

Matthew 14:22-33

We humans struggled for centuries to understand how bees could possibly fly. According to our known laws of aviation, it seems impossible that a bee should be able to fly, because its wings are so small compared to the size and weight of its body. It's almost as if bees contradict our laws of aviation, but bees, of course, fly anyway, because bees don't care what humans think is impossible. And I think it's safe to say that God doesn't care what humans think is impossible, either, because God often invites us to do what we think is impossible. Just look at our Gospel reading today, and Jesus' invitation to Peter to do the impossible, to walk on water. Peter wants to follow Jesus and in doing the impossible, and he asked to join Him. Jesus encourages him not to fear, and simply says, "Come. Come and do the impossible with me."

Peter steps out of the boat in faith and finds himself walking on the water. Notice that Peter starts out strong and makes a few steps on the water. And then, he notices the strong winds around him. He stops focusing on Jesus, and instead, focuses on the turbulence around him and gets distracted. Fear and the impossibility of the situation overtake him. And what is the result of focusing on the impossibility instead of on Jesus? Peter sinks. Notice, however, that Jesus doesn't let him go. Jesus doesn't let him drown. Jesus stretches out His hand and catches him.

Like Peter and the disciples that day on the turbulent sea, we, too, find ourselves, right now, on turbulent seas. The wind and the waves are battering around in the form of, not only a pandemic, but of social division and upheaval. And it can be a bit scary at times. And yet, here we are, we're in it and God invites us to wade through it with God. It can seem overwhelming, maybe even a little bit impossible, but I think it's a good time just to remind ourselves that this isn't our first rodeo. We, as individuals, and we, as a nation, have been through turbulent times before. And we know that God was always there with an outstretched hand to help us.

Think, just for a moment, right now, about all the things you've done in your life that seemed impossible at the time. But you stepped out in faith anyway and discovered God's outstretched hand was there with you, ready to help you. As I look at my own life, I can think of a lot of these impossible moments, but one always comes immediately to mind. It's being a parent. A parent is so hard. In fact, I think a lot of parents would agree that, at times, it's impossible to be the good parent we want to be. But I believe that impossible calling is actually made possible by God's grace.

I believe God is performing miracles every day. And they're more impressive than walking on water. What about the impossibility of being a faithful Christian, of following in Jesus' steps, Jesus who loved his enemies and calls us to love our enemies? How could we ever learn to love and forgive people without that impossible calling being made possible by God's grace? How could we ever love those that hurt us and drive us crazy? We humans tend to separate. We divide ourselves up into camps. We constantly move into our own tribes. We embrace tribalism and human history is filled with stories of war between hostile factions and groups. So, how is it that we could possibly love our enemies the way Jesus asks us to do, during this moment in time of such social upheaval and disagreement?

Our baptismal vows, of course, remind us that we do that with God's help, with God's outstretched hand to grasp us when we sink, with God's help making the impossible possible. God doesn't leave. God's outstretched hand is there. And once one hand is in God's hand, then the other hand of ours is free to grasp someone else's hand, someone else who may be in danger of sinking, even those we disagree with, even those we're angry with. Does this sound impossible in our current context? Well, bees don't care what humans think are impossible and neither does God.

But I have to wonder, are we too far gone, right now, my friends? Are we too divided? Are we too

filled with contempt in our country for people on the other side of the aisle from us that we no longer believe we could follow Jesus' call to truly love our enemies, to work cooperatively with others and with God? Do we think it's impossible? I admit I do feel like it is, sometimes. I can feel like giving up or just digging in my heels or simply writing people off who don't agree with what seems clear and reasonable and charitable. But what does that solve?

And if any of us feel that way, right now, if we feel like we're in that struggle, then this story's for us. Because it invites us to see Jesus standing on the water, beckoning us out of our boats, out of our tribes, out of our camps, out of the warring factions we find ourselves, out of division, to embrace the other, to take those impossible steps of loving the unlovable. God is in the water with us. And so, when we get out of our boats, it's scary, but God's there. And God's hand is there to help us make the impossible possible.

During a recent email exchange with one of our church members, she offered me what I thought was an astute example or a lesson on how we might learn to love those we think of as our enemies. She described the fact that whenever she found herself, or finds herself, not liking somebody, really struggling with them, she stops and asks herself, "Would I be their friend if I ran into them in a foreign city, or even more so, could I be their friend if we were suffering together in a labor camp? Yeah, of course, I could. Then how bad can it be?"

So, in other words, as I thought about what she said, to me it seems that when we are stripped of the things that distract and separate us as people, and we recognize our common human needs and values, which is exactly what happens when we're in a crisis, then we can see a path towards mutual support and understanding even with those people we don't like or disagree with. And if we could do that in that situation, what stops us from doing it right now? Because I'd like to suggest that this moment in time that we are in, this moment of

social upheaval of division and pandemic, this is that crisis moment. It is the key moment when Jesus' call to love our enemies is most crucial. It is also simultaneously appearing to be the most impossible, now than ever.

And yet, the story tells us that Jesus stands on the water and calls us out of our boats, as the church and as individuals, to step out onto the water and do the impossible, to love each other, even the ones we disagree with, even our enemies, and to be peacemakers, to follow Jesus just as he called us to be. And yes, we'll fail and sink, at times, because people say and do incredibly difficult, sometimes stupid, sometimes cruel, things. And yet, God's hand is there to help us when that happens.

It is our turn to stretch out our hands and help people sinking in the storm. It is our time to do what seems impossible, because we must. And we are the church and we follow Jesus, and he has shown us how. This crisis demands the response of love and not hate for people, all people, made in God's image. So, my dear church, it's time to get out of those boats. It's time to put your feet out onto the water with God. And God's hand is ready to hold yours so that you can hold the hands of others. Maybe it seems impossible, again. But I get it. I get how hard it is. But bees don't care what humans think is impossible. And clearly, neither does God.

Amen.