Last week, we read the story about Nicodemus as Jesus advised him of what he must do in order to enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus’ response to Nicodemus inquiry left him dumbfounded and perceived it as an impossible challenge, “*how could anyone enter his or her mother’s womb for the 2nd time and be born again*?” Now, obviously what Jesus meant was not to be taken quite literally. He was referring to the re-birthing, the revival of one’s heart…a start from scratch all over again. It is a metaphor of our call to a spiritual awakening. However, as inconceivable or impractical as it may sound, what Jesus was simply asking us was not that out of the ordinary or to the extremes. In fact, it can easily be engaged as part of our everyday life.

Jesus challenged us to think and to act outside-the-box. Instead of brushing off God’s challenges to us as mission impossible, perhaps we ought to give God/the Holy Spirit a chance to work among us. After all, this is what the season of Pentecost all about…about dreaming dreams and seeing visions beyond our expectations.

In the Gospel reading that we read earlier from Mark, Jesus was challenged into a theological debate with a group of Pharisees concerning the observance of the Sabbath. The Pharisees accused Jesus and his disciples of plucking grain off the fields on a Sabbath day and then later on healing a man with a withered hand. The Pharisees wanted to see how Jesus would respond, whether he would cure the man or not. They would look for opportunities to accuse Jesus with a religious crime and turn him over to the political authority for punishment.

Jesus then asked the man to stretch out his hand and immediately, he was cured. The Pharisees were left speechless and went to report this to the authority. However, Jesus did offer back a response challenging the Pharisees, **“*Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to safe life or to kill?”***

However, the issue here wasn’t about whether the man gets cured or not, but what’s more important, observing the law (for the sake of observing) or healing and saving someone who is in dire or desperate needs?

Now, Jesus wasn’t telling his followers to abolish or disregard the Commandments. What he was telling us was that not everything is set in stone. Not everything was so black and white. God’s mercy does triumph over rules, standards and regulations, or how we used to do things in the past. The new law of the covenant and grace supplements (and not replaces) the old law of obedience. There will be time when we may be called upon to carry out extraordinary mission beyond the law or the standard code of practice. **Participating in God’s mission and service takes no “vacation”! There are no days off. It is our honor and our duty to serve!**

Earlier this week, there was a video that has gone viral across the internet about this 22-year old Malian migrant who has illegally came to France just 4 months ago. How many of you have seen that? He was captured in the video scaling up the side of the building, rescuing a 4-year old child who was dangling off the balcony, while his parent went out shopping. It was pretty incredible.Mali is a French-speaking country in Western Africa bordering the Sahara Desert, just south of Libya.

What began as a summer afternoon hanging out with friends watching a football match at a local restaurant, turned into a call-to-action for this 22-year old migrant. Mamoudou Gassama heard this loud commotion outside, so he went outside of the restaurant to check it out. Upon seeing a child dangling on the side of a 5-story building, Mamoudou followed his instinct and immediately jumped into action by scaling up the wall with just his bare hands and feet…no tools, no ropes, no safety net…NOTHING. If you see the video, in about 25-30 seconds, he was able to reach the child on the balcony and brought him into safety, while risking his own life.

Mamoudou didn’t have to do what he did. He could’ve held back, minded his own business, kept watching his football match with friends, or taken out his phone and capturing the incident on video and post it on *Facebook* or *Instagram*. Mamoudou disregarded any conventional wisdom and standard protocols. He acted outside the box. All he saw was a child is in danger and he needed to do something about it and he needed to do it quickly. He didn’t have any special when it comes to rescuing someone AND furthermore he was an illegal foreign migrant in that country. Talk about taking huge risks out of the extraordinary circumstances. Who knew what would’ve happened to that child if Mamoudou had not gotten to him sooner? Who know what authority might’ve done when the police showed up and found Mamoudou was an illegal migrant? He risked his own life in order to save a total stranger in need. He didn’t have time to think about all of that. His priority was to get the child into safety. He did what he felt was the **right thing** to do. He was the **right man**, who happened to be in the **right place** and at the **right time**. Seriously, Hollywood could not have scripted this any better for a Spider Man movie sequel.

Because of what he had done, Mamoudou became an instant celebrity talk of the town, as he was being labeled as the French Spider Man. Even the French President Emmanuel Macron invited Mamoudou to the presidential palace to personally thanked him for his heroic effort. In recognition of his selfless heroic act, Mamoudou was offered a full French Citizenship AND a job with the Paris Fire and Rescue brigade for his bravery and courage in saving the life of others before himself. Talk about a dramatic turn of event for this 22 year old.

