



It's Impossible!



A Sermon By
The Rev. Andrew W. Walter

April 21, 2019
The Sunday of the Resurrection
Easter Sunday

Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

*An audio version of this sermon may be found on the Grace Church website at
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-admin/upload.php?item=5988>.*

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Some of you know that I love to play golf, and this past week, following Tiger Woods' huge win at the Masters, I was talking golf with some people here at church. They asked me if I've always played – was it something I learned and did growing up. And, actually, I didn't take the game up until much later, when I was in my 20's, after playing a round with my future in-laws.

Both of my in-laws loved playing golf, but my mother-in-law, in particular, was obsessed with the game. She would play golf and watch golf. She bought every little gadget that might help her play better. And, she had this huge bag of golf clubs. You're only supposed to have 14 clubs in your bag when you play golf, but she always had about 20 and didn't care she was breaking the rules. She just loved playing golf.

As passionate as she was, though, my Mother-in-law had to be the worst golfer ever. I mean, I loved the woman, but she was pretty horrible. She had this really funny, funky swing, so she could barely hit the ball, and even when she did, the ball wouldn't get in the air – it just ran along the ground. To make matters worse, my Mother-in-law couldn't see very well. When we played, she'd hit the ball and turn to me, "Andrew, where did it go?"

And, I'd be thinking, "It's right up there, about 20 yards in front of you."

So, one hot summer day, my wife, Susan, and I were at the pool with our three boys, when Susan's phone rang. She picked it up, and right away, started getting all excited. I could tell something happened. "What is it?" I asked. "What's going on? Is everything okay?"

"My mom just had a hole-in-one!"

You can imagine my skepticism. I couldn't believe it. There was no way! Her mother had to be playing a joke on us.

"What hole was it on?" I asked.

"The 12th hole at Salem."

Well, now, I knew it was joke, because I knew that hole, and there was no way her Mother could make a hole-in-one there, because she'd have to hit the ball at least the length of the church. Granted, the hole was slightly down hill, and that would've helped. But, there were also two sand traps in front of the green, and there was no way my Mother-in-law could get the ball over the sand. There was just no way. It was impossible. And so, I didn't believe her. She had to be making it all up.

We've all heard crazy stories before, stories that sounded too good to be true, or so far out there they impossible to believe, stories that made us think: There's no way. There's just no way that can be true.

Even though you're all here this morning, some of you may feel that way about Easter. You hear the story of God raising Jesus from the dead, and you think: it's impossible. It doesn't make any sense. You can't bring someone back to life. It goes against everything we know, everything science tells us. The resurrection had to be a fake, or a hoax, or a conspiracy of some kind.

If you have your doubts about Easter, don't worry. You're not alone. Others have felt that way, too. Even the disciples of Jesus had their doubts when they first heard that Jesus was alive.

It was early in the morning, and the disciples were just waking up, and trying to get their bearings. The last few days had been very traumatic. All of the disciples had done some things they wish they hadn't done, things they weren't proud of, things they wish they could take back. Some had fallen asleep when Jesus asked them to stay awake. Others denied knowing Jesus. All of them ran away when Jesus was arrested. And, now, Jesus was dead. The disciples had turned their back on him, their leader, their best friend, the person they loved most in this world. They left him alone to die on the cross.

With those feelings of guilt and shame running around in their heads, the disciples were just getting ready for the day, when all of a sudden, the women came bursting into the room. They were panting and out of breathe. *We went to the tomb; the stone was rolled away; his body was gone; two angels said Jesus was alive.*

The men couldn't believe it. There was no way this was possible. No one could roll the huge stone away. No one would take the body. It didn't make any sense. It sounded so crazy. The men thought the women were joking, making it all up, trying to pull one over on them. They thought it was an "idle tale."

But, later in the day, Jesus appeared to the disciples. The men still couldn't believe it at first, couldn't believe it was really Jesus, standing right there in front of them, until Jesus showed the disciples his hands and his feet, and the disciples reached out and touched Jesus, his flesh, his bone.

What a moment that must have been – the disciples coming face-to-face with the risen Christ, their sorrow and shame giving way to hope and excitement, as they realized everything Jesus had said, and everything Jesus had promised, was true. This was the culmination of the entire biblical story. It was the moment when God revealed God's agenda of love, healing and wholeness. Jesus wasn't upset with the disciples. He wasn't angry and bitter at their betrayal. All the disciples experienced in that moment was love, and understanding, and forgiveness. It was like the slates were wiped clean, and everything was new again. Jesus was alive, and the disciples were forgiven. There was no way it was possible. It couldn't be true. It all had to dream... except, it wasn't. It was possible, and it was true.

The disciples' story is no different from our story. We have some doubts. They had some doubts. They were carrying around guilt and shame, and we have those feelings, as well. All of us feel guilty at times, about things we've done and left undone. We feel badly when we cheat on our diet, don't answer our emails, lose our temper, or don't treat someone the way we should. We beat ourselves up over not exercising enough or not going to church enough. And, our family relationships are fraught with guilt. It tears us up inside to think we're not spending enough time with our kids, or not making our partner happy, or somehow, letting our parents down, especially as they get older.

It doesn't help that we live in a modern-day culture of shame. Everywhere we turn society tells us we're not smart enough, or pretty enough, or good enough, that somehow, we just don't measure up. We start to experience these feelings in middle school and high school; and after that, it never lets up. And, the internet and social media only make it worse. As the best-selling author Brene Brown writes, "Shame is something we all experience. And while it feels as if shame hides in our darkest corners, it actually tends to lurk in all of the familiar places, including appearance and body image, family, parenting, money and work... aging and religion. To feel shame is to be human."

But, on Easter, we learn that no matter who we are, or what we do, no matter how far we might stray from being the kind of person we want to be, God still loves us. God sees us for who we are, who we really are, with all of our blemishes and scars, our sins and our shortcomings. God sees right through us, and still loves us all the same. That's what is unbelievable about Easter. It's not that God raised Jesus from the dead. It's not that God brought him back to life. It's in spite of who we are, God broke all the rules and threw out everything we know, because wants nothing more to be close to us, and to love us, and to have a relationship with us. That's what is really crazy. That's what is hard to believe. That's what seems so impossible.

And, yet, sometimes, the impossible is possible.

A few weeks after that phone call with my Mother-in-law, we all went over to her house for dinner. As we sat down to eat, I started giving her a hard time about her "hole-in-one," at which point she got up and just walked out of the room. I thought maybe I had gone to far, maybe hurt her feelings, but a moment later, she came back, carrying this plaque. This plaque verifies she had a hole-in-one, just as she said, with her playing partners, golf professional and the United States Golf Association testifying to it.

Apparently, my Mother-in-law took her usual swing, and the ball went shooting along the ground, just as it always did, only this time, the ball hit the cart path, took a big jump forward, tumbled down the hill, rolled through the sliver of grass between the sand traps, up onto the green and right into the hole, for a one, a score that would make even Tiger Woods happy.

You see the impossible is possible. Today, Jesus is alive, and your sins are forgiven. So, let go of the guilt, let go of the shame. Know that you are seen for who you really you, who you really are, and God loves all the more.

Amen.