



**"WHAT are you waiting for?"**  
**SCRIPTURE: LUKE 1: 26-38**  
**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**  
**December 20, 2020**  
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Luke 1:26-38

1:26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth,

1:27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

1:28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."

1:29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

1:30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

1:31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.

1:32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.

1:33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

1:34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

1:35 The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

1:36 And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.

1:37 For nothing will be impossible with God."

1:38 Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

The Word of the LORD.  
**Thanks be to God.**

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If we're talking about what seems impossible, I've got a growing list right now in my life.

I could start with the mundane:

- Hundreds of unanswered emails. It feels impossible to catch up.
- A world where there is no laundry in the hamper after you do 15 loads of laundry and you've just put everything away.
- That my children would actually wash all their dishes in the kitchen after they eat.

But those are just low grade impossibilities. And truth be told, I could make all of those things happen--it would be hard, but honestly it's not impossible. It may be improbable, but not impossible.

We can take it up a notch--away from the mundane frustrations of the mountains of emails, laundry, and dishes. There's plenty that feels impossible:

- An end to this pandemic
- A coordinated and cooperative effort at all levels of our government to end this pandemic
- A consensus that we should actually all listen to the science so we can end this pandemic
- A shared sense of the magnitude of loss that this country is experiencing so we can end this pandemic.

The stakes are higher. Lives are being lost--a staggering amount of lives are being lost. And even when lives are spared, there is loss upon loss--loss of resources, jobs, community, connection. And while the conditions of our country make the prospect of coming together to end this pandemic seem impossible, the truth is that it isn't impossible. Our country could have and should have done better. Ending this pandemic is not impossible. Human beings have made ending this pandemic so much more arduous and costly than it had to be.

It's not that it's impossible, it's that human beings can find a way to make things so much harder than they have to be.

Let's take it up even another notch, if we're really looking for things that are impossible. Let's be honest with ourselves. What are the things we are facing that really are impossible? If we're telling the truth right now, what feels impossible--share it in the chat.

While you're typing, I'll get started with the list:

- A world without violence.
- A world without greed.
- A world without suffering.

I know those are pretty abstract--but they are real--and violence, greed, and suffering impact our everyday lives in painful ways. The world without them seems impossible to even imagine.

## (what's in the chat)

More concrete examples:

- It's impossible to bring back species who are now extinct because of climate change.
- It's impossible to really compensate BIPOC for the total cumulative loss and damages wrought by chattel slavery, colonialism, genocide, capitalism, racism
- It's impossible turn back time before over 300,000 people have been lost just in the United States alone to COVID 19.

I'll get more personal:

- I can't make it stop hurting that my mom is slipping away.
- I can't make it stop hurting that so many of you at Grace Covenant are feeling the pain of impossibility because of the struggle your child is going through, because of the news you just got from your doctor, because you are having to say a painful goodbye to someone you love, because you don't know if your marriage can be salvaged, because it hurts too much to keep going.

That's the kind of impossibility the angel Gabriel is talking about. The kind of impossible that is about human capacity and the way things work in the world. The kind of impossible that we're forced to accept daily--the kind of impossibility that hurts and that harms, the kind of impossibility that we've grown accustomed to on this planet.

This is the kind of impossible that makes the faith we confess seem ridiculous to many. How absurd that we would believe this Divine messenger who says God can defy all human limitation, all the conditions of possibility that create the parameters of existence.

Let's be honest, it's why our faith tradition can be absconded with by Empire, it's why our faith tradition has been so easily occupied by oppressors and abusers and grifters and liars.

Empire uses Gabriel's words to pacify us into looking beyond this world for the inbreaking of God's justice and to fail to hold the powers and principalities accountable for injustice right now.

Empire uses this idea of the impossibility that doesn't stop God to justify things like manifest destiny and the doctrine of discovery and colonization and genocide.

Abusers and liars use God's impossibility to prey on vulnerable people and trap them in cycles of abuse and exploitation. The grifters say, "Nothing is impossible with God so dip into your savings and call the number on the screen and help fund a scam that millions of people are buying into."

The abusers say, "Nothing is impossible with God so God will bless this forbidden relationship" that abusive pastors lure parishioners into.

God's impossibility can be the trump card of those who abuse their power--and keep those oppressed locked in to habits of thinking and being that are self-destructive and even hate-filled.

Gabriel's pronouncement of God's capacity to defy impossibility can liberate the captives.

But also, Gabriel's words can give captors a way to throw away the key that holds so many in bondage.

This impossibility that the angel Gabriel announces is both our greatest strength and our greatest weakness as a people of faith.

Can you touch into that razor's edge that we are walking on together as we trudge again toward Bethlehem in 2020?

Because if you can, then you have some visceral data about how hard our journey is right now. We are staggering toward Bethlehem this year--heavy with grief, activated by anxiety, numb from relentless death and shattered lives, and paranoid from all the lies that come at us and move through us--all the ways we've been used to prop things up we didn't consent to, all the ways we participate in our own demise.

We limp toward Bethlehem compromised beings.

And on the treacherous road, this angel's voice cries out and says, don't be afraid and God has chosen you and things you can't even imagine will come true and nothing is impossible with God.

This angel tells us that God is not constrained by our suffering or our social position or limited vision or our doubt or even by our imagination.

That's the God we're waiting for, my friends, my siblings, my beloved community.

WHAT are we waiting for? Well in our minds, we are waiting for a miracle. And faith is the deep longing that says believe.

The deep longing that, even now, kindles in us the courage to trust all that we cannot see and all that we cannot do or be.

That deep longing that makes us keep moving together toward something so startling, so beautiful, so tender, so wonderful, so impossible that only God could accomplish it.

It may sound impossible to us, but that's exactly where God really shines. Let it be with us, Grace Covenant. Let it be with us.

Thanks be to God.