

Impossible Possibilities

John 14:12-31

#43 in John Series

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Prayer

Lord God you are love and you are an eternal consuming fire. And we ask that you would send your Holy Spirit to burn on the inside, that we might be your temple, your sanctuary, filled with your presence. We ask it, Lord God, in Jesus' name, help us to preach. Amen.

Sermon

We usually preach through the books in the Bible, and this morning we're preaching through the gospel of John. I want you to know that I don't pick texts because I understand them but because they come next in line.

We've been preaching through John 13 and 14 recently. It's the last supper, Jesus has just washed the feet of the disciples and now:

John 14:12

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me (has faith in me) will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.

"Do the works that I do and greater than these will he do." How? It reminds me of a video my friend Monte Swann sent to me recently.

[Young men from all over the world, with all different types of accents are sharing about the sport of water walking, while footage of them preparing for their water walks is shown.]

Young man 1: A few people have tried it. Nobody has ever managed to get anywhere close to what we got to today!

Young man 2: You have to believe you can do it. It's not, like, impossible.

Young man 1: There have been a few people who have been sort of following us.

Young man 2: Me, my boots and I are gonna make it.

Young man 1: I definitely think it's gonna be the next big thing. (Adventurous music plays as footage of numerous attempts of water walking is shown)

Young man 3: It's a new sport that hasn't existed before.

Young man 2: You have to run very fast on the water.

Young man 3: Obviously the first step is the most important one when we discovered: "Oh my God! Jesus! We're going one step, two steps, three steps!" We were actually discovering how to do it as we go along!

You know, Jesus healed the lame, fed the multitude and walked on water and He said, *“Whoever believes (trusts, has faith) will do greater works than these.”* So, I used to figure if I wasn’t walking on water I just wasn’t trying hard enough – I wasn’t using the right technique or I wasn’t concentrating. I figured, faith was like “using the Force.”

Remember Luke Skywalker on planet Degobah– when Yoda was teaching him to “use the force”? The force was this metaphysical, ubiquitous power that held everything together. According to the Complete Star Wars Encyclopedia, (I found this online) it was also known as “The Way.” “Luke, Luke! Use the force.” “Use the way.”

So, I remember praying and concentrating: “A horn will honk.” “This book will levitate.” “I’ll walk on water.” But no matter how hard I tried, or how much I concentrated, though I might get one step or two, I’d sink. It seemed impossible.

Some of you know my story: the turning point came one night along about 1978. I locked myself in the bathroom of my parents’ house in Littleton, Colorado. I dropped to my knees on the edge of the bathtub, and through tears, I cried, “Jesus, I don’t think I can believe in you any more.”

I didn’t see any “great works.” I didn’t see any “manifestations” of glory. And I’d been praying, “Just show me a sign so I could believe.” And that’s an interesting prayer, because you know, Jesus seems to be pretty ambivalent about signs. And you may not have noticed this, but this is terribly important. In the Gospel of John, He’s done seven. And John is very intentional about pointing that out. He started numbering them in chapter two.

- Water to wine was the first sign.
- Healing the official’s son was the second sign.
- Then the lame man at the pool of Bethesda
- Then feeding the five thousand
- Then walking on water
- Then healing the man born blind
- Then number seven, raising Lazarus from the dead, the end.

Seven is the number of the days of creation. It’s like all creation, all space and time is - a sign.

Signs point to something else. (That’s why they’re called signs.) So walking on water isn’t just about walking on water. John also refers to signs as “works.” Maybe “the work” is the substance of the sign, what it points to – the meaning.

John 6: 29 Jesus says, *“This is the work of God, that you believe in the one whom he has sent.”*

Trust in me, who I am, not the sign, but the substance. It’s interesting that by John 14, the signs are complete. What scholars refer to as “the book of signs,” (John 1-12) is over. You know, Easter really isn’t a sign, but the substance. Jesus only manifests to people that already loved Him. The signs were for the whole world to see. Easter was for those who loved Him to see. He said, *“an evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign.”* Adulterers seek the signs of love, but not love, the gifts of love, but not love.

