

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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The Adjacent Possible

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Welcome to National Community Church, all seven of our campuses absolutely honored that you would celebrate Easter with us and I've got to say great timing. We begin a new series "Out of the Shadows", I believe it's going to be a game changer and I'll set that series up in just a few minutes.

In 1853 America hosted its first world's fair in New York City. The organizers built a beautiful exhibition hall called the Crystal Palace, and that's where some of the latest and greatest inventions were showcased. There was also a man by the name of Elisha Otis, who pulled off one of the most memorable, one of the most dramatic demonstrations in the history of the world's fair. Elisha Otis was the inventor of the elevator safety break, but he had a hard time selling his idea. So here's what he did; he stood on a platform in an open elevator shaft, that platform was hoisted high enough for everybody in the exhibition hall to see him. Then Elisha Otis, who had positioned an axe man above the elevator, ordered him to cut the cable. The elevator fell a few feet the crowd let out a collective gasp and Elisha Otis, announced; "all is safe, ladies and gentlemen, all is safe". When Elisha Otis pulled off this sales pitch, there were only a few buildings in New York City that were taller than five stories and I'll tell you why, no one wanted to climb the stairs. It was next to impossible to rent top floor real estate. Then in 1854 Elisha Otis installed one of these elevators in a building on Broadway and as they say, the rest is history. By 1890 10 buildings taller than 10 stories; by 1900 65 buildings taller than 20 stories; by 1908 538 skyscrapers in New York City, including the famous Flatiron building at the corner of Broadway and Fifth Avenue. More and more buildings got taller and taller and something else happen. Higher floors started producing higher revenues. Why? Well, as long as you don't have to climb the stairs, right? Everybody wants a room with a view.

Elisha Otis turn the world upside down. He didn't just invent the elevator safety break he made the modern skyscraper possible. At last count 58,000 elevators in New York City, they take a 11 billion trips every year, and that's just New York City. According to the Otis Elevator Company, the equivalent of the world's population rides on its elevators every five days. So, the next time you appreciate the skyline of New York City or any other city for that matter, understand that it was made possible by a man named Elisha Otis and his elevator safety brake. Hold that thought.

2002 an evolutionary biologist by the name of Stuart Kauffman coined a concept called '*The Adjacent Possible*'. '*The Adjacent Possible*' is all that stands between what is and what could be. It's a thing that enables us to dream bigger dreams, 10 story dreams, 20 story dreams, even 160 story dreams like the Burj Khalifa. Now, I don't think Elisha Otis could have imagined a building that would stand more than half a mile tall, okay. You can actually watch the sunset twice at the Burj Khalifa and its 65 Otis elevators that will take you to the top in a little over a minute.

Now '*The Adjacent Possible*' is a tough picture to paint, but I think the elevator is exhibit A. It was the elevator that made this skyscraper possible, as such, the elevator opened up '*The*

Adjacent Possible'. The elevator is to skyscrapers what the alphabet is to language. The elevator is to skyscrapers what the acorn is to the oak tree. The elevator is to skyscrapers what Tiger is to golf. Did you see the Masters last weekend and now and now 18 majors is *'The Adjacent Possible'*, but I digress.

Let me go back to the ground floor. *'The Adjacent Possible'* is the thing that makes something else possible; it's the microchip in the scientific calculator, the personal computer, the cell phone, without the microchip we do not land a man on the moon. *'The Adjacent Possible'* is one small step that turns into a giant leap and what's true in innovation is true in our lives. And so let me personalize *'The Adjacent Possible'*.

When I was in the eighth grade, our family started attending Calvary Church in Naperville, Illinois. I did not know that the pastor had a daughter, and in the eighth grade it really didn't make a difference. But in the 12th grade I asked her out and we've been married for 26 years. Now, I did not know this at the time, but when our family started attending Calvary Church, Lora was *'The Adjacent Possible'*. That's what I'm talking about. And after college, Lora and I got married and while I was in graduate school, we tried to plant a church in the Chicago area, but that church plant failed and it was that failed church plant that opened us up to other possibilities. Stick with me. We think of failure in negative terms, but listen, it's often failure that introduces us to *'The Adjacent Possible'*. Do you know why Pixar started making movies? Because they couldn't sell enough copies of their animation software. Their business model was not working and *'The Adjacent Possible'* was Toy Story and Monsters Inc and my personal favorite Up.

Alright, back to that failed church plant. Listen, we had no intention of ever leaving the Chicago area. It was home, but that failed church plant prompted us to pack all of our earthly belongings into a 15 foot U-Haul and take a 595 mile step of faith. But here's the thing, we did not move to DC to plant a church, but guess what? That move made National Community Church, *'The Adjacent Possible'*. Now I could tell you a hundred stories. You could tell me a hundred stories. Can I insert a little good news right here? God wants you to get where God wants you to go more than you want to get, where God wants you to go and he is really good at getting us there. God is ordering your footsteps. God is preparing good works in advance. God is watching over his word to perform it. Now here's the question you may be asking on Easter. What does any of that have to do with the resurrection? So glad you asked. It has everything to do because if the tomb is empty, all bets are off. Listen, if Jesus walked out of that tomb 2,000 years ago, then the word impossible was removed from our vocabulary, in fact, Jesus said all things are possible, then he flips the coin and says nothing is impossible. But let me say this as succinctly as I possibly can., Jesus is *'The Adjacent Possible'*. Okay?

