

Doing the Impossible

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church on October 10th, 2021 - Amos 6:10-15, Mar 10:17-31)

Lately I have been embroidering some Mr. Men characters onto a knitted jumper. Maybe it is my age, but the eye of the needle that I need to tread the wool through seems much smaller than I remember. I don't know how many times I have to try. Maybe it is my eyes, maybe the light I am working under. I know I should have got some help from a needle threader but I chose to persevere, sometimes curse and persevere. Sometimes it felt impossible. It reminds me of an experiment a chemist friend of mine showed me to use as a children's talk, maybe you have seen it – it is putting a hard-boiled egg (shell removed) into the neck of a bottle without breaking the egg – sounds impossible, and it is unless you happen to have some lit matches in the bottom of the bottle and then quickly place the egg on the top, the change in air pressure means that the egg is able to squeeze through the neck without breaking.

Jesus said it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of the needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Not impossible, just really difficult.

If you have ever ridden a camel, you will know just how stubborn they can be, they have a mind of their own and nothing happens until they are good and ready, it is very difficult to get them to do what you want them to do when you want them to do it. One just needs to be patient.

As we heard in the children's talk, so beautifully put and pictured in the story 'The Little Gate' by Nick Butterworth, the eye of the needle was a little gate in the city wall. Too big for a camel to go through with its load, but when unencumbered and with a bit of perseverance, a bit of shuffling, some assistance and perhaps pushing a camel can get through. Difficult but possible.

The young man in the story from Mark is by all accounts quite devout and has done all the right things, he has kept the commandments but he wants to know if that is enough or if he needs to do more to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus commends his actions thus far, even looks upon him with love, but suggests he needs to do one thing more. Jesus asks him to do what for some would be impossible or at the very least difficult. Jesus asks him, in effect, to put those rules and commandments into action. He asks him to sell all his possessions (and we think that amounts to a lot) and give the proceeds to the poor. Difficult but not impossible. The man goes away, but we don't know what he does. Is he able to do it? Is it too hard? The same level of difficulty as getting a camel through the eye of the needle – you need to unencumber yourself from your possessions to make it through.

Difficult but not impossible.

Amos tells us that if we love good and hate evil, if we treat those who practice righteousness and justice properly, and if we don't take bribes, or if we don't ignore the needs of others then God will look graciously on us, just like Jesus looked lovingly on the rich man.

I wonder if you look back on your life, can see any moments where you with God's help have managed to do the seemingly impossible. For this shy kid from Geelong, I never dreamt I would find myself working with some of the hardest juvenile offenders in Victoria or work with people living with dementia or do public speaking (preaching) week

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after week. Seemed impossible to that sixteen-year-old shy, average student. With God all things are possible.

Did we think it was possible to pull a soccer team of young boys out of a flooded cave system alive? Seemingly impossible, but perhaps with prayer, diligent doctors and divers and a lot of courage they one by one were brought out alive. Seemingly impossible.

Did a young kid from the Western Districts at the end of the 1800's dream he would become a Baptist minister, preach to thousands in the community and have a statue erected in his honour on the main road. Did the young Joe Goble think that would be possible? With God all things are possible.

God calls us to have a go at the seemingly impossible. To put others first, to give up what we have so others might have what they need. That is what Jesus asked of the rich man and of us.

What is our eye of the needle? What is stopping us from living out our callings both individually and as a church community. Where do we need to persevere? What do we need to give up? What kind of assistance do we need to give each other - how do we need to give a prod of two? How can we help others carry the load, or cast off what is too heavy and gets in the way of living a life of freedom.

With God's help things that we thought were unlikely or impossible are indeed possible. Possible as our God who is a God of grace looks lovingly upon you and your faithful endeavours.

Some of the words of the song 'Imagine' spring to mind.

*Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood (sic) of man*

*Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world*

*You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one*

Living this, which is akin to what Jesus asks of the rich young man will lead to blessing for all. Jesus reminds his disciples that following him and living out his calling on our lives will mean that we will receive a hundredfold. It's true isn't it, there is often more joy in giving than receiving.

With God all things are possible!