Well, anyway, Jesus says, “*whoever (has faith) believes in me will do the works I do and greater than these.*” And He’s just washed the disciples’ feet and commanded them to do likewise saying, “*A new commandment I give you, that you love one another just as I have loved you.*” And He just washed their feet; it was no wondrous, miraculous, incredible sign— just a slave washing feet.

John 14: 13 (ESV) Next verse:

*Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.
If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.*

Now, that really seems impossible. Did John really believe this? Remember, John is writing this quite late in the first century. He’s the only disciple that hasn’t been executed; yet he has been or will be exiled to a penal colony on the island of Patmos. John has seen a whole lot of suffering. Don’t you think it would’ve occurred to John to pray, “Father get me off this island . . . in Jesus’ name?” Wouldn’t it have occurred to Paul to pray, “Father, please don’t let them flog me with the forty lashes less one . . . in Jesus’ name?” (Yet they did it five times.) And what about Peter? “Father, please don’t let me be crucified . . . in Jesus’ name.” What does it mean to ask something in Jesus’ name? Is it in the name of the letters, J-E-S-U and -S or what they mean, who they mean?

Have you ever prayed this prayer: “Jesus, I want to know you. I want to follow you. Make me like you.” I wonder if Peter, Paul, and John prayed that prayer? I have. Two years ago, feeling forsaken, beat up, even forsaken by God; I preached a sermon on loving when there’s no reward for love but Love; that is, loving Love; that is being crucified in love for Love as Love. When I sat down after the sermon, Susan leaned over and said, “I just heard Jesus say, ‘See, Peter, I’m making you more like me.’” Oops! I must’ve prayed that prayer in Jesus’ name.

Later that night, (John 16: 24) Jesus says it again, “*Whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.*” And then He says, “*Until now, you’ve asked nothing in my name.*” Three years, and nothing asked in His name, and now all that’s left of His earthly ministry is that in the morning He will be flogged with the forty lashes less one, crucified, and exiled to death and Hades. If it’s a sign, it’s a sign due to the lack of signs: A sign that Jesus, who had all power, chose to surrender all power, taking the form of a slave in order to wash our feet and our lives and reveal His glory—the glory of love. He just said, “*Now is the Son of Man glorified.*” Of all times! As Judas walks out to betray him, it’s night, and He says, “*Now is the Son of Man glorified.*”

This is no longer the sign,

But the substance: Love at any cost

Love in absolute freedom

Love entirely free of the constraints and control of this world

Love.

Perhaps the greatest work is Love, or anything done in the name of Love.

Next verse: John 14: 14 “*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*”

He just told us God’s commandment is eternal life. What are “*His commandments,*”—Jesus’ commandments?”

Well, check it out: In the Gospel of John, there's just one. He just said it and will soon say it again: *"Love one another, just as I have loved you."*

Now we know, love fulfills the whole law and Jesus fulfills the whole law. Law without love (or Jesus) is empty. But to love as Jesus loved is absolute perfection. So, *"doing greater works"* and *"getting anything in his name"* seems impossible. But let's be honest, this seems most impossible, *"Love one another, just as I have loved you?"*

We can make ourselves wash people's feet that I don't like, but Jesus just washed Peter's feet and Judas' feet because He wanted to. In a few hours, He'll receive a kiss from Judas and call him *"friend,"* and Jesus is the Truth and does not lie, so this love is no act.

In the morning, He'll hang on the tree and cry, *"Father, forgive them"* even as He bears the sins of the world and washes us in His blood, because He wants to. He said it, *"No one takes my life from me; I lay it down."*

"Love one another just as I have loved you?" "My commandment?" says Jesus.

Now check out 1 John 5: 3 *"This is the love of God that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not burdensome."*

Well, excuse me John, but exiled, beaten, flogged, and dying for my worst enemies because I want to . . . such that it's not burdensome seems pretty burdensome to me! NOT an easy yoke or light burden (and yet that cross was Jesus' yoke and burden) but love just like Jesus – impossible.

When I'm honest, I realize that what I usually call "love" is really lust, or codependency, manipulation, or some form of control. In other words, I barely ever, if ever, love . . . Love. I use love as a means to other ends. I use love like I try to use the force or use the way. I use love. And what is love? 1 John 4: *"God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only son into the world that we might live through him."*

God is love and Jesus is the *manifestation* of Love. So, just by trying to love with this old heart of mine, just trying to love, I end up using Love, then hating Love, and even crucifying Love. Why? Because I don't love - Love. It's not my nature.