'The Adjacent Possible' is a person and his name is Jesus. I want you to stop and think about this. When Jesus came onto the scene, no one had a category for the miracles that he would perform. He's at a wedding reception and they run out of wine, now, this is not the end of the world, but it's awfully embarrassing for the bride and groom, and so what does Jesus do? You got to love this. He changes the molecular structure of water and turns it into wine and not just wine, but fine wine. That's impossible. Yes. No. Why? Because Jesus is *'The Adjacent Possible'*.

No one had a category for feeding 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish and then having more leftover than you started with that does not add up but when you put what you have in your hands into the hands of God now five plus two equals 5,000 remainder 12th.

How about healing and a man born blind? No synaptic connections between the optic nerve, visual cortex and the brain. Impossible? Yes. No possible. What about Lazarus? Four days dead now this is impossible, no, possible. And then we get all the way to the crucifixion and come on, this has gotta be game over. No, it's game on. Do not put a comma where God puts a period. I love the way Peter says this in Acts 2:24, "*God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*" That makes no sense unless Jesus is who he said he was. On the third day, light defeats darkness, life defeats death. Jesus walks out of the tomb, out of the shadows, and that changes everything. I want you to dial in right here, Christianity, not a moral code. Yes, we have a great commandment, "*love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself*". Yes, we try to live by this thing called the Sermon on the Mount where you go the extra mile, you turn the other cheek, you love your enemies, you pray for those who persecute you. Why? Because that's what Jesus taught and that's what Jesus modeled. But the foundation of our faith is not a moral code; this is not about behavior modification.

The foundation of our faith is an empty tomb. Now, I can't prove it any more than you can disprove it. It's a tenet of faith one way or the other, but let me push this envelope, praise God for the cross. This is where Jesus puts love on full display. This is where grace and mercy and forgiveness and healing happen but the cross is not what makes Jesus unique. Listen, lots of people died on Roman crosses. Some archeologists estimate about a thousand crucifixions in Judea every year around the time of Jesus. Okay? That's about three per day, and so Jesus crucified between two thieves, this is par for the course. Lots of people died on Roman crosses, but none of them predicted their own resurrection and then pull it off. That's what makes Jesus unique. That's what makes him '*The Adjacent Possible*'.

Over the next six weeks, we're going to take on some tough topics; fear and shame and doubt and addiction. You may find yourself in a dark place and those things cast a long shadow, but let me tell you why we're bold enough to believe that you can come out of the shadow of shame, that you can overcome addiction, that you can operate by faith, even in the face of fear, one simple reason, because the tomb is empty. Now, listen, you aren't going to solve those problems with a 30 minute message any more than a 50 minute counseling session. Okay? You're going to have to make some difficult decisions. You're going to have to take some next steps if you want to come out of those shadows. But what if we take the first step together toward mental health, towards emotional health, towards spiritual health and I think it starts at an empty tomb. The resurrection, it reframes reality of the resurrection it redefines possibility.

Alright that's the introduction. Good news it's longer than the message, okay? I do not want you to get nervous. 1 Peter chapter one and verse three; "In his great mercy God has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

I want to unpack this promise; it won't take more than 10 minutes. Here we go. What is God's great mercy? Now, if you're taking notes, you can jot this down. I think grace is getting what we

do not deserve and then mercy is the other side of this coin. Mercy is not getting what we do deserve, and so the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. See, it's God's mercy that makes forgiveness *'The Adjacent Possible'*. And some good news, his mercies are new every morning. That Hebrew word does not just mean again and again, as amazing as that would be, it means different. His mercy is as unique as your fingerprint. In his great mercy, he has given us new birth. Now, this word means to begin again to beget again. Just when you think its game over, it is game on. God is the God of second chances and third chances, and 70 times seven chances. I love the way the message translates this verse. Are you ready for this? *"The future starts now."* Don't you love that? Come on! Can I tell you what we believe in National Community Church that it is never too late to be who you might've been? If you are breathing, God is not finished with you yet, in fact, the best is yet to come. Again, one decision away from a totally different life might be a really difficult decision. You got to back it up with some good habits, but there is an "Adjacent Possible". In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Please hear me. This is not just hope, this is living hope. That is a very different thing. In fact, it's a person.

English word living comes from the Greek word Zoe. It means fully alive and it's the word that John uses to describe Jesus in his Gospel. He says in him was life in him was Zoe and that Zoe was the light of all mankind.