When he was being interviewed by reporters after his heroic rescue, Mamoudou responded *"We came here to watch the football match at a restaurant. I saw a lot a people yelling, cars were honking. I got out, I saw the child who was about to fall from the balcony. I like children, I would have hate to see him getting hurt in front of me. I ran and I thought of ways to save him. Thank God I scaled the front of the building to that balcony*. *I got on the top of a door and I managed to pull myself from balcony to balcony. And thank God, I saved him."*

Just as in the passage that we read earlier when Jesus was presented with a crisis situation. Jesus didn’t care what should’ve and have been done in the past, all he saw was someone in need and he needed to step up and helped someone right there and then. Jesus knew that every move he made was being scrutinized by the Pharisees. Did he break the rule of the Sabbath, oh yes, if you interpret it by the letter of the law? But aren’t people’s lives, morality, and ethics more valued than the legality of the law and regulations? As Jesus said,*“****Is it lawful to do good, or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?”[[1]](#footnote-1)***

Mamoudou stepped out of his own comfort zone by stretching out his arms in order to save a life. In the same way, Jesus also stepped out of his own comfort zone by being obedient to his Father in fulfilling his earthly mission. He stretched out his arms upon the cross for the salvation of ALL of God’s children, many of whom might be dangling off the ledge of a balcony waving, calling out for help and waiting to be rescued. Time after time, God makes what seem to be the impossible possible. God exercises extraordinary acts of giving and generosity out of the ordinary people, just like you and me and call them into actions. Are we willing and ready to say Yes and to take on this challenge when we are being called upon?

In the 2nd scripture that we read earlier, the Apostle Paul was writing to the early church in Corinth who was being challenged by many false prophet teachings, paganism, idols worship and other forms of ethical immorality. **The faith and personal values of these early Christians were being challenged spiritually and persecuted politically left and right.** Paul wrote to the Corinthians to reassure their faith and to encourage them of keep on fighting the good fight, keep running this race that God has set before them. Keep God’s mission AND vision alive, even if it may not seem to be getting any easier going forward and hope is fizzling out quickly. God will provide opportunity for mission and outreach, even on the day of Sabbath, as we read in our story earlier.

When the situations become dire and desperate, or when the future outlook becomes uncertain and unimaginable, Paul reminded us that there is still “treasure in the jar of clay”, that God’s “extraordinary power” may one-day be manifested in us.[[2]](#footnote-2)  Boy, don’t we need that now more than ever, we need to depend upon God and God’s mercy, not upon our own personal accomplishments and human efforts.

As Paul wrote, *“we [may be]* ***afflicted*** *in every way, but not* ***crushed****;* ***perplexed****, but not* ***driven to despair****;* ***persecuted****, but not* ***forsaken****;* ***struck down****, but not* ***destroyed****”.*  But Paul didn’t stop there. He went on to challenge the Corinthians (and likewise to us today) that our life is nothing less than a testimony and a witness of God’s work in us….when things are going well, as well as when things going not so well. In the midst of trails and hardship, we ought to give thanks to God as our testimony of faith. **“*Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus [as a sign of our witness], so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our bodies.[[3]](#footnote-3) WOW!***

What about us? How many of us right now can make such claim today ***“that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our bodies and in our lives!”*** This was a powerful challenge and a bold claim of faith for us to pursue. It may seem like an impossible mission, but with God all things are possible. Whatever we do here on earth, as trivial or insignificant as you might think, we bear the image of Christ’s life, death and resurrection.

Our life and our stories are the best tools of sharing our testimony with others. Whenever we experience human hardship and trials in life, God reassures us that His presence will be with us no matter what, through the power of the Holy Spirit, for as long as we place our faith and trust in Christ. By doing so, we fulfill our calling of living in a “koinonia” community.

What is impossible with human is possible with God.[[4]](#footnote-4) **God’s mission remains active for as long as there are souls that need to be saved, and lives that need to be rescued.** Let us re-dedicate our lives for God’s use, for the greater fulfillment of God’s Kingdom that is already here and is yet to come. In the name of God the F/S/HS, Amen.

1. *Mark 3:4* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *II Corinthians 4:7* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *II Corinthians 4:8-10* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Luke 18:27* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)