

“How Do Mermaids Stand?”  
Mark 14:32-36 (Jesus prays, “If possible”)  
Mark 10:23-27 (Does Jesus say all things are possible?)

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March 22, 1009

[Take roving mic and engage with congregation members] I want us to think about things that seem impossible, but that are indeed possible. What are some things that astonish you a bit, that surprise you because they are POSSIBLE?—things that may not have been possible a while back, or things that, when they occur, evoke in you a sense of awe. You respond, “Amazing, wonderful, it seemed impossible—and here it is!”

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[As I walk back to podium, show a little bag.] John was here yesterday with Dale and Jayne Honeycutt, Marilyn Caminiti, Peggy Sanford, and Ron Hiebert for the ½ Day Trustee Work Day. He brought home this empty little bag, saying Dale had handed out donuts, two in each bag. I wondered why John was showing me this empty bag, until he pointed to what was printed on the side: “With a donut in each hand: Anything is possible.”

What we have just done is similar to what people did in ancient days, before and during Jesus’ time, when they quoted the axiom, “For God all things are possible.” Someone would say this axiom, then people would respond with what was possible that they had not believed possible. Usually they would contrast what seemed to be fixed in nature with their own amazing experience of the divine.

When we are in situations or times, individually or collectively, when we are hoping for amazing results, even for results that look a little impossible, it’s great to refresh our memories of things that we didn’t know we ourselves could do, but we did, with God’s help. “I’m sure that each of you have stories like the one I’m about to tell you.

At the church I served in Orange County the past five years, there is a woman who LOVES Sequoia National Park. She had been going to this forest of trees for thirty years, on average at least once a year, and frequently mentioned she would like for me to join her sometime. Finally, one year at the very end of May, we traveled there together. Experienced about traveling to this location, she suggested that we fill up on gas at the last gas station before the entrance to the park. We stopped there, and as I was filling the tank, I read a sign that had been prominently placed at the entrance: “Chains Required Ahead; Last Chance to Purchase Chains—Here.” Sheryl said that in the thirty years of coming, she had *never once* needed chains—even in January; this was the end of May.

However, since the salesman said, “The Park Rangers are telling us they are requiring chains up ahead,” we purchased some used chains. I said to the man, politely, “Would you please put them on?”

He said, “No, Maim. I can’t put them on. You put them on when you get to the snow. It would ruin your tires to drive with chains on roads that are not icy.” “Oh,” I said, as I pondered how the chains would get onto the wheels, if we really did need them.

My friend was wise throughout this endeavor. She suggested that the man *show us* how to put them on, just in case. He asked me to back my van into a sheltered area, sheltered from the rain, as it had started to rain. I backed up. He sort of showed us how to do it.

I lived in Iowa when I was 25. That year there was a lot of snow and ice, but we used *snow tires* in the winter, not chains. I lived in Ohio for 21 years; but we never needed chains. I doubted we would really need these chains we were buying.

Sure enough, six miles ahead, the rain became snow, and Rangers were stopping all the vehicles, telling us to put chains on our vehicles or turn around and go back down the hill. Not afraid to ask for help, I asked the Park Ranger if he would please assist us. He told me it was dangerous where I had parked, and told me to move to the other side. I thanked him. We got out of the van, in our spring clothing, and began our task. The Ranger, whose presence gave me some comfort, came over to us and informed us that he was called on ahead. He could not supervise us, after all. “Good luck,” he said as he waved good-bye.

My friend was wise throughout this endeavor, but she was not very mobile, for she used a cane. Yet, with that cane she helped to pull the chains out straight, and she managed to *recall* what I was to do. For me, a prayer came first: “*God, all things are possible; please help us.*” Thirty minutes later, with my friend’s guidance, I had managed to put chains on a van for the first time in my life. My hands were frozen, my clothes wet, but we were driving on tires that would not skid on the ice, which, by that time had completely covered the ground.

I glowed for weeks after that adventure. We did it! I did it! Since we are near Big Bear, probably plenty of you have put chains on your tires. You might not think that putting winter chains on a van while snow is falling was any great achievement. But, you see, doing that was NOT within my self-identity. I did what I had considered impossible for me to do.

I shared this long story because it is very good for us to recall vividly what we *can* do and *have done* that is beyond what we thought we could do! I encourage you to do likewise.

This exercise helps us to truly affirm and believe, “Nothing is impossible....”

