wedding between Jose and Judy – the love between them was palpable: in his later years Jose had found the woman of his dreams and a job that he loved. If you met Jose today, you would see before you a joyful man filled with God's Spirit, successful in his work, careful with his finances, and happily married. You would not be able to imagine the Jose who showed up those years ago at our homeless meal in desperate need of food and shelter. It would seem impossible that this was the same person. But that is the work of God – our God – a God for whom nothing is impossible. Jose, like Mary, appeared to be a no one to the outside observer, but God had other plans – and by simply answering the call and following God's plans, the seemingly impossible was made possible for Jose.

Scholar G.M. Trevelyan once said: "Never tell a young person that anything cannot be done. God may have been waiting centuries for someone ignorant enough of the impossible to do that very thing."

My favorite blessing is a Franciscan blessing which ends this way: May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you really can make a difference in this world, so that you are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.

If only all of us would be ignorant and that foolish when it comes to the impossible. The starting point into the impossible for Mary is the same as the starting point for us – and it is rooted in the fact, whether we can accept it or not, that we are highly favored by God and that God is with us. Those are Gabriel's opening words to Mary, "Greetings favored one. The Lord is with you." And these are words for our ears too: You are favored by God. You are loved by God. And you are loved more than you think you are. The Lord is with you. We are stating that fact in our liturgy when we say, "The Lord be with you." "And also with you." –because indeed, God is with us.

The second point is often perplexity. Mary is described as being perplexed by the words of Gabriel and she has to take some time to ponder what has been said to her. Angel Gabriel has to tell her not to be afraid because surely she was frightened in that moment. We too may be perplexed by God's call and invitation to us. We too may have to ponder. And we may be afraid, just as she was.

But that is when we come to the third point. And here Gabriel lays out God's great plan and calling to Mary- the impossible invitation. And she sees for the first time that she has been called to something much bigger than she ever could have imagined. We too have been called to things far beyond our imaginations- we too have been called to move into a purpose, a meaning, an invitation, that is bigger than most of us ever imagine for ourselves.

Because the calling that God has for us is usually much bigger than the dreams we have for ourselves. Just like the dream God has for our world is way bigger than the dreams we have for it. And so when we catch a glimpse of God's call for us – of who and what God is really calling us to be and do – it may very well seem impossible. Mary asks Gabriel, "How can this be?" She is looking at herself and thinking, "I'm nothing special, I don't have the skills or what it takes for this kind of call." We tend to think the same kinds of things.

And that is when Mary receives reassurance, the fourth point. We too question the vision and calling that God has for us – but we are also given reassurances in the form of others or by the still small voice of God's Spirit speaking to our hearts, enlightening our minds and our vision. We are assured, as Gabriel assured Mary, that "with God, nothing is impossible." NOTHING.

And so that leaves us at the fifth point on our way to the seeming impossible: the moment of decision. Mary's decision was clear, she answered: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

What will your answer be?