30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. 5:1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph. 4:30-5:2)

JESU, JUVA!

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Light without fire?! That's impossible! Then Thomas Edison invents the light bulb and for the first time in the history of the world, you don't need fire to get light! For a few thousand years, it was just assumed that governments were run by kings and their princely sons. The thought of a butcher, baker, or candlestick maker electing their leaders? Impossible. They would even have called it "unnatural."

But these things were not impossible. Light without fire? That seemed impossible to the people who settled Wisconsin 150 years ago. To you and me, the light bulb is a 89 cent part of every day life in the 21st century. As far as people electing their leaders, that seemed impossible to peasants living in Germany 500 years ago. Today, it is apparent that our American democratic experiment has something going for it! Tom Cruz has done several Mission: Impossible movies, but if his missions were really mission impossible, his movies wouldn't have sold any tickets.

Here are some things that are impossible. I remember a song from my favorite band U2 back in my college days: "A woman needs a man, like a fish needs a bicycle." It is impossible for a salmon to ride a Schwinn. Or when I was growing up, my mom used to say: "When pigs fly." It is impossible for Waukesha County's prize-winning sow to sprout wings and fly the friendly skies. Or take a Biblical example: It is humanly impossible to cram a big, hairy dromedary camel through the eye of a needle. Fish on bikes. Pigs in space. Camels through needles. These are pictures of the impossible.

This morning, God proclaims the impossible. We are going to take a look at a biblical mission impossible: 1) God will demand the impossible of us. 2) God will do the impossible for us. 3) God empowers us to do the impossible.
**GOD ASKS THE IMPOSSIBLE**

God really does ask the impossible of us! “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God… Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice… Be kind and compassionate to one another… Be imitators of God… live a life of love…”

The Lord has some very definite things in mind for us as we FOLLOW CHRIST. And if we are going to be brutally honest with ourselves, we must confess that the likelihood of us doing all of these things — all by ourselves — always! — is about the same as a salmon riding our Schwin, as Percival the pig to growing wings and flying to Frisco, as a camel hopping through the needle. Don’t grieve… Get rid of… Be kind… Be God’s imitators… Live a life of love… And leave it to God to pile impossible on top of impossible! Jesus says: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matt. 5:48) PERFECT kindness. Perfect imitation of God. Perfect love. Perfection is God’s holy standard. “Be nice” — “Do your best” — “try your hardest” — those are Satan’s mockeries of God’s holy standard. For sinful you and me, Perfection is a genuine mission impossible.

But why would the Lord spill holy ink reminding us to “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.” It’s not like these are all that serious. These aren’t like adultery or murder — the biggies. Honestly: I’ve never heard of anyone who did some serious jail time for “Bitterness in second degree” or was ticked for “premeditated anger.” But think for a second: How many marriages are now curtains because unresolved bitterness became anger and then down-right hatred for one that we used to call Mr. Right or Miss Perfect? Another thought: How many of you have been less-than-happy in your places of employment because there is someone who can’t control their temper — or freely vent to their anger — or can’t keep a reign on their gossiping tongue. And one last thought comes to mind: In 16 years of pastoring, I’ve never had anyone say that they were going to leave our church because there was too much murder and armed robbery going on. I have had many members leave over the years because of lies told behind backs - slander, because of bruised feelings that weren’t healed with forgiveness and then festered into bitterness, because of a non-stop parade of nasty on the playground - bullying is certainly a form of malice. How much mileage does the devil get in our midst over a few unkind words here, a thoughtless action there? Then combine it with our ugly urge to never forget the wrongs done against us! Hear the Word of the Lord: “Get rid of all such thing.” By ourselves, that’s impossible. I can’t be the perfect person the Lord expects me to be. Pigs don’t fly. And neither can we!

**GOD DOES THE IMPOSSIBLE**

God really has given us a mission: impossible. But the good news for us this morning is this: the same God who demands the impossible FROM us is the very God that has done the impossible FOR us. The Lord, you see, if he so chooses, can make a fish grow a cyclist’s legs, enable a pig to sprout wings, and shepherd a caravan of camels through the eye of a needle. We worship a God after all who created water and then walked on it; who causes the sun to shine and caused the sun to stand still. With God, all things are possible. Just ask the Moses or the disciples or the Virgin Mary.