Walking on water is nothing compared to love. It's an impossible possibility. The commandment to love reveals that I don't love and can't make myself love. It causes me to cry out for help, for a helper!

Well, maybe it's not just a commandment, but a promise: *"You **will** love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. And you **will** love your neighbor as yourself."* Not just a command, but a promise. Think with me: If God is love, then the Word of God is the Word of Love, which is the commandment of Love, which is Jesus. So, *"A new commandment I give you"* is like: *"A new me, I give you."* I need a new me! . . .

Maybe this would help. Remember this box? (Peter holds up a shoebox labeled Universe) We've been talking about it in the Gospel of John, the universe. Imagine that this is the universe, the entire Cosmos—the world—the big bang. Inside this is all creation, all space and time: the laws of cause and effect (those have to exist in space and time). It's our world. Outside the box is what? All around it? Not nothing, more like everything eternal and undying. Outside is God and God is Love, the eternal, unchanging decision that is Love. And so, our Cosmos, our Universe, our world, like, floats in Love; created by Love and maintained by Love through the Word of Love, and yet it can't receive Love, for it's in rebellion against Love. It's empty of Love for it won't surrender to Love. When Love shows up, we try to use Love, we even crucify Love, and so we can't love.

We can't comprehend love, but maybe Love can comprehend us.

We can't make love, but maybe Love makes us.

We can't produce love, we can't animate love, but maybe Love can animate us.

God is Love and Jesus is the Word of God, the commandment of God, the command of Love in human flesh. He's the first one to dance and He came that we would dance. The love that made the world, entered the world, then enters me (a new me) and causes me to dance.

The ancients used to talk about "the music of the spheres," the music that surrounds and animates the Cosmos. The Word of Love is the Logic of Love, it's the rhythm of Love, the music that is Love. If we control the music, we kill the music, but if we surrender to the music, we begin to dance, animated by the music. Then we don't use the force; the force uses us, animates us. Scripture says the entire Cosmos will be filled with Jesus, filled with the Logos of Love, Word of Love, music that is Love. Everything will be filled with Love and dance to the rhythm of Love, but maybe we can begin to dance now (a new me - now).

Jesus said, "*If you love me you will keep my commandments.*" Like: "If you surrender to the music, you will start to dance." When you dance, you forget the dance steps yet fulfill all the dance steps; you forget the law but fulfill all the commandments.

"If you love me you will keep my commandments." Maybe that's not a threat, but a promise. "*If you love me...*" and maybe you do love Him, just not very much yet. Not much and maybe you think it's nothing. You don't love much, and don't think love is much. You think love is nothing compared to walking on water or parting the Red Sea, yet Love made the sea.

You think washing feet or a cup of cold water given to a child or a visit to the sick and imprisoned is really nothing when it's actually everything, literally everything, for even a little love is Eternal Love and Imperishable Seed.

On Judgment day, Jesus said, the King will sit on the throne and He is not at all impressed with signs, and wonders, and miracles. People will say, "*Did we not cast out demons and prophecy? Did we not do many mighty works – in your name?*" And the Lord, the King will say, "*Depart from me you workers of iniquity. I never knew you.*" And yet He'll say to others: "*I was thirsty and you gave me a drink.*" "*I was sick and imprisoned and you came to visit me.*" "*Enter my kingdom.*" They'll say, "We don't remember that." Maybe they don't remember because they were dancing because they were filled with music—animated by a Spirit. They were free, not trying to love, they just did love (in other words, it was their nature - a new me).

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Well if we love Him, it’s because He first loved us, even if that love looks about the size of a seed implanted by a Word or as a Word.
1 John 4: 19 *“We love because he first loved us.”*

Back to our text: (John 14: 15-17)

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

The Spirit of Truth is the Spirit of Jesus, for Jesus is the Truth. He just said so: *“He dwells with you and will be in you.”*

John 14: 18-21

I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

“Manifest,” that’s what I wanted that day kneeling by the bathtub back in 1978.
(John 14: 22-23)

Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home (our abide or abode) with him.”

