

INCREDIBLE (OR IMPOSSIBLE?)

*SERMON, PENTECOST 2, PR12,
YEAR A*

Incredible, absolutely incredible!
Not impossible. No, not
impossible, but absolutely
incredible.

Today's "One Word Sermon Title
Series" topic is INCREDIBLE.
Not impossible, but incredible.

I'll tell you what is incredible. It's
over in Gatlinburg, the Ripley's
Believe it or Not Museum. It is
cheesy, but it appeals to me. I like
carnival side shows and curious
things. Oddities fascinate me,
they are incredible.

Would you believe at Ripley's,
they have a pin with the Lord's
Prayer carved on the head of that
pin? I mean, how incredible. Not
impossible, but incredible.

They also have a human hair with
the name "Ripley" written on it. I
asked the clerk, "How did they
write the name Ripley on this
strand of hair." And he said, as if I

should already know this, “You see, he took a strand of hair, dipped it into the ink and wrote the name Ripley across the second piece of hair.” Duh...

Impossible, I thought. But I’ve seen it. It is not impossible, but incredible.

Incredible. Did you know that a Mrs. Vasaly in Russia, gave birth to 69 children? And all the moms here say, “Impossible.” But no, it is history, incredible.

Again, moms, did you know that a healthy baby born in Turkey weighed 24 pounds? That’s painfully incredible!

Did you know that a man in Arizona grew a mustache that was a hundred and two inches long? Incredible!

Yes, there are many things in life which are absolutely, weirdly, wonderfully incredible, but they are not impossible. That’s the way life is, incredible, not impossible

Some women went to the tomb and noticed that the big sealing stone had been rolled away. The tomb was wide open and naturally, they were upset. They wondered what had happened. They looked inside and, incredibly, a young man was sitting there and he was dressed in white. He said to them, “Jesus is not here, He has been raised from the dead by the power of God.”

“Incredible, absolutely incredible,” they thought. Not impossible, but incredible. They did not know how to react, but ultimately they ran to tell the disciples. They told them, “We were at the tomb and the body was not there and a young man told us that Jesus was raised from the dead.

How did the disciples respond? “Impossible! We do not believe you because that is impossible,” they said. They were skeptical, to say the least. But that same night, Jesus appeared to the disciples and the disciples believed that it was not impossible, but indeed, absolutely incredible.

Why is it so incredible that God raised one man, Jesus of Nazareth, from the dead? That there is life after death? That's not impossible, but incredible.

Why is it so incredible that the Lord God of the Universe, who created the abundant bountiful life of the ocean and who created the endless numbers of stars in the sky and who created life itself, why is it so impossible that this God can make people righteous, whole and holy through their faith in the risen Jesus? It's not impossible, but it is incredible.

Is it too incredible that when your life is all messed up and your family is all messed up and you feel like everything is falling apart, is it too incredible for you to know that God is there in the midst of your mess to help you? It's possible and incredible.

You see, God is wonderfully incredible. And so much of what God does is wonderfully incredible. Not impossible, but wonderfully incredible. With God,

all things are possible, the Bible reminds us. Incredible, not impossible.

As I told you earlier, I enjoy odd things, strange things, like Ripley's Believe it or Not and carnival side shows. Today's gospel reading is about the weirdest of all the Gospel readings, a true freak show of a Gospel reading.

There is this man possessed by demons and the demons go into a big herd of pigs and the pigs jump over a cliff and all drown. In the realm of Bible stories, incredible.

Notice how impossible this is. When Jesus meets this demon-possessed man, the demons in him recognize Jesus. Demons always know who Jesus is because of his power. They realize, understand, recognize, appreciate his power. Demons know. The people around Jesus, sometimes even the disciples fail to understand just who he is. But the demons always know his true identity.

In fact, the demons tried to defend themselves against Jesus because they knew he had power over them. They forced the possessed man to go down on his knees before Jesus, to lower his head, to not look Jesus in the eyes, as if to say, “We have nothing in common, you and me; leave me alone and go your own way. Do not torment me.”

Jesus asks, “What is your name?”
The man responds “Legion.”

That name Legion revealed the complete and absolute power the demons had over the man. A Roman legion was a well-organized, closely knit strike force of six thousand men.

The man was in the grip of not just one demon, but of a troop of them, a great number of them.

By revealing the name Legion, the demons acknowledge Jesus’ power. They want nothing more to do with Jesus. They are ready to jump out of the possessed man to escape Jesus. Jesus is a threat to

their existence, so they abandon the man.

Jesus was their judge and so judged, the demons' exited the man and entered a heard of swine. Now to escape Jesus, in the pigs, they rushed down a hillside and over a steep bank into a lake where they drowned. Incredible.

This is a scene of absolute chaos and destruction. How would you have liked to have been a swineherd, tending to these pigs, responsible for them, only to see them all run madly into the water and drown.

When they saw what happened, the swineherds ran off and told everyone in the city. Impossible, must have been the response. No, they told them, not impossible, but incredible!

And when the town folk rushed out to see what they had been told, they found Jesus standing in the center of the scene with this man who had been enslaved for years now sitting at Jesus' feet like a pupil, fully clothed and in

complete possession of his senses. He was restored and cured. Not impossible, but incredible. Jesus is the liberator, the redeemer. It is all made visible in the presence of that man sitting obediently at Jesus' feet.

The Bible says the town people were afraid. Yes, Jesus' power appears frightening, terrifying, uncanny to those who do not realize that he is their savior. The crowd did not want anything to do with this frightening stranger who was superior to the power of demons.

The once possessed man wanted to follow Jesus and his disciples, but Jesus told him to return to his home. "Go," Jesus said, "You can do more good here. Go home and declare how much God has done for you." The Bible reading ends: "So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him." Jesus takes the impossible and turns it into something incredible.

We are always looking for some lesson in these Bible readings,

some instruction. I think it is obviously before us this morning. We have an incredible, not impossible, message.

What are we to do? Just as Jesus tells the man in the reading: “Go, return to your place and declare all that God has done for you.”

Go, return to your place and tell all that God had done for you. That’s not an impossible thing for you to do. It is an incredible thing for you to do. An incredible calling, an incredible task, an incredible mission.

Thank the Lord and sing God’s praise. Tell everyone what God has done!

That’s incredible. Amen.