

## For God All Things Are Possible

Luke 1:26-45

Cradock Presbyterian Church

December 9, 2012

There are a few things in life that are impossible. For example, understanding the opposite sex. Now notice, I *didn't* say "understanding women," I said "understanding the opposite sex," leaving it open to go both ways. You ladies are *never* gonna figure us men out, so you might as well quit trying. *We* can't figure us out. And us guys have quit trying to figure you ladies out long ago. It's impossible! We'll just be happy we have each other, and leave it at that.

Here's something else impossible: eating *one* potato chip. You can't! Lays had the right ad campaign for all those years. "Bet ya can't eat just one!" But it applies to every potato chip, even those store brand things. Just try and sit there with that bowl right in front of you, and eat *just one chip*. Can't be done!

That's just as impossible as driving down the Interstate at exactly the posted speed. Now I suppose you could cheat, and set your cruise control right at the speed limit. But what would be the fun in that? Besides, after about the hundredth car passed you, you'd click that cruise off and speed up to "match the traffic." You would! You know you would! Or at least, that's what you'd tell the officer if you got pulled. I do this "speed matching" thing every day.

If you really want to define impossible, then try training a cat. I've actually been dumb enough to try this. "Okay Fluffy, if you jump up on this cat house here, you get a treat. Here you go!" Sullen glare. "Up! Come on girl!" Sullen glare. Then body licking. You can't train 'em to walk, either. You put the leash around their neck, and try to lead

'em, you're just dragging a limp, honked-off cat around by the neck. About the only thing you can train 'em to do is to come to the food bowl when it's time to eat. It's impossible to train cats – they have a mind of their own.

Of course, one of the most impossible things is to get people with wealth or people with power to be humble. They have minds of their own, too, worse than the cats. Think “Donald Trump.” Think “Mitt Romney,” or think about any of those obnoxious politicians, the ones who are busy right now messing things up for us in Washington. Humble? If any of them had a humble thought, they might burst into flames! I don't think they can even spell the word. It just might be impossible to get a rich or powerful person to be humble.

Well, what does it mean to be humble, anyway? The definition in my dictionary for the adjective “humble” says “having or showing a modest or low estimate of one's own importance.” The verb gets defined as “to lower (someone) in dignity or importance.” Ain't no congressman or senator fits either definition. Not too many wealthy people fit it, either. And religious leaders! All of us get the big head; all of us feel like we got some power. Some of us get that way much worse than others. All of this – it's just the way we humans are. If we *have* something important or of worth; or if we're in charge of something, we're not usually humble, at least not when it comes to those things. We should know better. But it seems like we never learn. It seems like it's almost impossible for human beings to be humble.

You remember from last week how John's daddy Zechariah acted, don't you? He was in the place in the Temple where he should have expected that maybe he *might*

encounter something heavenly. When he did, and the angel told him he was gonna have a son, what did he do? You'd think he would have started celebrating. You'd think he would have started shouting praise. You'd certainly hope he'd have at least been thankful! But no – he had to assert himself. This is *his* Temple, on *his* watch. The angel just told him something astounding; rather than just accept this gift from God, Zechariah had to insert himself into the process by asking, “How will I know that this is so?” I'm an old dude, and my wife's old, too. He didn't accept what God had done, he didn't humble himself. It looks like he didn't think it was possible this could be happening to him.

Does this seem kinda mixed up? It isn't; people who aren't humble, who don't understand their place in God's scheme of things, are the very ones who have trouble believing in anything beyond themselves. Zechariah was depending on himself; he wasn't humble enough, not yet, to depend on God.

Think about Zechariah's question! *He was telling the angel he doubted God would really act; and if left up to him and Elizabeth, there wasn't going to be a baby boy!* “How Will I know this is so” = “Prove it!” Strong stuff, from somebody in the presence of God's messenger. Zechariah got humbled, all right – he couldn't talk, when he left the Temple. When he got the chance to show he believed God, when the time came for the naming of his son, he did what he was told to do by the angel; in essence, he humbled himself. *And his voice came back!* Proof that God's hand was in it all along. Proof that if you humble yourself and put things in God's hands, all things are possible.

