

CROSSING THE IMPOSSIBLE

St Matthias and St Luke, Vancouver

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The Lord is our guide as we dare to cross the impossible.

In our first reading today, 1 Kings 8:22-30, Solomon dedicates the New Temple. This marks a huge transition for the people of God. They have gone from being a nation of wanderers, to being a settled, productive, and established society. They have undergone many scary transitions to get there. They have crossed the Red Sea under the direction of Moses. They have escaped the Egyptian army. They have spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness. They have crossed the Jordan River. They have fought their way into the promised land. They have faced innumerable dangers and adversaries.

Through all of this they have learned to trust in the presence and care of God. They had to cross over impossible obstacles many times. They had to learn, time and again, to trust in the divine presence.

Our second lesson also has a theme of crossing the impossible. Revelations 21: 1-7, was written for a Christian community facing heavy persecution. In addition, they were grieving for the loss of the temple in Jerusalem, which had been destroyed by the Romans about 70 A.D. The temple had been a central point of reference for every believer. Now it was gone! How could the faith continue?

In the Book of Revelations, John of Patmos reminds his hearers of the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven! This is far more significant than the temple made with stones. It is just as Jesus had foretold. Not one stone would be left upon another. Keep your eyes focused on the kingdom coming with all of its Glory. There will be, "... no more... crying... former things have passed away... behold, I make all things new!"

The Gospel also speaks of crossing the impossible. Jesus meets his followers in a resurrection appearance. He says to them, "As the Father has sent me, even so send I you." Christ himself has crossed the impossible. He has conquered death and sin. He comes forth in resurrection power. He summons them into the resurrection life. He promises his gift of the Holy Spirit. He sends them forth on a costly journey to do the will of the Father and to go to the ends of the earth. How impossible this task must have seemed to fishermen from Galilee! In partnership with the Resurrected Lord, they went!

For each of these three journeys faith is essential. Trusting God is not optional. It is

completely necessary to make passage. Any journey of this kind is not possible if people just rely on their own abilities. There is risk and danger. There is also a God who brings us through!

We have a story in my family about my daughter Jenny when she was a little girl. We were on a family outing to the Lynn Valley Suspension Bridge and she was crossing with Uncle Chuck. Everyone was apprehensive about the wobbling and swaying, and the rocks and water below. She just kept saying, "Don't look down Uncle Chuck!"

When life is swaying we all want to focus on the rocks below. We need to focus instead on the adventure and the destination.

Through faith God helps us to cross the impossible. This leads to an experience of surprise and grace. This leads to a gratitude that lasts for centuries. This inspires new ages of faith, grace, and crossing the impossible. We cross the impossible, through God's power, not just for ourselves, but to bless the generations yet to come!

Some of my ancestors made the crossing from Ireland to escape famine in the early 1800's. Many of your ancestors faced similar painful transitions. There were the hardships that forced them to leave. There were the dangers en route. And there were the trials of adjusting to a new country.

Hebrew 13:14,15 reminds us that we are also spiritual immigrants. We are on a journey of painful transitions. "Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp, bearing abuse for him. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come. ...continually offer up.... praise to God... the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name."

You are here today because you know about this invisible God who carries us through. You seek the holy and heavenly city. In your own life experience you have learned to rely on Him. You know Him and trust Him.

When I think about crossing the impossible, I think of so many friends I have met over the years. They are people who have shown a great courage in the face of adversity. But they are also people who have learned to rely on the Lord and not on themselves.

I think of many parents I have met who have lost children. Even though their loss has been devastating, through their tears, they have experienced the Lord who carries them through.

When I was a young priest in the '70's in the northern Yukon, I ministered to many Gwitchin elders who were born in the 1800's. They had come through terrible times of famine and epidemic. Their losses were great. But their faith was greater. They would

sing in their own language, "My faith looks up to thee, the Lamb of Calvary..."

