

“Imagine”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia
Season of Epiphany, Sunday, February 17, 2019
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Ephesians 3: 14-21

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For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

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.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Sermon

“Now to [God] who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to [God] be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.”

“...more than all we can ask or imagine...”

God is able to accomplish more than we can imagine.

What can you imagine?

Envision? Conceive? Dream?

God can do more! Is more! Loves more!

“The always more of God” is so much greater than we can ask for or imagine.

And yet, imagination is a requisite for love.

Love is imagination.

Harrison Simmons is a Disciple of Christ who went to Parkview High School.

Harrison swam very well for his high school team.

In 2004, we were both at Camp Christian,

he as a HS senior and me as a keynote speaker.

His high school swim coach granted permission for Harrison to miss a week of practice

with the condition that he swim laps in the camp pool

every morning at 6 AM for an hour, so he could stay in shape.

I agreed to be the adult lifeguard,

although he was a far better swimmer than me,

dragging weights behind him

as he powered through lap after lap after lap.
So, while Harrison swam back and forth, by dawn's early light
I sipped coffee, studied the Scriptures, and prepared keynote presentations.

I admire Harrison's dedication to his sport;
I honor his commitment to all of God's people.

When he was 15, he volunteered to serve as a counselor-in-training
in our Disciples camp for low-income children.
He was aghast when he discovered that the underprivileged children
in Camp Balaam (now called Camp Oasis) were not given camp t-shirts
like every other participant in our other church camps.

"This is not right," he thought.

He quietly asked a regional minister
how much it would cost for the kids to have shirts, too.
For the next year, he set aside a 10% tithe from his allowance
and from his earnings from p/t jobs.

By June of his 16th year,
he had saved and then sent enough money to Camp Christian
to ensure that every child at Camp Balaam got a t-shirt.

How do I know this?

How are you hearing of this?

Not from my modest young friend Harrison.

His mother, Landa Simmons, first shared her son's story of faithful stewardship,
and then he gave me permission to tell you.

Love is imagination.

Harrison's imagination freed him to love as God would have him be.

Harrison could have focused on himself, on his swimming, on his little circle.

He could have said, *"Ah, I'm only a drop in the ocean. What can one person do?"*

The common definition of a drop in the ocean leans toward smallness, helplessness.

If you say that something is a drop in the ocean,

some folks mean to say that it's a very small amount, teeny tiny in comparison,
something so small it's unimportant

compared to the cost or size or magnitude of other things,
so small that its effect is infinitesimal.

Don't tell that to the Creator, the Son or the Holy Spirit!

A drop in the ocean can change the tide, alter the hue, raise all boats.

Who are we to tell God we are only, we are just, we are infinitesimal?

If you have the faith of a mustard seed, you can move mountains.

Harrison tapped into God's love planted deep in his heart;

he discovered that he had compassion for someone else.

He imagined a solution to the problem,

and recognized he was a part of the solution.

He made the effort, he made sacrifices, he made sure to follow through,

and his act of generosity changed regional camp policy.
To this day, every child at every camp gets a t-shirt,
a warm welcome, a place at the Table.

Love is imagination.
Love frees us and binds us at the same time.
Love liberates us to become who we ought to be and to see our neighbors holistically;
Love also binds us, yokes us to be true to the Way of the Lord.
Love connects us to the God of Creation,
and to all that God created and creates.

Sometimes when we send a loving Emoji with our texts,
we like to use hearts or happy faces.
Love is not emotion.
It has little, if anything, to do with infatuation.
Emotion, joy, passion may be attached, but love is more, so much more.

Through Christ,
*“the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more
than all we can ask or imagine.”*

Love is imagination.
Love is imagination to see people in light of the hope
of the wholeness that God has in store for them.
Love involves seeing someone as having worth, meaning, infinite value as God’s own.
Love sees worthiness in another soul, looking, seeking, searching deep within,
even when there is little outside evidence that this is so.
That, my friends, involves imagination.
Imagine the goodness in your neighbor.
Imagine that there is more to a person
than a first impression, or a mistake, or an imperfection,
or a connection with something or someone you find unpleasant.
Such imagination is a gift to you from God.
Imagination fires the mind and heart to look deeper,
to act with more responsibility,
and to make a greater sacrifice than our culture suggests.
As a matter of fact,
such imagination is a radical, counter-culture approach to life.

Through Christ,
*“the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more
than all we can ask or imagine.”*

Who has looked at you with an imaginative love, and changed your life?

Who do you know who needs for you to look at him or her with an imaginative love?

A child was looking out her car window at the snowy street
as her father drove them through downtown.
Paused at a red light, she saw a shape under the snow.
"Daddy, what's that on the sidewalk?"
"It's a man. He's probably homeless. Maybe he has to sleep there, on the street."
All the way home she could not get the image out of her head,
remembering his hands clasped together against the cold.
When they got home, she dug around in their glove drawer.
[We all have one, a glove drawer.]
She found a pair that matched.
She pestered her dad until he agreed to take her back to the same corner.
They drove through the snow and pulled up next to the shape in the snow.
She jumped out of the car and ran to the man, kneeling by his side.
She gave him the gloves and placed next to him a brown paper bag with a sandwich.
He was quite surprised and said thank you as he put them on.
She stood up and looked around.
There were others, other men and women,
standing, sitting, lying on the snowy sidewalk,
curious about the girl and her dad.
She knew what she wanted to do, had to do, was called to do.
She went home and started contacting her friends,
asking them to share extra gloves, blankets, to make sandwiches.
The parents got involved.
A child's vision became a communal reality.
True story.
This was the genesis of a movement.
Today their city has a movement of love and generosity,
people sharing coats and resources, job training and opportunities,
all sparked by the imagination of a child,
a drop in the ocean
who refused to forget what God called her to remember.

*"The happiest people are fearless dreamers.
They use their imaginations to create hope and possibility."* --Ian K. Smith, M.D.

What would you do if you knew that God would not let you fail?

Who would you be if you trusted in the faith God has in you,
that you are a drop in the ocean,
a drop that can change the tide, alter the hue, raise all boats.

Imagine that.
Imagine you.
Imagine us, embodying love and compassion, together.

The late Will Campbell was a Baptist pastor,
but he wasn't like any you or I have ever known.
If you ever read the cartoon *Kudzu*,
Campbell was the model for the preacher Will B. Done.
The real Will Campbell delivered a sermon
in which he described his fantasy for an altar call.
He imagined a preacher inviting people to come meet Jesus,
and as the people begin to come down the aisle,
the preacher shouts to them, "*Why are you coming to me? Go out and find Jesus!*"
And they turn and head out of the building.
In a little while, news reports begin coming in.
The jails are being swamped with people wanting to visit prisoners.
The nursing homes are overwhelmed with people
coming to share God's love with patients.
The food pantries in town don't have room to store all the food they've received.
[Friends and neighbors who never really talked and listened to each other are suddenly
having conversations that matter.]
And in every one of those places,
people are yelling, "*We want to see Jesus. We want to see Jesus.*"

That's the invitation God offers.
Seek Jesus in the face of our neighbor in need.
Self-giving care for others is at the heart of the revealed will of God.
Imagine that.
Imagine us, seeking and discovering Jesus in the faces of our neighbors in...

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!