What if Zechariah had just simply trusted God, believed in God? Could he even have brought himself to do that? Given his position as a priest, could he have acted any other way? To get an idea of how it *could* have gone, consider Mary.

Mary was among the poorest of the poor. She didn't have anything to hold onto with pride. As soon as you hear she was in Galilee, you know she was in poor country; when you hear "Nazareth," you're in that area the pizza companies block off – they don't want to deliver to that neighborhood. It's rough; it's poor, not many sales, no tips in Nazareth. She's engaged, but not yet married, so she *almost* has *some* status. Most scholars assume she was really young – 13 or 14 years old is the favorite guess. The greeting is really kinda funny in the original language. It means "one who has been made charming, lovely, agreeable; one who has been filled with grace; one who has been made graceful and beautiful." *That's* why Mary was "perplexed by his words, and pondered what sort of greeting this might be." It wondered if he was hitting on her! An *angel* might be hitting on her! Really? That's not how this works, she must have thought, angels don't do that sort of thing, so she kept listening. The angel goes on to explain himself; the second time around the angel explains: *God* is giving her grace by giving her a son.

Now note the difference in how Mary reacts and how Zechariah did. Zechariah asked, "How will I know this?" The emphasis was on him, on what *he* could know. It's like he had a right to know. Mary simply voices her confusion: "How can this be? since I am a virgin." She's asking for an explanation, not *demanding* to know – just as any humble person would, who simply wants to understand. Then the angel gives the

explanation, and it's a doozy. The Holy Spirit will do this; he'll overshadow you, and you'll conceive, and that'll make the child holy. In fact, he'll be the Son of God. Whoa!

And you thought Zechariah's deal, with him and Elizabeth being old, was a tough one to swallow. Son of GOD, no less.

So what does Mary do? She keeps listening. And she hears something that I think must have made sense. Why would the angel tell her about her relative Elizabeth if Elizabeth was unknown to her? From the way it's written, it makes sense to say that maybe Mary already knows about Elizabeth's being pregnant – it would be rather huge news all around the area. And if she was in the sixth month, she wouldn't be able to hide it very well! – so everyone would know. Mary is ready. "Let it be to me according to your word!" she says. And so it was. You know why it was? Humble Mary trusted God, and knew that with God, *all things are possible*.

That's why I read to you the story from Mark, about the rich young ruler. He's exactly the kind of guy who would have questioned what the angel was saying. Maybe you know people like that today. You can almost hear 'em now: "That's impossible! That doesn't fit my worldview. How can this happen, since it's outside human control? How can a woman in her 70s have a baby, and how can Mary have one without "knowing a man," (as the original text actually puts it)? That's impossible!" Well, unless you remember who's doing the doing. It's God; and with God all things are possible, even saving the world through the birth of a couple of babies. Mary's acceptance of the angel's message from God is the beginning of the salvation of the world.

Thing is, we always cut the story off right here. That's wrong! There's more to it than that. Mary needed to go to see Elizabeth. She must have thought that there was a reason the angel told her about her cousin. And there was, there really was. When the two ladies met, John leaped in his mother's womb. That leap *confirmed* the prophecy the angel had spoken, that "even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit." The leaping did that; it also confirmed for Mary the things the angel had said. Look! It's happening before my eyes, just as the angel said. And if she didn't quite understand yet, what Elizabeth says to her fills it all in.

So – a baby born to parents not able to conceive because they're nearly dead, and with no in vitro or other of our modern miracles; another baby born without normal conception, conceived by the Word of God. No wonder non-Christians have a problem with our faith! And yet –

And yet this is God we're dealing with. For God all things are possible. And that means, for *us* all things are possible. No matter how bleak things might look, in our own lives, in the life of the church, in the way the world is going, take heart: for God all things are possible. When doubt creeps in, and you wonder how any of this could be true, just remember: for God, all things are possible. And when it comes time to tell the Good News to others, be bold! Don't be afraid, don't worry about the outcome, just remember: for God, all things are possible. And once you realize that, and take it to heart, then go ahead and celebrate, harder than you ever thought you possibly could.