



## LESSONS for LIFE

January 11<sup>th</sup> 2009 11:00am

TAKING FLIGHT PART II

THE AIRPLANE

Rev. Dr. Brent Hawkes, C.M.

### SACRED READINGS

**Lesson: GENESIS 1: 1 - 5**

**Gospel: JOHN 2: 1 – 9**

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It's impossible, it will not happen. Don't waste your time. You have more important things to do. Now God, this thing that you have in mind of taking that empty space out there and creating something you want to call a world – forget about it. It's impossible, God. It will never happen. Don't waste your time; you have more important things to do. There have been many things in our lives as individuals and in our church that folks have said, it's impossible, it's not going to happen; don't waste your time; you have better things to do. And there are many times in our individual lives when we give up on things, when we face something we know has to change and we get stymied and we give up; and we fail to make or experience the change that needs to happen in our lives. Many of us have developed an impossibility mind set. We face something and there's obstacles and we think it's impossible or someone tells us it's impossible for us to do it and so we quickly give up.

I'm just thankful that down through history there were individuals who did not have an impossibility mind set; that there were many individuals who did not listen to the impossible voices around them: the telephone. I am still amazed that I can pick up the phone, punch in a few numbers and someone halfway around the world will answer and we're able to speak almost without delay; something that at one point most people would have thought impossible – it will never happen, don't waste your time on it. We've gone from that to cell phones today which we can carry around and where folks can reach us no matter where we are or what we're doing – they can reach us!

Quite a few years ago John and I were in New Brunswick visiting my family for Christmas and my grandmother at that time was quite elderly. I loved my grandmother but she was the kind of community gossip. She was the one who collected information and shared information through the telephone. She had this telephone with the longest cord I've ever seen on a telephone and as she got older she couldn't get to the phone in time. People would call and she couldn't get up to the phone and so they'd hang up. So, this one time when John and I went there we got the perfect Christmas present for my grandmother. It was just at the time when cordless telephones came out and so we got her this cordless telephone and she was just amazed, because no matter where she sat she was able to have the phone with her and could answer it quickly. For three days you couldn't get through to her! She was catching up on the information, and before she went into hospital for the very last time the only thing she said to the family around her was, "Make sure that the telephone which Brent and John gave me is taken care of when I'm in the hospital." Someone didn't believe in an impossibility mind set.

The television – and this is going to date me slightly – but I remember when my family was the first to get a television in my neighbourhood and everyone gathered around. The room was full when we were going to turn it on; kids were outside looking in the windows to see this thing called a television, and now



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we sit with remote controls, just controlling things. I just wish someone would invent it so that I could just point it at John and press 'mute' and that it would work! (laughter).

Computers – originally the size of a room! Who would have thought the progress which has taken place in just relatively a few years; in fact, the CEO of IBM once said there will never be an interest in people having a computer in their home and, he said, there are probably only four or five businesses in the whole world which would ever use a computer because of its size and how expensive they are. And yet look today where we are: from the size of a room to the palm of our hands! Some would have thought that was impossible; someone else didn't give in to an impossibility mind set. And the access we have to information nowadays. Recently someone taught me to Google (laughter) and so I decided I wanted to get some information on a movie, a mature movie, a movie with a great theme and so I googled and I typed in, 'Adult Entertainment' (great laughter). You would not believe...It took me hours to get out of there – hours!!

The diseases that once ravaged cities and countries: tuberculosis; someone didn't give up and a cure was found. For too long it was said that it was impossible for women ever to win the right to vote, but some folks said it was not impossible. For too long schools were segregated in this city as well as in other places, but someone didn't give up and didn't say it was impossible and worked for change. And when we think of what was once thought impossible and what's happened nowadays there's no greater example and in fitting with our sermon series this month "Taking Flight" than to think about the airplane and what has happened there. I still sit in a plane on a runway and think how is this thing going to get into the air, and so I'd like you to travel back a bit in time and see the very first attempts when people said it wasn't impossible but maybe it looked impossible (screen shows man's first attempts to fly – from attaching wings, then a motor and wings etc. and the resulting crashes!). All of these attempts until one day this happened...and for the first time the impossible became possible and for the first time people actually flew.

The first time we raised the idea of having our Christmas Eve service at Roy Thomson Hall some folks told us it was impossible; we couldn't pull it off. Down through the years there have been many times where folks told us that things were impossible and there were those who preceded us: Peter, one of the disciples of Jesus – very conservative in his religious beliefs – had a vision one night where he saw all of the animals that he was told as a kid, growing up in his Jewish faith, that he shouldn't eat and the vision told him, *Peter eat*. And he said, *It's impossible. I can't do that, it's my religion*, and God persisted in making the point to him. Shortly afterwards there was a knock on his door and someone said, *Peter we want you to come over to a group of Gentiles who want to hear the good news*. And he said, *That's impossible. I'm not supposed to speak with them; that's what my faith told me*. And God said, *come on over and speak to them* and so he went and he spoke and he experienced the presence of God among a group of people that he thought was impossible to ever happen. Jesus, I'm sure at times must have thought it was impossible that these disciples would ever get it or would ever get together enough to lead a movement; and when Jesus was faced one day with a crowd of five thousand people who needed to be fed the disciples were saying, *It's impossible. We don't have enough food or enough money*. Jesus saw through that impossibility and he called forth the gifts that were there and through the sharing of those gifts and the miracle that happened that day there was enough food for everyone and there was lots left over.

