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Jesus begins 6 sentences this way in his Sermon on the Mount. But right before he does all this repeating, he alerts his hearers. “Now don’t think I have come to abolish what was said of old. I’ve come to fulfill it.”

Jesus came advocating for a more expansive view of God’s intentions for the world. God isn’t just a law giver or rule enforcer but comes near and among us for the messy work of love – and invites us to the same.

Jesus speaks of a fuller purpose, not of confinement or restriction. Jesus shows us how much more is possible than we assume. “I have not come to abolish, but to fulfill” – to broaden, build up, embellish.

You have heard it said, love your neighbor, but I say, love also those who don’t love you back.

You have heard it said, care for widows and children, but I say see your neighbors’ children as your own – like the children in Ukraine, Iran, Syria, and Turkey. Jesus says, “They are us.”

You have heard it said, don’t tell lies, but I say, you won’t even think of leaping to defend yourself once you know who you really are – the beloved by God. If you embrace your belovedness, defensiveness loses its hold.

Today’s text, Deuteronomy 30:15, gives us one of the commandments not in the famous top Ten Commandments. Deuteronomy commands us to “choose life” as ones living in relationship with God. Every day we choose whether we’ll live this day as people of faith or we’ll live as atheists.

An atheist is what the word says: a–theist – like anonymous: not known. Thinking there can’t possibly be a God may be logical given all the bad in the world. But what often happens is, we say we’re not atheists, but we act like we are. We act like we don’t believe there’s really a God of love promising a future of blessing and holding us close as we walk toward it.

A Danish author, Soren Kierkegaard, incredibly wrote years ago, “The believer possesses the eternally certain antidote to despair.” Did you catch that – what it is we possess? “The believer possesses the eternally certain antidote to despair.”

We might venture guesses of what this brilliant theologian says is the antidote to despair. But it’s not any of the usuals. It’s not money. Not power. Not fixing all the wrongs in the world. We’re taught to think this – if we’d just have enough money, enough power, enough ability to fix things – we’d be self-sufficient and have life and have it abundantly.

But the problem is, money, and power, and technical know-how aren’t the end-all-be-all we’re led to believe. Kierkegaard boldly proposes *this* antidote to despair: “Possibility!” He quotes scripture to back it up: “*For with God all things are possible.*” He even adds, “*It may be said that this is what God is, One for whom all things are possible.*”

But here's the thing. Kierkegaard was devotedly Christian. He believed Jesus came to live in the real world with us. Kierkegaard marked himself with the cross of Christ. Kierkegaard observed Good Friday as a painful though temporary step in the Christian journey to Easter.

Good Friday precedes Easter, always. There's no way around it. Jesus' death is real because he entered our real and broken world. What's incredible is that Good Friday isn't all there is. The miracle is that life emerges again out of loss.

Kierkegaard names *possibility* the antidote to despair but not by denying life's disappointments and losses. "Possibility" is the antidote because, as Jesus said, he came to fulfill, not abolish. Jesus doesn't abolish sin, or loss, or death, or our freedom to live in houses of fear rather than houses of love, but Jesus came to fulfill for us a happier way.

Jesus was born in flesh and blood like we are. He bled on the cross he was put on because people wanted magic, more than God's possibilities.

Perhaps you've heard the story of the famous chess player at the art museum. The chess player became interested in a painting called *Checkmate*. The artist had intended to paint the winning moment of the loser being put into checkmate. The title was in bold relief: *Checkmate*. Thousands of visitors had observed the painting without critique – never doubting the loser was in checkmate.

But this world-famous chess player lingered with the painting, studying the chess board, examining the moves. "No," he finally yelled in the quiet museum. "There is still one more move." The chess player understood chess. The painter only painted it. Sure enough, there was one more possible move.

This is the sense in which Kierkegaard sees the believer's antidote to despair as "*possibility*."

But opening ourselves to God's possibilities requires we not deny our losses. Denial leads to despair by keeping us paralyzed, clinging to false hopes. "Only grief allows newness," says Brueggemann. Deuteronomy got this too. The struggle is before us. "I set before you life and death, and I say, choose life."

Have you ever wrestled with despair? I have. I've also discovered what it is to take it to the Lord in prayer – not hoping for magic, but for one who accompanies us through our losses to rise again to new life. Jesus is God meeting us in our troubles, walking with us to a new day. This is baptism – dying and rising.

In closing, a Prayer, and a Hymn, based on Micah 6:8.

*Merciful God, you ask **the impossible** of us:*

Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with God.

Then your Spirit gently whispers:

'Christ is your righteousness, holiness and redemption;'

*so we dare to try. We fail. And in your mercy, we try again **because** you are with us.*

Amen. (LWF)

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