

Sunday, August 2, 2015
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon – "Imagine"

When I was a child and complained of boredom my mother would say "Use your imagination."

It was a somewhat vague directive that I hadn't thought much about until I started seeing the word 'imagination' come up in my reading about church dynamics.

In a book called "Imagining the Small Church" Pastor Steve Willis celebrates the values and attributes of smaller churches, reminding readers that for most of history the church has been small.

Willis focuses on all of the good things in a small church: relationships; community; sense of belonging; a church that is heart-centered.

He urges us to embrace what we have, rather than strive for cultural benchmarks based on size and budgets.

In many ways his approach reflects the appreciative inquiry model we talked about a few weeks ago.

In Larry McSwain's column for the Center for Healthy Churches last month, imagination again was lifted up as an important attribute for the vital church.

"Congregational vitality is essentially spiritual and the presence of the Spirit in our midst has no limitations *if we are open to the reality of the new*. Congregational capacity is more fundamentally an issue of the imagination than the metrics of bodies, buildings, and budgets. The focus is on what we *can* do rather than what we *can't* do."

Again, imagination was tied to positive thinking.

As I reflected on this I realized that the authors were encouraging us to be open to new ideas, new ways of thinking – the same thing that Jesus was doing.

Jesus was asking his followers to imagine a world where every person was nourished and cared for.

In Jesus' kingdom, every person matters, the lowly are exalted, the weak made strong.

Perhaps the only way we can embrace such an enormous vision is to use our imaginations.

Our imaginations are the territory where we dream of what might be, but also where we picture what might have been.

As children we use our imaginations to create fantasy worlds and scenarios, often where we have more power than we do in real life.

As we get older, we dismiss the imaginary world and root ourselves in the reality of day to day living.

But...isn't faith really an act of our imagination.

Don't we employ creative thinking when we read scripture – we create the biblical stories in our heads.

Could we possibly embrace the story of Noah and the Ark or David and Goliath without imagination?

What would Christmas or Easter be without our imaginations?

When we pray, we are able to picture God or sense God's presence with our imaginations.

As Joe and I visited restored palaces in St. Petersburg, Manor Houses in Estonia, walled villages in Sweden we had to use our imaginations to picture life in the past.

Scientists report that close to 50 percent of our waking hours are spent daydreaming.

Think about how much of your time is spent in internal dialogue, thinking, planning, observing, reflecting.

Why do we not give life to those internal ruminations?

Why don't we say our dreams out loud?

Why don't we articulate possibilities?

I think that imagination has been trivialized by our fact-driven society.

We dismiss imagination as childish.

But the definition of imagination is simply 'the forming of mental images or concepts of what is not actually present to the senses.'

So there is nothing childlike or trivial about using this uniquely human trait.

For the past eight years, I have had to use my imagination to maintain a relationship with my father.

As Alzheimers Disease robbed him of his memory and ability to converse, I had to try and understand what he might be thinking or feeling.

Imagination is a gift from our Creator that allows us to dream of things that are not yet present to our senses.

When the followers asked Jesus to give them a sign, such as God's gift of manna to the wandering Israelites, Jesus urged them to understand without having to touch or see.

He said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Completely intangible.

Nothing to hold on to.

Nothing to prove.

Nothing actually present to the senses.

But oh what's there – an offer, a promise, faith in things unseen.

We are missing an opportunity to use one of our greatest gifts when we limit where our mind is allowed to go.

Think of the literature or art or music that has been created when someone lets their imagination take over.

I consider Dr. Seuss one of the champions of utilizing imagination in our lifetime.

He said, "Think left and think right and think low and think high. Oh, the things you can think up if only you try!"

My friends, take and eat the bread of life Jesus offers.

Allow your mind to wander.

Dream out loud.

Imagine what the world could be if we were all sustained by the food that endures for eternal life.

Imagine.