

“Just Imagine...”
Mark 1:14-20
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One of the great things about being a pastor is being able to hear the stories of people's lives and what led them to be where they are today. Last Thursday, I heard a little of the story of Agnes Moreland Jackson who joined with us today. She told me that as a young girl she would hop on the trolley in L.A. and go a few blocks down to the 2nd Baptist church where she'd listen to preachers like Benjamin Mays, president of Morehouse College. After the sermon one Sunday, he told the young people that whoever could bring him the best recollection of the sermon would win a prize. The next Sunday Agnes won a box of candy. She said it was Mays and others like him who inspired her as a youth towards an exciting future. While at the University of Redlands, the very first Danforth fellowships were offered, and Agnes was in that first class of Danforth fellows which financially supported her education. These experiences set the direction of her life. Many of us can recall a person or an experience that came into our lives and set the course of our future.

Today's Gospel tells us that the experience of Jesus was the kind of catalyst that allowed the disciples to “just imagine.” They saw the world in a whole new light and Jesus allowed them to imagine themselves doing different things with their lives and being different people from that moment on. Because they could “just imagine” life in a new way, they left their boats and nets and followed Jesus. These words, “they left their boats and nets and followed Jesus,” have become so familiar that it's hard to remember that this was a major and probably traumatic life transition. Fishing was their livelihood. Whatever family they lived with depended on it! Today when a person abruptly changes careers they are often accused of being irresponsible. These disciples “checked out”! What caused such radical behavior as this?

My sermon title, “Just Imagine...”, and the whole point of this sermon is this: when we come face to face with God something happens to us and our imaginations are let loose and we begin to imagine life in a whole new way. And because we can just imagine, we can begin to make that new way of seeing life and living life come true and that is salvation. It is human nature to get stuck in the same old stuff. We are conditioned to repeat the past, to repeat the familiar and to stay within cycles of belief and behavior. We are hard wired to keep on doing the same old, same old.

But there was something about Jesus that stopped people in their tracks. His presence and his closeness to God was so powerful that people were compelled to take notice. His words forced them to see the way things were in the here and now and to “just imagine” a future where God's deepest desires came true. How can God help US to “just imagine?” I believe that God is that powerful One, that powerful presence of life that holds within God's self **all** possibilities. Most of the time we participate in only a very limited amount of the possibilities God offers to us. We're blind to the opportunities, invitations, chances, and even second chances for our lives to be complete. These possibilities tell us what might be, and what can be.

And because God offers us **so much** we live knowing that **God is for us, divine power is with us**. And though we may be highly influenced by our past, it does not determine our future because we can choose a new way. **This is really good news! This is a message of hope!** Though we may experience the deep, dark places of life, God is constantly luring us through love towards the greatest possible in any given moment. And often the people God gives us help us into those new possibilities through their encouragement or by even giving us the boot out of the old and into the new.

A little imagination can help us too! If we seek a model for imagination...we find a good one in children. Sometimes a child's imagination is so strong that the line between what's real and imagined is very fuzzy. I think this is why their dreams are sometimes so terrifying. My daughters taught me how to expand my imagination. While I was in seminary they got me hooked on the TV show, “Star Trek, the Next Generation.” The reruns came on about the time I'd be cooking their dinner. In fact, one reason we knew Tom was “the one” for us was because we discovered that

both he and the girls had almost a complete set of video tapes of every episode of Star Trek. It was the beginning of a beautiful relationship!

An ongoing theme of Star Trek is that the humans on the spaceship, Enterprise, are constantly being introduced to aliens from other planets and galaxies. The crew is challenged to imagine the universe in a different way with many different life forms. One of those aliens, a particularly obnoxious one whose name was Q, makes this comment to a member of the crew: "You're thinking too much like a human...." What he was really saying was that human beings often fail to tap into their imaginations.

Today's gospel is the story of some fishermen whose imaginations were unleashed one day at the seashore. They started out for another day's work, but then they encountered Jesus. They followed this Jesus because he set them free to imagine the infinite possibilities of God. Jesus was the light that shown in the darkness, He flipped the switch, so that their imaginations were "turned on" to how God wanted the world to be.

Jesus' first sermon in the gospel of Mark was this: "repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Frederick Buechner a theologian and author, says this about repentance: "True repentance spends less time looking at the past and saying, 'I'm sorry,' than to the future and saying; 'Wow'. God gives us the power to change. The past may influence us but it doesn't control us. And knowing this, we can say "Wow" to the future. This doesn't mean that we ignore or deny what we've been in the past; the disciples probably did more fishing later on, but they did it as changed men.

Can we as people of God trust God and "just imagine?" Can we think outside the box? Can the church be that presence, that can say to a world that seems intent on repeating the past to "just imagine..." and then name for the world God's new possibilities? To use Walter Bruggemann's words; the church must offer "Prophetic Imagination." We, the church, are a collective force of prophetic imagination that proclaims to all people, "just imagine...the possibilities God has for you."

The author, Alice Walker, dedicates one of her novels to her mother. It reads like this: "To my mother, who made a way out of no way." She describes her mother, the poverty in which they lived, the grinding work her mother did in order to "make a way out of no way" and Walker says this: "My Mother..handed down respect for the possibilities--and the will to grasp them." "To make a way out of no way" requires us to imagine the endless possibilities God invites us to. And when we "just imagine..." then with God's help we are empowered, and we can say "wow" to a new future. AMEN.