

## Imagining Beyond the Boundaries

This past year I took a course about peacebuilding, where the class approached peacebuilding as an art, a craft, that needs a different set of tools and a different approach than what is usually taught in a classroom, with the expectation of learning information and communicating in back to the prof in an academic format. Instead, we spent a lot of time drawing pictures, playing charades and interacting with each other. Every time that I explain this to people, the response is usually laughter and people roll their eyes, usually followed by some comment of “well obviously you’re a PCTS major...” Even though this class was the epitome of unconventional, I think I learned more than I ever have in a classroom.

As I have been thinking about this class it stands out because it engaged my imagination in ways I rarely do in university. One exercise that challenged me more than others was talking about the Gun Violence in the states. My Professor invited the class to come up with an invention that would mitigate the violence and tension concerning gun control. The invention did not have to be possible in reality. That was all the instruction that we got. This was a challenge and I struggled so much. I felt way too stuck in the limitations of reality. I couldn’t default to what I’ve done before.

As a child, I loved “playing pretend.” I would spend hours writing stories and plays, pretending I could fly, and I even had an imaginary friend. But I thought that everything I was creating, was separate from the problems of the world. I began to perceive that imagination should be limited to my mind, and had no place in “the real world.” I wonder if too often we cast our imagination aside when we are told to grow up. We determine that reason and imagination can’t go together, and that we must set aside our wildest dreams and settle for reality.

But, I have always believed that God is a God of imagination. I believe that God dreams, imagines and has a vision of the world that is beyond human understanding.

The passage in Ephesians states that God, who is working in us, can accomplish abundantly far more than we could ask or imagine. The work of God is even beyond that which we can comprehend. The scope of God’s vision for the world stretches beyond what we could possibly imagine. So why do we limit ourselves to the boundaries of what we understand?

God creates the world, out of nothing, there was light and life. Throughout the history of the world, God has been creating, re-shaping and inventing. Everyday people discover more pieces of the beauty of the world and as a people of faith, we strive to live into the imagination of God. We often state that God has plans for the world, but we often struggle with this, perhaps

because God's plan for the world cannot be limited to our own experience because God's love surpasses knowledge and understanding.

Revelation gives a vision of the New Creation, where God's reign is established. One cannot help but envision this passage, as it draws on powerful images of water, and light. Though this passage from Revelation has evoked positive emotions, I generally find myself steering clear of this book, because I feel like I'll never be able to understand all the symbolism and intention of the text. It all just seems a little daunting! I've heard so many stories of people who've trying to figure out the exact meaning and slot these images into a calendar of events. So Revelation has been a bit of a "taboo." Perhaps we are trying to fit these ideas into the limited understandings of the world. What if these passages are a small glimpse into the imagination of God?

I wonder if we would gain new insight about this text by using our imagination and creativity. If God is can do more than we can even imagine, approaching scripture with our presuppositions and ideas won't cut it. We often read scripture through a lens of our rules of the world, and our reality. But, reality is shaped by certain borders and boundaries. Culture, time, language, gravity. None of these factors have the same pull in our imagination where we can create without these factors having the same importance.

When I read this text, I see the beauty of the new creation, a world without our limits. These passages speak of a city with no temple, where the river runs through the middle of the street. This doesn't fit into our concept of how the world works. It is a time where all of life is ordered by the breadth, height, length and depth of God's love.

As we have spent our summer exploring the theme borders and boundaries, I have begun to ask myself, what is borderless? I found myself continually coming back to imagination.

Even though borders and boundaries are not innately "bad," it is still important to enter a space where they don't have the same pull. Our imaginations allow us to forget about restriction and limitations. It is an experiment in freedom and an exercise in creativity. Imagination allows us to see from a new perspective and see new possibilities where before we only saw a wall. It is artists who have transformed so many walls into pieces of artwork, some beautiful and others that portray the hurt in a striking way. Street artists have turned walls into canvases, where they share their hopes, wishes and anger.

This is why I believe my professor had us stretch our imaginations; to see new perspectives on peace, justice and reconciliation.

As people of faith who follow a creative God, we are invited to live into that imagination. To nurture a Holy Imagination, where we allow ourselves to enter into God's vision. God is not

limited to the boundaries of human reality, so maybe it would make sense to read scripture with imagination. These are the stories and images that are constantly unfolding for us, and I think that we can see a new depth of scripture by using our imagination.

As I was preparing for this sermon I googled “Holy Imagination,” and discovered that in the Ignatian tradition there is a form of contemplative prayer that they call Imaginative prayer. It was developed from the belief that God can speak to us through our imagination, just as through memories and thoughts. This is a spiritual practice that guides people through an entry into the scriptures, as people place themselves into a scene from scripture and move farther into the story by using imagination. This then allows us to move closer to God in a different way, and experience the stories of scripture.

This stood out to me as a way of reading scripture that can potentially transcend boundaries that we have in prayer. We are often limited by our language, or struggle to actually listen to God, but this practice moves beyond conversation and into experience. So I thought that we would try this out today!

I will read the passage from Revelation and I invite you to enter into the story. Please feel free to sit comfortably, or draw or write as you listen, and let your imagination experience this passage. Everyone should have a paper with guiding questions, and a pencil crayon if you wish.

So I invite you to imagine the scene as I read it and find a place within it.

Let the words unfold in your imagination.

Try to place yourself in the scene. Who are you? Where are you?

Are you a central figure or observing on the sides?

What can you see, hear and feel around you?

Listen to the sounds around you.

Are there other people there?

Look at the expressions on people’s faces and listen to the tone of people’s voices.

What else can you hear, see or feel?

Perhaps you will notice things not mentioned in the text.

Is there anything that you want to explore more?

So let’s be still for a moment.

### Revelation 21:22 – 22:5

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

In a world of borders and boundaries, imagination is something that surpasses all of that. It is boundless, and takes us to the moments of challenge and creativity. As we enter into a world of imagination, there is a possibility that we can see from a new perspective, and see possibility where before we saw a wall.

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God, whose creative energy and transforming power invites us into new life in the imagination of God.