

## Thinking Beyond Impossible

April 16, 2006

We think as humans. Which is not surprising, because we are human beings! It is natural that we think in human terms. To utilize human logic and insight. To imagine what we, as human beings, can accomplish. So, we attempt to do those things which seem possible for us to do, being acutely aware of our human limits. Therefore, we have grown accustomed to saying either "I can't do that!" or "That's impossible."

Today, however, is Easter. Easter contradicts our typical human mindset. Christ has exceeded all expectation. He is risen. Done the impossible! Been victorious as we never would have imagined! And so Easter invites us to walk to the empty tomb and, there, to think beyond the impossible.

There's an old story. You will know it's been around awhile when you hear the price of Ice Cream. A 10-year-old boy entered a hotel coffee shop and sat at a table. A waitress put a glass of water in front of him.

"How much is an ice cream sundae?" he asked.

"Fifty cents," replied the waitress.

The little boy pulled his hand out of his pocket and studied the coins in it.

"Well, how much is a plain dish of ice cream?" he inquired.

By now more people were waiting for a table and the waitress was growing impatient.

"Thirty-five cents," she brusquely replied.

The little boy again counted his coins.

"I'll have the plain ice cream," he said.

The waitress brought the ice cream, put the bill on the table and walked away. The boy finished the ice cream, paid the cashier and left. When the waitress came back, she began to wipe down the table. There, placed neatly beside the empty dish, were two nickels and five pennies. You see, he couldn't have the sundae, because he had to have enough left over to leave her a tip.

We tend to be like that waitress. We look at ourselves and how we are inconvenienced. We feel the impatience of others. We feel so put out that we cannot see beyond our own needs. We use human logic to size up situations, which could (if we were willing) transport us to more holy ground.

Today we gather and profess to the Easter Story. We make a claim upon God's love for the world and say that there is nothing we would not do for love. Let's not walk into Monday and fall back into bad habits, forgetting again to think as Christians. Let's not become content with only what is possible. Let's not recreate God in our own image, rather than the other way around. We must learn to think beyond the impossible!

There was a news story this week. A girl was preparing for her First Communion. The problem was that the girl has Siliac Disease, which means she cannot eat wheat products. So her family has asked the church for a dispensation; that she might be allowed to substitute a rice wafer for the wheat wafer typically used during communion.

I am not sure what the outcome was or if the situation has yet been resolved. Initially the request was denied because it contradicted church policy. I assume now they may have worked it out. Whatever, it's a laughable example of how we have let legalism interfere with the holy. It's another demonstration of how we think as humans and not of how Jesus might have thought. Let's face it, the Christ would never have prevented someone from coming to the table. Jesus redefined what it meant to be included in God's kingdom. His healing ministry was to the leper and the paralytic and the infirm. He welcomed children as others did not. He would have done anything to ensure their rightful place at the table.

At what point did we begin to contrive rites and ordinances of religious faith that only served to exclude people? When did we become judge and jury, prone to pointing out people's flaws rather than their gifts? Today we seem insistent that some be denied the grace of God, for reasons we can explain only with human language. Surely not language sacred or divine! Again, we must think beyond the impossible. As Jesus did. When he spoke of liberation and new life. As the church should. As it must if it is to retain its integrity in the world.

Don't get me wrong! Jesus did judge. He told the elders not to throw stones at the adulteress. But in so doing, he also warned her to go and not sin again. The Kingdom has been ushered in and things must begin to change. But there is a notable difference - in God's new realm, the challenge is to set people free, rather than relegating them to the past. Jesus must be admired for seeing God's vision so clearly - the one that depicts a world embraced by love.

Jesus looked beyond poverty and prejudice and war. He knew that these could be overcome. No matter that people believed such accomplishments impossible! President George Bush recently stood in New Orleans and said, "Poverty is a blight on our nation." I don't always agree with our President, but in this case he was absolutely correct. Good for him to state it so publicly! The problem is that most of us have become content to live with poverty, saying a certain amount is acceptable. That, again, is a reflection of our human mindset. Jesus would disagree. "You must always minister to the least of these, my brothers and sisters." That is the nature of the Kingdom of Heaven. As Christians we cannot simply acknowledge the blight; we are called by God's loving vision to eradicate poverty and pain from the earth.

When you think as a Christian People, you no longer use such language as "I can't do that" or "It's impossible." Otherwise we would never be able to journey to that place that is beyond racism and sexism, class confinement and ageism. The religious community has been influential in bringing people to that place where all can live without prejudice and fear. Likewise, the church must continue to stand firm against homophobia. Against imperialism that plunders the earth and develops a society that benefits the rich. Read the New Testament:

Jesus knew the problem was not the poor, it was the rich! The church must advocate for peaceful reconciliation over and against militarism. In this day and age people are wondering if we can live without warfare. That's human thinking looming its head again. Those who follow Christ must think the impossible. The church must be prophetic: it is time to turn our weapons into plowshares and pruning hooks. It is possible. All things are possible with God.

I have spoken recently about church signs. Maybe someone should write a book documenting how churches advertise themselves on their front lawns. I spoke of the sign in Birmingham that claimed they offered "authentic worship." I am still wondering exactly what that might be! Last week, I saw a sign for a church in New Hampshire – the New Hope Church. Nothing wrong with that. Maybe we should change the name of this church. Maybe all churches should make claim to this. That we are the New Hope Church! Christ's hope. God's vision. Maybe we should go one step further and, though it sounds kind of smug, rename ourselves the Church of Divine Promise. At least then we would have our sights set on God and then have this visual reminder of our calling - to speak God's language of promise to all.

There are not many places in today's world that look beyond the possible. Beyond what we think we can do or accomplish. What is humanly possible. We are content to pretty much live with the status quo. Yet, Easter calls us beyond status quo to a divine promise. Of forgiveness for our sins. How unbelievable is that! That God would forgive us for our depravity. Of victory over death. The greatest of all boundaries overcome! Of new life for all people. That the world might live as one. Human logic has fallen into the trap of saying all this is not possible. With Christ, we must rise up and say "nothing is impossible with our God."

The Apostle Paul wrote to the people of Corinth (2 Cor. 5:7) that "we walk by faith and not by sight." How true! Yes, we walk today as Easter people. We walk by faith, placing our trust in God. In the Christ who lived to transform society.

Easter brings resurrection love and hope. Some would say that the resurrection is impossible. The church that bears the name of the Risen One must claim otherwise. We can never be content with what seems merely possible. Rather we must live beyond our human field of vision...we must see beyond ourselves. The gospel account is there. "He is risen!" The church must stand firm. That one day..."all will be one."