



Following Jesus means taking risky steps of faith

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him.
(Matthew 4:18-19)

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The decision to follow Jesus will always involve risk. Following Jesus is never 'safe', nor is it ever predictable. Rather, being a disciple of Jesus involves following him wherever he goes and obeying whatever he asks.

Are you willing to follow Jesus when he asks you to take risky steps of faith, and follow him into new situations which are impossible for you to accomplish on your own?

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What are you believing God for this year?

Perhaps it is just to survive another year.

Perhaps it is going through the year without having to have any joints replaced!

Perhaps it is believing God to help you step into new area of ministry or for God to be with you as you witness to a loved one.

What I hope, however, is that whatever you are believing God for ... it is absolutely impossible for you to do on your own.

How many of you are trusting God for a mountain to move?

I think you'd agree that's a prayer request that is pretty impossible!

But I want to start my message by telling you a story that shows faith in God really can move a mountain.

In the 1930s there was an orphanage in Japan run by Irene Webster-Smith. The orphanage was called Sunrise Home, which was a strange name, really because it was situated in the shadow of a mountain, and rarely got any sunlight.

When Irene first moved to the orphanage, she quickly ascertained that sunlight was essential for the growth and health of the babies, as many had tuberculosis. So, not shrinking away from a challenge, she told the children that one way they could get rid of the mountain that blocked their sunlight was by moving the dirt one shovel at a time.

However, after months of effort, only a little dent had been made.

As time progressed Irene needed to visit another city. The children said they would continue their shovelling in her absence. Almost as an afterthought, she suggested they pray about the mountain. One girl prayed, "Lord Jesus, last Sunday we heard in Sunday School that if we had faith as a grain of mustard seed, we could remove mountains. In fact, you said we could move a mountain into the sea. Here the sea is just across the road. Will you please take our mountain and put it into the sea?"

Shortly before she was to return to the orphanage, Irene received a card from the children saying they had a wonderful surprise.

When she returned, they led her to the front yard and lo and behold, the entire mountain had gone!

The children explained that a week earlier a series of trucks filled with workers had come up the hill and without a word proceeded to transport truckload after truckload of dirt. Apparently, their 'mountain' was needed as landfill in an area corroded by the sea.

Certainly, we worship the God who calls us to follow him.

But he calls us NOT to a life of normalcy. Rather, he calls us to follow him into a life of faith adventures, where the impossible becomes possible, and the mediocre becomes miraculous.

Point 1 | The decision to follow Jesus will always involve risk – stepping out in faithful trust of God

Let's step into an average day of Peter, Andrew, James and John.

They are fishing, minding their own business, just like every other day.

But, then this strange man showed up, and suddenly the day turned into anything but normal.

Let's watch ... [play video from The Visual Gospel – Part 1]

Don't you love the expression on their faces?

Imagine what's going on in their minds, "Who is this guy? What do you mean 'fishers of people? You want us to just drop everything and follow you?"

Each of these men faced a decision.

As Bill said last week, 'a once in a life-time decision'.

They had to decide. 'Will I remain in the boat, staying in control of my life?' or 'Will I step out from everything I've ever known, and follow this strange man into a different life?'

What a humungous risk! These men only knew how to be fishermen.

But Jesus was inviting them to accompany him as in a life they had never done before – to become his followers, his students, his disciples.

He was going to be their teacher, showing them how to 'fish for people'.

Let's see how they responded:

Play video [Visual Gospel – Part 2]

Every time I watch this scene my heart leaps at the miracle of what the Spirit of God can do in the heart of a person.

They dropped everything and followed Jesus.

Still today, Jesus calls each and every one of us to drop what is familiar and known to us and follow Him.

Point 2 | Jesus always invites us to believe him for the impossible – so that God is glorified.

But, the life following Jesus can never be regarded as 'same-old, same-old'.

I mean, when Jesus said, "I will make you fishers of people" ... wouldn't it have been weird if Peter and John had answered the Lord,

'Oh fine. Its OK Jesus we know how to do that. You stay here and we'll go and do that!'

No! When God invites us to join Him in His work in the world, He will never expect us to rely on our own power and strength or ingenuity to fulfil His work.

God's invitation will always require a step into faithful trust of *His* power, *His* wisdom, *His* ability – God never says "you're on your own. You can do it without me."

For it is only when we trust in God's ability and power, that He gets the glory!

I bet Paul and Kristy are happy about that!

No one in their right mind would ever undertake parenthood, if they had to go at it alone, without the wisdom and power of the Spirit of God to guide them.

And parenthood is a good analogy of the impossible task of following Jesus.

Many people tackle the responsibility of parenthood with a 'we'll-make-it-up-as-we-go-along' kind of attitude.

Unfortunately, some adopt the same attitude when they attempt to follow Jesus.

But the life of following Jesus is humanly impossible.

Before long a mountain of impossibility will loom before us and we'll realise, that being a disciple of Christ is impossible without the empowerment of the Spirit of God.

That's why we must settle in our heart today, that responding to Jesus' invitation to follow him, is a step into a life of faith believing God for the impossible.

For Paul and Kristy, it is the impossibility of wise and godly parenthood.

For others it is the impossibility of believing for family reconciliation, or for a loved one to develop a relationship with Jesus, or for the physical healing of a friend.

I urge you today to not remain in the boat of comfort and security.

Rather, respond to Jesus' call to step out in faith and believe in God to do the impossible.

Afterall we are called to be people of faith.

That is, people who choose to shape their lives so that dependency on God's power and ability is vital.

Unfortunately, we humans have a natural tendency to build our lives so that faith is not necessary. We want to clearly see how we can accomplish something.

That's why we build comfort zones and develop strategies, so that everything remains under our control.

When you hear yourself saying, 'Well, I could never do that ...' you've lost sight that it is only through the Spirit's enablement that we are able to anything for God.

Application | How do we support each other as we take steps of risky faith?

So, what is the impossible mountain that looms before you this year?

What is the thing that you hear yourself saying 'that will never happen'?

For me the mountain is the new evening service commencing in February.

For others it will be believing God for a reconciliation in our family, or peaceful resolution where there is conflict.

Others are trusting God to provide financially so that we end the year with a surplus budget.

Paul and Kristy are trusting God for the empowerment to fulfil the impossible task of raising Grace to be a godly woman of God – and they will need all the Spirit's miraculous power to do so.

So, let everyone of us stir each other up to believe God for the impossible this year.

Let's speak to the mountain of impossibility, trusting that our God is able and willing, to move mountains, which will bring glory to Him.