That’s how they’ll manifest to him. God will fill them with himself and He is love.

Now, I can’t even begin to comprehend all that, but I think He’s saying something like this:
“When you want to love, but can’t love, love! And you will love.” “With just a mustard seed of faith in love, plant that love, take the steps of love, and you will love.” “Even if you can’t hear the music of Love, practice the dance steps—not in fear, but faith, and the music will come and fill you and animate you to the rhythms of Love. “ “If you feel like you can’t love, but want to love, make a space for love and love will come and fill you.”

If you can’t love your wife, but want to love your wife, (because you have begun to love Jesus) do what you’d do, if you did love your wife and Love will come and fill you – manifest in you and help you—a miracle in you, the impossible possible in you.

If you don’t Love, but want to love, because you love, love (because you’ve begun to love Jesus) and act like you love and you will love. Practice the dance steps until the music sweeps you away dancing. Act like you love, and it’s *not* hypocrisy if you’re honest about the act and earnestly desire that the act would be real. That’s not hypocrisy. It’s hope in Faith waiting (longing) to be filled with Love.

When my daughters were little, like two, three, four; they'd play with their dolls, and I'd come into the room and they'd say, "Look daddy – I'm the mommy!" And not once did I ever look at them, point my finger, and say, "Liar, hypocrite, Pharisee!" Actually, I realized that one day a miracle might happen and God might fill the hope with life, and fill them with babies, and all that acting like mommies would've prepared them to be mommies. Maybe God is preparing us for something in this place.

If you don't love the poor, but want to love the poor because you've begun to love Jesus, do what you'd do if you *did* love the poor and Love will come and manifest to you. Mother Teresa told of a day, in Bombay, when her sisters picked up a dying man on the street. As they did, the whole of his back remained on the street. The sisters brought him home to die – they bathed him staring at those naked bones on his back. He never said a word. Teresa asked the sisters: "What did you feel when you were touching him?" One answered for all. She said, "I have never felt the presence of Christ so real, mother, as when I was touching him."

Mother Teresa told thousands of stories like that. Have you ever become a story like that? Have you ever loved the unlovable? Loved someone from whom you expected nothing in return and then just felt so alive? Perhaps Jesus was manifesting to you.

He said, *"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me and I will love him and manifest myself to him."* That's what I wanted that night in high school as I knelt by the bathtub in my parents' house in Littleton, a manifestation of Jesus. That's why high school kids in my old youth group kept meeting Jesus on the wrong youth group retreat. We'd plan outreach retreats full of signs and wonders canoeing, waterskiing, great games and speakers who would explain the gospel and ask the kids to make a decision and maybe a few did . . . kind of.

We also planned mission trips for the "committed kids," the ones we figured already made a decision for Jesus. But they kept deciding "for Jesus" on that trip – the wrong trip. They'd build houses during the day in the Tijuana dump, play with the children that lived there, they gave them cups of cold water. They fed the hungry and clothed the naked. During the day, they did acts of love. Then at night around the campfire, they'd say, "I believe in Love." "Now I believe in Jesus." You see, He had manifested to them and now He manifested in them—the decision of God—the free will of God—the Word of God—the Love that is God had manifested to them.

Years ago, I was praying for a friend that was reliving a horrific trauma. As I prayed she had a vision of Jesus standing in front of her. She cried to Him, "I want you to hold me." She said to me, "Why won't He hold me?" I didn't know and so I wrapped my arms even more tightly around her and I said, "Why don't you ask him?" So she just cried, "Why won't you hold me?" She was silent and then she told me, "He just said, 'I am.'" "I am holding you."

He was using my arms, my body! He not only manifested to me, and He not only manifested in me, He manifested *as* me – a new me. His Spirit in my body, the eternal decision, from outside the Cosmos, the free will of God, God's will in me – Wow!

You see, the “greater works” are still His works, for we become His body and they are more and more, for His body grows – *HIS body*—His body that still suffers for Love in this fallen world.

And listen, there is no greater work than that.

