

Faithful Imagination

From the Bible: Revelations 21: 1-4

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Welcome back from your summer wanderings which I hoped included some significant and meaningful sabbath time.

Time to rest and to take a deep breath.

Time to reflect and recharge and reconnect.

And now to be ready for fall with all it will bring and hold.

Now we are back.

And with that, what about this as a place to begin!

Filled with threats and warnings.

And angels and demons.

And battles and judgement.

And finally triumph (at least for a few).

Complete with all of the drama of Tolkien's *Return of the King* or JK Rowling *Harry Potter and the Deadly Hallows*.

We finally get to this:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

"See the dwelling place of God is among mortals.

The Holy One will dwell with them as their God;

They will be God's peoples, and God will be with them.

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more.

Mourning and crying and pain will be no more..

For the first things have passed away." (Revelations 21: 1-4)

This morning I would like to think with you about imagination.

God wiping away every tear from your eyes.

Mourning and crying and pain being no more.

God's Kingdom come.

Daily bread enough for all.

Swords into plowshares and weapons of war remade into tools with which to harvest food.

In the introduction to the Book of Revelations, the last book in the Bible and the last writing in the canon of Christian scripture, the editors of the Oxford Annotated Bible, write this:
The book of Revelation, or Apocalypse, is a fitting close to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, for its final chapters depict the consummation toward which the whole biblical narrative of redemption is focused. It may be described as an inspired picture-book that, by an accumulation of magnificent poetic imagery, makes a powerful appeal to the reader's imagination. Many of the details of its pictures are intended to contribute to the total impression, and are not to be isolated and interpreted with wooden literalism.

It is probable that the author put the book in its present form toward the close of the reign of the [Roman] Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81-96). It was then that Domitian began to demand that his subjects address him as "Lord and God" and worship his image. For refusing to do so, many Christians were put to death, others were exiled and all were threatened."

That is the context for that vision of what we believe is to be.
Surrounded and seemingly overwhelmed by the misuse and abuse of power. By persecution.
And, threats. And suffering. And sacrifice. In the midst of all of that, this...
A new heaven and a new earth for the old, what was and what we know, will have passed away.

Now back to today.
And to you and me.
And to Bedford Presbyterian Church.
And to the communities in which we live.
And to the places where you work.
And to the country as it is.
And to the world entrusted now to our care and keeping.
With eyes wide open to what you see and to what is, with all of its confusion and chaos and uncertainty and questions, in your best and your most faithful moments what do you imagine might be?
What vision for your life or our life does your faith stir up within you?
What do you sense or see God calling you towards?
Calling us towards?

I am serious.
I mean this as more than an intellectual exercise.
This, I believe, is a part of what it means to be a Christian. A person of faith.
To see, at least some small portion of your life and world, the way God imagines and intends life and world to be.
Then to turn towards and to hold onto that vision.
So, I wonder...
What is tugging at the edges of your heart?
What is stirring in the depths of your spirit?

When you pray for yourself what do you pray for?
When you pray for our country what words do you use?
Do you wish people were more kind to each other?
Do you wish there was more dialogue and less shouting?
Do you envision a world where there is less hunger? Less violence? Less hatred and racism?
A world where all have enough and all have a place?
What?
May I ask?

That was step one.

This is step two.

If it is true, which I believe it is, that we are called to be partners with God in God's ongoing work in the world, then what can you do to step towards that vision of tomorrow which God has placed in your heart or mind or soul.

Wishful thinking is not enough here.

Waiting for someone else or waiting for God is not who we are called to be.

Thoughts and prayers without moving your feet gets us nowhere.

As I was writing this sermon I remembered and then googled this quote attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. *"Start by doing what is necessary; then do what is possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible."*

Is that the way it works?

You start where you can and go from there?

Each of us doing our part.

Each of us doing what we can.

Pointed in the direction of God's Kingdom come.

If you imagine the world as more generous, how do you practice generosity today?

If you imagine the world where all have enough, what choices and decisions are you making today to help make that happen tomorrow?

If you imagine a world less fractured by racism or sexism or tribalism, what are you doing to understand those subtle tendencies at play in your own life and how they are at work in our communities and then doing what you can to grow and change?

So much of what this congregation does in the larger community started that way.

Twenty nine years ago, three high school young women convincing the Session to support the Midnight Run which then made space for us to envision and risk the Emergency Shelter Partnership which, once we started it, no one in our communities has died due to exposure.

And, believing all should have a safe place to live or sleep leading to our building or repairing homes in Yonkers and Peekskill and Grundy, VA and Colcord, WV, and Bedford, NY and in Nicaragua. And with eyes to see the community and world around us leading to the first Laundry Love in Mt. Kisco a couple weeks ago.

Is that how it works?

Start where you are and go from there?

Then one day...

Maybe.

Beyond me and maybe beyond you, but someday that day will be when...

And, God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

And, Death will be no more.

And, mourning and crying and pain will be no more.

For the first things have passed away.”

May it be so, O God.

May it be so.