(John 1:5) *'The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.'*

Now we're going to come back to that because that's how you come out of the shadows, you step into the light, into the life, into the love of God. Let me play this out, John 3:16, *'for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting Zoe'*. Jesus said, John 11: 25 *I am the resurrection and the Zoe*. He said, *I am the way, the truth and the Zoe* and then John 10 *the thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Jesus says, I came that you might have Zoe and that you might have it more abundantly.*

I think what I'm getting at is this, listen, God doesn't just make bad people good, he brings dead things to life. I love the way Steven Johnson defines *'The Adjacent Possible'*. In a Wall Street Journal article he said, *'The Adjacent Possible'* is a kind of shadow future, interesting, a shadow future hovering on the edges of the present state of things. Plato believed that human existence is not just determined by past tense memories or present tense realities, but also by future tense hopes and what we have is a living hope. And this is something; this is a thread that is woven from beginning to end. One of my favorite Prophet Jeremiah, *"I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a future and a hope"*. You know what I love about it? It's the context. It's the fact that these words are being proclaimed to Jewish refugees whose temple has just been plundered and whose God is being mocked. And even then even there, God says, Oh, I've got a future; I've got a hope for you. And he has the same for you, of that, I'm sure.

By definition, shadows are made by blocking light. If an object gets in the way of light, an area of darkness appears. That's what shame and fear and doubt and addiction do. Right? It's the pain of our past that then casts this shadow on our future. And so what happens? We let fear begin to dictate our decisions. We let shame begin to affect our self worth. We let addiction get the best

of us and it's almost like those things back-light us from the past and really cast doubt on could our future be any better than our present. Now I want to juxtapose that with this, there's this fascinating theological concept; happens about six times in scripture that God overshadows. In the garden of Eden God overshadows Adam and creates Eve. That's a good thing. Yes, men, yes? Very good thing God creates overshadows. Now, in the wilderness, God is a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day, not just guiding but providing shade from the desert sun. Then in the New Testament an angel makes a strange announcement to Mary says, the virgin is going to conceive and give birth to the Messiah and then explains how this is going to happen. The Holy Spirit shall come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you. On the Mount of transfiguration a cloud overshadows them and Jesus is transformed. Now, the next one kind of crazy. You get into the book of Acts people are getting healed right and left. They would actually lay the sick in the streets. Why? So that the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow them. And then you get to 2nd Corinthians chapter 12 verse nine it says, '*my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness*'. And Paul responds to God's sufficient grace this way. He says, "*therefore I will boast about my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may overshadow me.*"

When God overshadows us powerful things happen, the shadow of the almighty, it creates things, it conceives things, it hovers over us, guiding us and protecting us, it turns weaknesses into strengths, it redeems things that the enemy meant for evil and uses them for good, it transforms us, it heals us. May God overshadow your life this weekend. Your future may be backlit with fear and shame and addiction. Those things cast a long shadow. But listen, God can overshadow your past with his mercy. He can overshadow your present with his power and he can overshadow your future with his presence. If you struggle with shame, forgiveness is '*The Adjacent Possible*'. If you struggle with fear, faith is '*The Adjacent Possible*'. If you struggle with addiction, freedom is '*The Adjacent Possible*'.

Let me go back to the tomb one more time because that's what makes it possible, that's what makes all things possible. Few years ago, Lora and I had the joy and privilege of making a trip to the Holy Land. And one of the places that we visited was one of the many places that claim to be the site where Jesus was buried. I'm not so sure, but we walked into one of those burial tombs and I had two observations, one kind of claustrophobic and two pretty dark, and that was with the door open. I did not want to spend any more time in there than I needed to. Imagine what it must've been like when that stone was rolled in front of that tomb the light of the world in total darkness. And then on the third day, the stone is rolled away but something crazy happens. It's not just the light of a new day that pours into the tomb it's the light of the world that pours out of it and in him was life. That life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness and because of it we can come out the shadows.

I'm going to invite our worship teams to come at all of our campuses; I want to close with this. I love this first Malachi 4:2, I preached on it a couple of months ago. And it says this; "*for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays.*" What a powerful image. And then it says this, "*you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves*". Now, I gotta admit that's kind of weird, but sort of awesome, right? Like, we do not pronounce this benediction. May you go in God's grace and frolic like well-fed calves. Like, we just don't do that. But it's this picture of the Son of righteousness shining on a life that is backlit with pain and

suffering and sorrow. And it's that light, it's that life that is our healing and in him we find our wholeness. Now listen, you have to step into that light, you have to step into that life. And that's what we're going to do over the next six weeks.

I usually close with a prayer, I want to do something different this weekend, I feel like pronouncing a benediction or a blessing on you. Listen, the first thing God does after creating Adam and Eve is he blesses them. This is their oldest memory and this is God's most ancient instinct, to bless us. And then you get into the wilderness and God instructs the Jewish priest to pronounce a blessing. And it's a blessing that I think foreshadows what we're talking about today. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face shine upon you. May the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord turn his countenance on you and give you peace. Amen.