

## **Imagine**

Acts 4: 32-35

About a year ago, this congregation was engaged in a capital funds campaign to raise money to buy a building. That, of course, assumed we could find one we all agreed on and could afford one we liked. One gift that was given during the campaign was the production of a Capital Campaign DVD by our own Will Blackwell.

According to Will's vision, there was a recurring theme in the video: "imagine". Imagine what can be. Imagine what could happen and what might appear. Imagine what we can accomplish. Do you remember what we imagined? Do you remember what you imagined?

The clinching line was "imagine it happening now". Those of you who were part of that process, could you have imagined then what we are experiencing now? More importantly, what can we imagine now for next year, for two years, and beyond? Imagine.

Something I never imagined, even a few months ago, was this rain garden project. Thanks to all of you who imagined this for Crossroads.

Yesterday was Earth Day, a fairly new holiday for our society. We had a great turn out at our open house and rain garden clinic yesterday. Why do you suppose a church would recognize and celebrate Earth Day? It's not a religious holiday. Why does a church emphasize Earth Day and environmental concerns?

The answer lies in many places, including the Bible. The Bible begins by proclaiming that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Then, there is the story of God planting a garden and making people to care for it. The Bible ends with God recreating both heaven and earth. In between the beginning and the end of the Bible, the image of the Promised Land is a substantial part of God's covenant promise.

The Psalmist writes, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof". Isaiah writes, "The whole earth is full of [God's] glory" (Isaiah 6:3). Jesus constantly drew connections between God, himself, and faith with images from nature: "I am the vine. You are the branches." We need to have "faith like a grain of mustard seed". He told parables about a sower and some seeds and about workers in a vineyard. The promise of the first beatitude is "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth"

Many of us experience nature as one of the ways to see God's presence in the world. Nature is translucent to God. Modern science tell us that earth is really a single, global, organism. We're a part of the earth and she is part of us. Native culture images "the earth [as] our mother."

Our rain garden places at our fingertips, the sacred images of seeds sprouting to life, of living things being deeply rooted, and of God's Spirit enlivening them. These are imagine to remind us of the work the Spirit is accomplishing in us. The love of God is all around us. Earth Day is a good reminder of the breadth and depth of this love.

What else can you imagine? Can you imagine "no possessions? I wonder if you can; no need for greed or hunger, a brotherhood of man. Imagine all the people living life in peace." John Lennon's haunting lyrics echoed in my mind when I read the passage from Acts:

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. (Acts 4: 32 NRSV)

The whole congregation of believers was united as one—one heart, one mind! They didn't even claim ownership of their own possessions. And so it turned out that not a person among them was needy” Acts 4: 32, 34a The Message)

This description of the Christian community in Acts, with everyone sharing everything and no private possessions, sounds almost like a commune. If any of you has been part of a communal situation, they are not always idyllic. An honest reading of the New Testament reveals that things in the early church were not quite as idyllic as described here.

This passage is a description of the ideal faith community. What is described is called Koinonia – the community of the Spirit. Such community is characterized by love and trust. What made it work was the presence and leadership of the apostles, the trust that members had for each other, and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

You might imagine an ideal community: a family or a church. What is ideal for you? What is it you imagine for your life? What is it you imagine for your family? What is it you imagine for this church? How do we get there?

Sharing of possessions was key to the community of Spirit in that early church. I am not advocating communism or even communal living. I don't think we should read the Bible as insisting that we have no private property or personal possessions. Yet, most relational issues between people seem to come down to our relationship with money. It is said, “The love of money is the root of all evil”. Money gets a bad rap. It is not the source of evil. It is our attitude that is in question. How we relate to our possessions plays a huge part in creating a community of the Spirit.

What about Crossroads? What about us and our possessions? As many of you know, in order to afford to buy this wonderful building we now call our church home, we had to do more than just raise money through a capital campaign. We also had to economize by restricting our budget to the bare minimum for the last two years. It worked. We are here and here is a wonderful place to be.

Without a budget for most of our programming, we have developed something of an underground economy here at Crossroads. I am tremendously grateful for all who have stepped up and given above and beyond your regular giving to the church for everything from hot dogs and lemonade to carpeting for the youth room; gifts to support ongoing programming needs and gifts to enable special activities to happen. There have been so many generous and spontaneous gifts, especially over the past two years. I could not possibly do justice to trying to name them. To each of you, and all of you, on behalf of the congregation, “thank you”.

There are always opportunities and needs for special offerings in the life of every congregation. There always will be. Reliance on such gifts for the ongoing ministry of any congregation, however, will inevitably begin to undermine our trust in each other and in the community. It will become shaky ground as the basis for our life together. Suspicion always seems to creep in that others may be holding back in order to support their favorite program. “I don't know, but I suspect...”

How can we trust the full commitment of each other unless we trust the whole community with setting our ministry and financial priorities. In the church described in Acts,

nobody held back. Everyone trusted everyone to give what they could. No one was in need. The Spirit filled their community.

This will be a wonderful year in the life of Crossroads Church, I can imagine us echoing the experience of that early church – each of us committing all we can and trusting that, as a community together, we will shape our priorities. I see this happening in so many ways, including with our money. And the Spirit will fill us, more and more. As we work together to shape a community of Koinonia and experience God’s new creation being born in us and through us.

More than rain gardens or stewardship, the theme today is “Imagine”. Embrace the power of sacred imagination.

The danger of not treating the creative imagination with real love is that this involves a rejection of God – or at least of a huge and magnificent dimension of God. Such a rejection seriously impedes [our] work in the transformation of the world. (Sara Maitland, *A Big-enough God*)

You may remember the story about a woman’s dream. A new shop had opened. Out of curiosity she went in, and to her surprise God was behind the counter. ‘Oh,’ she said, “What do you sell here?” “Everything your heart desires,” said God. Hardly daring to believe her ears, she decided to ask for everything a person could wish for. “I want health and happiness, and wisdom, and peace of mind,” she said. And as an afterthought she added: “Not just for me and my family, but for everyone in the whole world.” God smiled: “I think you’ve got me wrong, my dear. We don’t sell fruits here, only seeds.” (as told by Francis Dewar in *Invitations*)

You may say that I’m a dreamer,  
but I’m not the only one.  
I hope some day you’ll join us  
and the world will live as one. (John Lennon)