And then I think of my life. I think of the years that I spent alone, flying over the mountains in the most rugged terrain in Canada, piloting the Church plane to visit small congregations in isolated little communities. I cannot imagine that I did that now - 500 mile trips over the mountains with no radio contact. But I do know that the courage was not mine.

And I ask you to think of your own life. Why is it that you are a person of faith? Why is it that you have this inner assurance of God's grace? You have the gift of an inner knowing. You have seen a God who can carry you across the impossible.

Think of how God has brought you, over the course of your life, through many heartbreaks, discouragements, and trials. Many of us would be broken and embittered were it not for the presence of the Lord. Think of the times when our lives were at risk, or our souls were at risk, and we found that the Lord carried us through. What a remarkable God!

Jesus taught the people that if they have faith, they would "tell the mountains to go to the sea". Jesus summons us to a life that is based on faith, that reaches beyond ourselves, that takes risks, that journeys, endures, and follows.

Your parish stands in this great tradition. You have made an impossible crossing. Because of your deep conviction, your obedience to Holy Scripture, and your honest beliefs about holy living, a costly transition was the only way forward. You took trembling steps on your own. And you found that God was with you on your impossible crossing. The Lord gave you wise and gifted leaders. For each obstacle before you, there was also a way around.

In the short space of a few difficult months you found a new Diocese. You found a new Province. Where formally there were just a few individuals standing alone against great odds, you are now part of a Christian family of 1000 churches across North America and another 1000 in the making! Who would have believed that was possible?

This church family, The Anglican Church in North America, is poised to become larger than any church family you have left. It has full communion and acceptance by the vast majority of Anglicans around the world. The Gafcon gatherings past, and in 2013, offer the promise of strengthened linkages around the globe. Through these events, we seek to place at the feet of Jesus, a church that is reformed, scriptural, mission minded, evangelical, apostolic, and with a clear vision of holy living for all of humanity.

One of the Banking Companies had an ad recently that reminded us there are more people learning English in China, than there are people in all of England! We happen to be living at a moment in history, when there is unique opportunity for the global Anglican Communion. It should be no surprise that evil should try to confound us at just this moment!

We have a unique role to play in calling the world to Christ. As Anglicans we have the experience of honouring and working in many languages and cultures. We respect and value godly learning and true science. We are also on the brink of an Asian resurgence. We have precious personal and business linkages across the Pacific Basin.

Your parish is poised at the juncture of all of these tides of history! You have said yes to God! You have said yes, to an impossible journey. You have made a great crossing. You bear authentic Christianity to your community. But you bear it also to future generations, and to the world. You have entered, at cost, the Resurrection life, and you join with the apostles in bringing that Resurrection life to others.

And just as you faced a critical juncture, God brought you new friends in the people of Bethlehem Lutheran Church Vancouver. You come to a beautiful new worship space. More importantly you become partners with a welcoming sister congregation.

What privileged people we are, to know a God that has the power to bring us through the impossible. We know the touch of God's grace. We are people of profound gratitude. As a parish you have the experience of what so much of the Old and New Testament try to teach us. Rely on the Lord. He will bring you through. Be thankful. Tell the generations yet to come.

And your experience will be critical to the mission Christ has given to you. All around us are people who have impossible attitudes, impossible pride, impossible resentment, impossible loneliness, desperation and grief. Many suffer from crippling addictions and distorted values.

I don't know of anyone who doesn't need to find the God that we by grace have found. Everyone needs a Lord who will guide them through what is impossible.

By following Jesus we have come to a living faith and a breakthrough experience in our own lives. Our gratitude and love compel us to share this sacred knowledge with others! "The love of God compels us." (2 Cor.5:14) It spills over. It pushes us onward. We are driven by Christ's outreaching love.

"Through many dangers, toils and snares,

I have already come,
But grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home!"

We know the bigness of God. We know that we have been brought to this moment for a divine purpose. We have great expectations. Having come a long way, we know that the journey is not over. But with Jesus beside us, we dare to cross the impossible.