And this is the miracle, the greatest possible, impossible possibility:

That you and I would freely choose love, that we would love Love,
That John would want to love like Christ,
That Paul would want to share in his sufferings,
That Peter would want to be crucified with Christ,
That we would want to love above all else – love in freedom,
That we would not want to be greedy,
Not want to covet or lust, just not want to take, but give.
Not want to be proud, but humble, not want to be first, but last.
That we would *want* to humble ourselves and wash feet
That we would *want* to love is the greatest possible impossible possibility

It's the hardest thing for us to believe:

That God would send His Spirit into our hearts
That we would actually have new hearts
So we would actually want what God wants
So we would actually get whatever we want
And therefore be entirely at peace with all things.

The hardest thing for us to believe is that God would create a new me, in old me;
Even if right now, it's the size of a seed.

Let's finish this chapter: (John 14: 23-31)

Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me. These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid, you heard me say to you ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.”

That the world, Cosmos, may know this is why the world was created.

This is why it was subjected to futility and pain.

This is what all creation and all signs point to.

All signs point to this substance.

“So that the world may know that I **love** the Father”

“So that the world (cosmos) might know **Love**.”

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—three persons—one substance – Love.

In the morning, there would be no signs, for this is the substance: body broken and blood shed. It's the Revelation of love. He cries, "*It is finished*," bows His head, and "*delivers up his spirit*;" that Spirit that is sent into our hearts, that decision that will one day fill all things with Love.

So I knelt by the side of the bathtub and through my tears I cried, "Jesus I don't think I can believe in you any more." I had been seeking a sign, and I saw no signs. And now let me tell you, I've seen all sorts of miraculous signs, healings, exorcisms, manifestations of power. I've seen all sorts of miraculous signs but not when I sought the signs, only when I sought Love, only when I looked for Love.

And check this out: Peter, the Apostle did walk on water for as long as he did not seek to walk on water. He walked on water as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus – the manifestation of Love.

Well, that night in the bathroom, (the closest thing I have to a conversion experience) I cried, "Jesus, I don't think I can believe in you anymore." Much later, I realized (that without thinking), as if it was my second nature or perhaps my first nature, I was talking to the One I said I didn't believe in. I must have believed. I had no signs, but I had met the Substance – it had manifested in my dad, in my mom, in the people who loved me—the manifestation of Love to me.

Do you realize that's more powerful than all the signs and wonders in the world?

It's not the sign of love, it is Love.
It's not the gifts of the Spirit, it *is* the Spirit.
It's not the work *of* God, but the work that *is* God.

I hope we're a church that desires the gifts of the Spirit, and expects to see signs and wonders but if we don't have love we're nothing.

Maybe I'm getting old, but I've seen my fair share of miracles, signs, and wonders, and they're pretty cool, but if we could just love each other we would already be home. 1 Corinthians 13, "*Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things...*" It seems pretty clear to me: Love wins and it starts here. It starts now—at this table.

Communion

For on that night, that He said these things, that night that there were no signs, for we had arrived at the substance, He took bread and He broke it saying, "*This is my body given to you; take and eat, and do it in remembrance of me.*" And in the same manner, after supper and having given thanks, He took the cup and He said, "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood.*"

"Remember the life is in the blood, in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins, drink of it all of you. Do it in remembrance of me. Eat and drink."

And so He invites you to come to the table, tear off a piece of the bread, dip it in the cup, (dark cups are wine and light cups are juice). And then, with faith, take it (gosh, you only need a mustard seed of faith). So, if you're sitting out there struggling saying, "Gee should I really do this or not?" Well, if you like Him, if you've just got a mustard seed of faith, come to the table.

Take that little speck, dip it in the cup, and you place the Eternal Seed in the broken soil that is your heart, place your new me in your old me, and worship. It will grow.
In Jesus' name, believe the gospel and live!

Benediction

Saint Jerome records John's last words. According to church history, I think John died in Ephesus. Jerome says that as he was lying on his deathbed, the church gathered around him and asked if he had any last words. And this is what he said, "Little children – love one another." "Little children, - love one another." "Little children – love one another."

They asked, "Is that all you have to say?" He said, "It is enough, for it is the Lord's command." So believe the gospel—the Love that He has for you. And may you love as He has loved you. (Peter is holding the shoebox labeled Universe, and He gives it a shake.) And love will not fail. Mathew 18:5 In Jesus' name, believe the gospel, Amen.

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.