What is it for us as a church that once was thought to be impossible? Well, the mere existence of this church was deemed to be impossible. There were folks who said there could never be a church started



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by gay and lesbian people. There could never be a church expanding beyond and including the gay and lesbian community. They said God would never bless such an endeavour, that you would never feel the presence of God in such a gathering. There were those who felt we would only be a ghetto church, a tiny little group of gays and lesbians; that we could never expand beyond that core to welcome those who would define themselves differently, to welcome those who were not gay and be able to form a congregation together; that we would never be able to work with other churches or organizations, and yet out partnership with Wellspring – working on cancer issues for men and women, our partnership with the Toronto School Board in hosting the Triangle program, our partnership with Alliance Hospice caring for those who are ill. There were those who said it was impossible that we would never win inclusion in the Human Rights Code. In those early days in those early protests when I chained myself to the railing of the Legislature to protest the defeat of sexual orientation in the Human Rights Code I have to tell you there were moments, glimpses when I said, God, if you're calling us to do this you've got to make it possible for it to happen. The next time they voted it happened! There were those who believed that marriage would never be extended in our lifetime, and I was one of those. When John and I had been together fifteen years, on our 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary we had a holy union because we never thought there'd be another alternative. Ten years later we got married.

There are those who thought it was impossible for this little church to reach out to the world, and yet right now, on this web cast there are people watching this service who will never be able to come to worship with us in this place and one day they will be watching this service around the world. And we will move beyond web-casting to multiple site worship. We're beginning to form little groups in Muskoka and Manitoba and some day Saudi Arabia and Iran. Little groups of people huddling around the web cast to watch it together, to have communion together to pray with each other together in communities where there may never be a Metropolitan Community Church. As those groups will be formed we'll train people, empower them, support them, get them the material so that they'll be singing along with us through the miracle of what one day was thought to be impossible. We will move beyond that to a virtual church and we will train people via the Internet, provide courses and education, challenge and train people to work for human rights around the world through what someone thought was impossible. Right now we're in the midst of a pledge campaign and will it be possible for us to balance our budget this year? Will be able to raise the massive increase in our offerings that will be necessary for the Board to pass a balanced budget without cutting staff? For me, cutting staff means cutting programs, and I don't want us to take a step backwards and we will be able to move forward if all of you here and watching are able to take a look at how you can help. For those of you who've already increased your giving – thank you – and for those of you who've made new pledges we appreciate you trusting us enough, believing in the vision enough; and for those of you who'll think about it today and in the next couple of weeks we appreciate your trust in us. And what about you as an individual? What is it that you have tried to do that you have felt was impossible, that you have given up trying. Is it a health issue? Is it an addiction that you're facing that you think is impossible to break from? Is it a relationship issue that you think is impossible to change? Is it an issue for you that you've been struggling with and you've finally said it's impossible and you give up. I would challenge you that in all of the examples that we have mentioned this morning where something was thought to be impossible and eventually it became possible.

Now, I'm realistic. I know there are some things that are impossible. I will never win the medal for the hundred yard dash; no matter how much I believe it and see it it ain't gonna happen! I will never be on a Stanley Cup winning hockey team, especially if I stay in Toronto (laughter). There are some things that may be – realistically – impossible for you; however, there are many more things that you may have



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deemed to be impossible which are not impossible but are possible for you. When you pull up the reserves within you, the resources around you and the holy presence of God there to empower you. You may have thought it was impossible to be happy; you may have thought it was impossible to get your finances sorted out and to be healthy in terms of your financial management. I would encourage you this day and in the next few days to think about what those things are that might have been deemed impossible. Jesus faced that at the wedding in Cana. *They've run out of wine* his mother said. Jesus said, *It's none of our business* but his mother knew better. She knew what he'd do and he looked at the situation and a miracle happened. Why did it happen? Because Jesus began with what he had: the stone jars and the water and he took what he had and he blessed it and a miracle happened. I would encourage you to take what you already have: the strength, the creativity, the faith, the perseverance that you already have. Bless those and watch the miracle happen as that which was thought to be impossible becomes possible. Robert Goddard said, *It is difficult to say what is impossible for the dream of yesterday is the hope of today and the reality of today. The dream of yesterday is the hope of today and the reality of tomorrow.*

I conclude with a quote from Samuel Johnson: *Few things are impossible to diligence and to skill. Great works are performed not by strength but perseverance.* It's time to take flight. It's time to transform your life and for us to transform this church. Take a look at those things you thought to be impossible. Watch the impossible become the improbable and become the inevitable. The Canadian Snowbirds just a few years after Kitty Hawk when the plane barely got off the ground. Once it was impossible.

Amen.