There is no Bible verse that commands, “Do what is possible.” In fact, when the Bible uses the word “possible,” it is contrasting what God can do versus what human beings *cannot* do! For example, Jesus said, “What is impossible for mortals is possible for God” (Luke 18:27). Yet, there is an underlying theme in Scripture advocating and praising human effort, diligence, perseverance, and “bearing fruit” which points us toward doing what is possible in the realm of good works, healing, peacemaking, and other virtuous undertakings.

Saint Francis of Assisi once advised, “Start by doing what’s necessary; then do what’s possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.” Francis’ statement suggests that there is a momentum that may be unleashed by doing the necessary and the possible, which may carry over into the seemingly impossible. But while that can be true, we ought not take it as a guarantee and treat the “possible” as if it were only a step on a larger journey. In truly difficult circumstances, the possible may be all that is ever accomplished, and doing the possible can still be a godly thing.

Kitty Harris, director of the Center for the Study of Addiction and Recovery at Texas Tech University, gives us an application of this principle from her journey to recovery from alcohol addiction. “As we begin the journey of recovery, we are capable of doing only the necessary. We don’t drink and we go to meetings, and we live our lives in hourly increments. Slowly, as hours turn into days and days into months, the fog lifts and we begin to recall our forsaken dreams and goals. One day we realize it might be possible for us to achieve what we abandoned. As our dreams are reclaimed, we become the people we were intended to be and suddenly we realize we are doing the impossible. That is the story of my recovery…”

This principle also applies to projects or missions you may feel called by God to undertake, but which (at first) seem impossible to you. Doing some part of the project that is possible is likely to give you an indication regarding whether you are really feeling the call of God or only entertaining an idea of your own. As George MacDonald wrote: “All things are possible with God, but all things are not easy.”

Father Richard Frechette discovered this when he went to Haiti in 1987 to work at an orphanage. Moved by the tremendous need he saw there Frechette launched the St. Luke Foundation to provide basic, everyday help and education for Haiti’s children. St. Luke’s now operates schools for 8,000 elementary children and 1,200 high school students. The foundation also supports businesses employing Haitians which helps to meet the food needs of families. In total, St. Luke’s programs touch the lives of 150,000 Haitians each year.

Frechette described conditions in Haiti as terrible on almost every level, and not getting better. Yet, he pursues his work with great love and a marvelous confidence in the potential of the children who are involved. “I don’t see so much the bad part of it,” he said. “I see what’s possible.” Summarizing what St. Luke does, Frechette said, “We raise children, that’s what we do.” He adds: “When you do the right thing, the next right thing will happen.”

Doing what is possible puts us in a position where God will transform us from people who think real change is impossible, to people who are doing the life-changing work of God, even when it looks like the odds are against achieving anything. In Nazareth, Jesus “could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.” More would have been possible if others had a more open-minded faith, but Jesus did what he could, and it meant the world to those few sick people whom he cured. For them, it was the will of God the Father being done by God the Son.

Jesus said, “With God, all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). While this is true, it does not imply that all things are easy. Accomplishing the impossible typically takes extended effort. And it does not imply that all things are immediate. Reaching worthwhile goals require a long-term investment of time and energy. Lastly, it does not imply that all things will be painless. Personal sacrifice is part of the process. It may not be easy, immediate, or painless, but for those willing to step out in faith, for those bold enough to trust God to do the impossible, the reward will always be greater than the investment.

One final example: as we celebrate the birthday of our nation today, we remember the seemingly impossible task faced by our founders. They picked a fight with England, the superpower of the eighteenth century, and won! They drafted a Declaration of Independence and issued a Constitution, which guaranteed the “inalienable” rights of American citizens, creating the strongest democracy in world history. They accomplished this seemingly impossible task “by the grace of God.” Of this new nation and its unique government, Alexander Hamilton declared: “For my own part, I sincerely esteem it a system which without the finger of God never could have been suggested and agreed upon by such a diversity of interests.” James Madison agreed: “It is impossible for the man of pious reflection not to perceive in it a finger of that Almighty Hand which has been so frequently and signally extended to our relief in the critical steps of the Revolution.”

Our nation is not perfect, but we may yet become a “shining light on a hill,” an example to other nations of just what is possible to achieve with God’s help. Our prayer is that each of us as individuals, as a congregation, as a community, and as a nation may do what is right, what is possible, working with God for whom the seemingly impossible is easily achievable.

Prayer: Lord, we come to You with this prayer for our land. You promise that when your people pray, humble themselves, and seek You, You will hear and answer. You even promise healing in the land.  Lord, our land needs healing from disunity, hate, unrighteousness, idolatry…and we believe it starts with us. We humble ourselves before You right here, right now. We are seeking Your face. We ask You to give us a repentant spirit so we may be your instruments, ushering in Your blessing for this nation.

Lord, we believe in Your sovereignty. We know You are the One who sets up rulers and kings. We pray for our leaders and future leaders…and those who elect them…to have wisdom, knowledge, and discernment, for these things come from You. We pray for Your Kingdom to come, Your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. We know Your will is for righteousness, salvation, and truth. We pray for these things to define our lives, our relationships, our homes, our communities, and our nation. We ask for Your church to be vessels that usher in Your Kingdom and fulfill Your will. Grant us, Your servants, success as we seek to glorify Your name. This we pray in the strong name of Jesus. Amen.

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**Doing What Is Possible**

Sunday, July 4, 2021 Mark 6:1-13

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

In September 2020, Israel signed diplomatic pacts with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, the first such agreements between Israel and her Arab neighbors since the peace accords with Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994). The United States brokered the pacts and dubbed them the “Abraham Accords” in recognition of the biblical Abraham who is the spiritual ancestor of both Jews and Muslims. The accords normalized relationships between Israel and these two Muslim countries, and may set a precedent for how peace in the Middle East will progress.

The biggest step toward Middle East peace would be a resolution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, but that has not happened. The Abraham Accords ignored this conflict, focusing instead on how an accord could benefit those nations willing to be involved. Sometimes, doing what is possible is better than grumbling about what cannot be achieved.

Something like that is happening in today’s reading. Jesus visited his hometown of Nazareth and when the Sabbath came, he went to the local synagogue to teach. His reputation as a miracle worker preceded him, drawing a crowd, but Jesus’ teaching was apparently not what that congregation expected. Yes, there was great wisdom in what he said, but who did Jesus think he was? Here was a hometown boy, and some in the crowd thought was getting too big for his britches. Mark writes, “they took offense at him” (v. 3). Some in the congregation had no faith in Jesus, so they missed out on what he might have done for them.

Mark further comments: “And [Jesus] could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them” (v. 5). So, it seems some people present had enough faith to receive Jesus’ help. Here we find the linkage to the Abraham Accords. When Jesus could not accomplish in Nazareth what he had set out to do (what he was willing to do), he did what was possible (what the circumstances allowed) and healed a few sick people. Sometimes, doing what is possible is better than doing nothing if solving the larger problem is beyond reach.