

Today's readings got me thinking about the African impala. You may be familiar with it and may have even seen one in the zoo. It's more commonly called an antelope. As you can see on the screens, it stands about 3 feet tall with long horns. It's an impressive animal that can do amazing things. It's so impressive that Chevy even named a car after it. Remarkably, the impala can jump 10 feet straight up in the air from a standstill and jump an expanse of 30 feet from a running start. Yet, we're able to keep this creature in captivity using only a 3 foot wall.

Think about that. We're able to keep a creature captive that can jump 10 feet straight up in the air and jump an expanse of 30 feet using only a 3 foot wall. You're probably asking yourself, "Why doesn't the impala just jump over the wall and run free?" Well, an interesting fact about the impala is that it won't jump anywhere that it can't see where its feet will land. So a creature that can do amazing things like jump 10 feet straight up in the air or jump an expanse of 30 feet stays captive behind a 3 foot wall because it can't take a leap of faith.

I think we're a lot like the impala. We too are capable of amazing things. I don't mean things like putting a man on the moon, or climbing the tallest mountains in the world, or the feats we've seen in the Olympics over the last couple of weeks. No, I mean amazing things like having faith in the face of persecution, or forgiving others even though it hurts to do so, or loving when we ourselves feel unloved, or finding hope in a situation that seems so hopeless. We're capable of all these amazing things and so much more.

But sadly, we all too often don't take advantage of our capabilities. Rather, we choose to put up our own 3 foot walls and remain in captivity. We put up a 3 foot wall of doubt when we don't understand where God is leading us, or a 3 foot wall of comfort when placing our trust in God would require us to change, or a 3 foot wall of fear when God's plan for us is pointing us into uncharted territory.

We can't take that leap of faith because, like the impala, we can't see where our feet will land. We don't trust that God will provide a safe place for us to land. But instead we're like Peter in today's Gospel. We miss the point even when it's staring us right in the face. We would rather tell God what to do than listen to what God wants us to do. We would rather stay comfortable on the mountaintop than come down off the mountain and take a leap of faith. We would rather manipulate God than obey God. We want to be assured of the results before we act. We want to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that everything is going to work out just the way we want. So we get hung up on words like "impossible" and "absurd." We let our 3 foot walls keep us from our destiny.

Abraham and his wife Sarah were no strangers to "impossible" and "absurd." If you recall, Abraham and Sarah spent many years wondering and praying for a son. They deemed it impossible in their old age so they put up a 3 foot wall of doubt that it would ever happen. Then finally an angel appeared to Sarah and told her that she was pregnant. This announcement was so absurd to her that she broke out into laughter. She laughed so hard that tears streamed down her cheeks. That's why, when the child was born, they called him Isaac; which in Hebrew means "laughter." But, Abraham, at 75 years old, finally received a son to initiate God's promise of numerous descendants.

But then God asked Abraham to jump over his 3 foot wall of complacency and sacrifice that son. Abraham had to make a leap of faith. He had to decide to place absolutely everything he had, his very heart, in God's hands. Abraham had to not only be willing to slaughter his long-awaited son but also to obliterate God's promise of descendants.

When God called to Abraham, he didn't ignore God. Abraham answered, "Here I am." We should do the same. We should answer when God calls with the response, "Here I am."

Putting our trust in God is not like putting our trust in another person. I'm sure we've all been let down by someone we put our trust in. God isn't like that. God doesn't break His promises. God doesn't disappoint. But He may ask us to sacrifice something near and dear to us – it may be our pride, our selfishness, our comfort zone, or our egos. We just have to remember that His plan for us is not always our plan for ourselves. He has a plan for us of which we can only see the tiniest part. A funny thing about God is that sometimes He has our feet land in unexpected places – places we never envisioned.

Putting our trust in God cancels out words like “impossible” and “absurd”. Everything is possible for anyone who trusts in God's plan. We can work miracles if we just trust that God is leading us. A nun heard God's call to take a leap of faith and jump over her 3 foot wall of comfort in her convent to go out to work with the poor. So, she headed to the slums of Calcutta, India. There she ministered to the poorest of the poor. Now we know her as Saint Teresa of Calcutta, or Mother Teresa – one of the greatest humanitarians our world has ever seen.

We don't even have to look as far as India for another example. We can stay right here in Memphis. Danny Thomas was struggling for direction in his life so he prayed for guidance. He received in response to his prayers a call to take a leap of faith and jump over his 3 foot wall of doubt in what God had planned for him. So, he let God lead him in an unthinkable direction. As a result, we now have St. Jude Children's Research Hospital working miracles every day.

Trusting in God means believing what we can't see. In turn, we can see things we never imagined. Trusting in God can enable us to accomplish things we never dreamed capable. The things we can accomplish don't even have to be as grandiose as working in the Indian slums or founding a children's hospital. They could be as simple as volunteering at a soup kitchen, or reconciling with an estranged family member, or sticking up for a friend when others are

attacking them, or spreading our faith when others try to minimize it. We're all capable of great feats on our own scale.

Brothers and sisters, in today's Gospel, we hear the solution to being held captive. We hear our escape plan – the way to run free. It's all wrapped up in the words, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." It's that easy. Listen to him. And it's also that hard. Listen to him.

We can't go it alone. Our trust has to be in God, not in our own power - even when our culture tells us that we don't need anyone's help. Our trust has to be in a God who is all-powerful and who loves us beyond all imagining – even when it's hard to find love in the news headlines.

Like the apostles on the mountaintop, we too are accompanying Jesus this Lent on his journey to Calvary – to the cross. We have the gift of knowing that the story doesn't end on the cross on Good Friday. We know that an empty tomb follows on Easter. Not even death can defeat Jesus. Jesus put his trust in the Father and surrendered for our sake so that we could be delivered into the kingdom.

It is trust in God that will carry us through not only this Lent but beyond. Where we go, Christ has gone before us. God has unimaginable plans for us. We can either remain captive behind our 3 foot walls or put our trust in God and take a leap of faith to experience a freedom that only comes from following Christ. Which one are you going to choose?