And now the key thought for today: God not only asks us to do these things. God, in Christ, has already perfectly done these things! Listen again: Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (4:32-5:2)
Christ is the fulfillment of Mission: Impossible! There was not a single time when Christ let his mouth run away from him - even with the Pharisees who were a constant burr under his saddle! There was not a single time in Christ's life when bitterness got the better of him - even with his disciples who denied him and sold him. There was not a single time where Christ threw a sucker punch, even though the people might have "deserved it" - opting instead to turn the other cheek. Jesus Christ his whole life long was a walking, talking, compassionate, loving, forgiving imitator of his heavenly Father. Christ is, literally, PERFECTION PERSONIFIED. What God demands from us, his Son has already done perfectly for us!

And then he offered up himself as the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice for sin! He was the sacrificial Lamb of God that atones for the sins of the entire world. You and I can't sacrifice for our sins. How many prayers do you think it would take to make up for a heart that hates a neighbor? How much of an offering should we give to pay down the debt of our sin? If we tried hard enough, we just might be able to climb Mt. Everest. Not one of us, however, will get to the top of our heap of guilt! Only Jesus can, because with him is full forgiveness and full redemption. Just like the book of Hebrews says: We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” (Heb. 10:10) The Perfect sacrifice for our sins has been made. Now Jesus lives again to assure us that our sins have been paid for. Jesus is now the resurrected proof that the forgiveness of our sins - something that was once mission impossible - is now mission accomplished, accomplished forever and ever!

**GOD EMPowers THE IMPOSSIBLE**

God asks sinners to do the impossible. God, for sinners, has done the impossible. Now the potent love of Jesus is going to empower us to do the impossible: to live a life of love, because Jesus first loved us. Notice carefully how our life of love for each other is bound together with Jesus' forgiving love for us: Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

What a mouth full! IMITATE God! Live a LIFE of love! Impossible! Yes, it is by definition impossible for the sinner in us to imitate God and live a life of love. But we Lutheran Christians treasure the fact that we are not just sinners. Because of Christ's work for us, we are also saints. Christ empowers his saints to do the impossible!

How? It's simple 1) Remember who you are! 2) And then - to rip off a quote from Nike - “just do it!”

Who are you? According to Scripture, you are a special object of God's compassion. He has a heart for you! According to God, you are a sinner 100% forgiven in Christ. You are an imitator of the Heavenly Father. (Think of how our children imitate us when they are young - imitating the way we talk, imitating the way mom does makeup, or the way dad shaves.) Through God the Son, you, too, are DEARLY LOVED sons and daughters of God the Father. Finally, you are people for whom Christ was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice - a people willing, therefore, to sacrifice themselves for others. That's who in Christ you are!

That's who you are. So when it comes to living a life of love: JUST DO IT! I sometimes think that we Christians try to make the Christian life too difficult. Living a love is not rocket science. It's not difficult. It is hard work, however! Christian love, you see, is not some much of a feeling - it is an action! Take the Good
Samaritan as an example. He didn’t stop to think of what he thought about wounded Jews. He didn’t reflect on how the highway-robbery situation made him feel. He didn’t make a list of three people who would be more qualified to help wounded travelers. He didn’t attend a six week seminar on helping out to wounded people. He didn’t stop double check which church board, committee, or council had the responsibility to help. He saw a man in need of help, so he rolled up his sleeves and helped to the greatest degree possible. To quote my wife when encourage the rest of us to help in cleaning the house: “See it. Do it!”

So now think of what God empowers in you!

- **Be kind to each other.** If we waited for someone to be kind to us before being kind, we’ll all wait a long time. The kindness of Christ covers you. Kindness: See it. Do it!
- **Be compassionate to each other** - have a heart for each others needs. If we waited until we felt like helping, we’d do nothing but wait. The compassion of Christ beats in your heart. See it. Do it!
- **Forgive each other.** If we were going to wait to forgive until we felt like burying the hatchet with people, we’d be waiting a lifetime. The forgiveness of Christ has literally cleansed your soul. Forgiveness: See it. Do it!

May the Lord bless you with much joy as you live a life of love. Be who you really are: People in whom the Spirit dwells, people prepared and empowered for their Christian Mission: Mission Possible - one day, Mission Accomplished. Amen.