Jesus said several times, “For God, all things are possible.” He said it when he was discussing prayer.<sup>1</sup> He said it again, when he was explaining to his disciples that although God did not favor wealthy people over poor ones, as most people seemed to think at the time, both the rich and the poor could be saved. That is, Jesus was saying, God could save anyone! Nothing was impossible for God.

It is common for us to think of Jesus as one who often did what seemed to be impossible. He healed people. He empowered people by listening to them. Jesus spoke truthfully to leaders. He challenged social systems that led to poverty. Repeatedly, in lots of ways, Jesus showed that all things are possible, through God.

There are many things that are daunting that become possible because of each other—because of community. Dancing itself seems on the verge of impossible—perhaps that is why it evokes such reverence and a sense of beauty. Our liturgical dancers exemplified for us *The Servant Song*, a song that points out what we do for and with each other that is not possible alone. “Brother, let me be your servant. Let me be as Christ to you. Pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant, too.”

As a congregation, you have, and we are now demonstrating what wonderful possibilities we have to provide vital ministry here even as we pay off our state-of-the-art Education building, with gratitude to all those who had the fore-thought to do the remodeling a decade ago.

Without question, “With God, virtually all things are possible.”

Carolyn, you changed the axiom. You inserted the word “virtually” before all. Well, there are some things I would like that seem impossible. I would like *all* those who are fighting in wars right now to be spared the fate of suffering and death. I would like all teens to get safely from age 16 to 26. I would like, as a far more frivolous wish, to play softball. I do not know how any of these things are possible.

I do know that when we pray-really-earnestly-together many many many things *are* possible that had seemed not-so-surely possible.

Many personal and collective things that we want to be and do seem humanly impossible. However, God does not have the same constraints that we have. The seemingly impossible can and does happen.

**So, can God help a mermaid to stand? If all things are possible, how does a mermaid stand?**

Perhaps, not all things are *necessary*. Perhaps it is not necessary that the mermaid stand. *Perhaps what is possible is for the mermaid to understand that she does not need to stand.*

In one of the most serious, somber, pensive, challenging scenes of the entire Bible, Jesus prays. He is in the garden called Gethsemane. Jesus did not fold his hands nicely and pray a discrete little prayer. It is recorded that he “threw himself on the ground and prayed.” What did he pray? He prayed that, “If it were possible,” the events that were likely to occur soon not happen. He knew what might be coming up. He knew that he would probably be arrested, for people were so confused about who Jesus was and what kind of power he sought.

Jesus had given instructions on prayer, assuring his disciples that God could and would answer the prayer of those who believe. He said there was no obstacle to God’s power (11:23-24). Jesus, with God’s power, had done so many things that had not seemed possible. He had just restored Jairus’ daughter to life (5:37). But now, Jesus was praying fervently, stretched on the ground, “If it is possible,” let this not happen. “If it is possible.” This prayer binds Jesus to all others who have suffered through the centuries.

Yet, it happened. Jesus was arrested.

Evidently, it was not possible. Perhaps it was not *necessary* that Jesus be spared that arrest in order to fulfill his purpose on earth.

Perhaps it is not necessary for you and me to do and be everything we want to do and be.

I bet that each of you, through your faith and trust in yourself and in God, with the help of other people, could do many things that today seem impossible to you. Think about what you want to do, but are inclined to consider impossible.

I now know that with the help of a wise friend, I can put chains on the tires of a van when I have to. If we have enough support, we can make it through difficult times. If we persist, we can find a friend. If we sense God’s presence, we can have the strength we need to speak up in challenging situations.

Yet, perhaps, *everything* is not necessary.

How does a mermaid stand? It is not necessary that she stand. She can live a fulfilled life flapping her fins. That is, she can be who she is. You and I can live a rich and meaningful life as who we are. Jesus did much that seemed impossible. Yet, in that Garden, he accepted the necessity of facing reality as it was, which was not quite as he wanted it to be.

Virtually all things, with God, are possible. Certainly we can pay off the Education Building in 5 years. Certainly many people experience wonderful healings. Certainly reconciliation happens between people who seemed hardened against each other.

You and I can do many things that we thought were impossible. Yet, *occasionally*, as with Jesus, the *miracle that happens* is our being able to accept, with grace, and even gratitude, the fact that what we wanted so badly may not be necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark, Chapter 11