

THE MESSAGE for Oct 24, 2010
Colossians 1:15-20 & Luke 18:9-14
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Kingdom Inclusion

In 1971 John Lennon released a popular song called “Imagine” and it has remained very popular for the past 39 years. “Imagine” is on the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame’s list of “500 Songs that Shaped Rock and Roll.” And it’s ranked the third greatest song of all times by *Rolling Stone Magazine*.

Listen to the words of the song, “Imagine...”

“Imagine there’s no Heaven/It’s easy if you try
 No hell below us/Above us only sky
 Imagine all the people/Living for today
 Imagine there’s no countries/It isn’t hard to do
 Nothing to kill or die for/And no religion too
 Imagine all the people/Living life in peace
 You may say I’m a dreamer/But I’m not the only one
 I hope someday you’ll join us/And the world will be as one
 Imagine no possessions/I wonder if you can
 No need for greed or hunger/A brotherhood of man
 Imagine all the people/Sharing all the world
 You may say I’m a dreamer/But I’m not the only one
 I hope someday you’ll join us/And the world will live as one.”

Regardless of what you think or believe about John Lennon, I invite you to consider the message in his song – “Imagine.”

The message is pretty simple. And it sure seems to resonate with a similar message that we, as disciples of Jesus, are called to share – a message of hope not fear. A message of living in peace together. A message that calls to think and live outside the box; when so many people, and organizations, and countries, and nations are stuck inside the box. Stuck in the way things are.

Did you know that one definition of *insanity* is doing the same thing over and over and over expecting different results?

John Lennon’s song “Imagine” is a tribute, not to the way things are, but to the way things could be. If we, could just imagine. And it’s easy, if we try.

That’s what I find so appealing about the message in this song. Things don’t have to be the way they are. We can make things better. We can make the entire world better. Do you believe that? Can you imagine that?

How many of you are content with the way things are in your life? In your relationships? In the church? In the world? If you are content that's super fantastic! Please tell me your secret. I want to know what it is!

If you aren't content with the way things are (and that's most of the population) then let me ask you – are you willing to imagine what could be? Are you willing to step outside the box and consider new and exciting possibilities for your life? For your relationships? For the church? For the world?

Imagine... just imagine...

In Luke's Gospel we are invited to imagine how we approach God in worship. Because the way we approach God in worship reveals how we approach life and the people around us. Listen to these words from the 18th chapter:

Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood up and prayed about^[a] himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

¹³"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

¹⁴"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Imagine how you come to worship? Do you approach God humbled or exalted? Do you expect God to do amazing things when we gather for worship or do you expect business as usual? God has high expectations of us; perhaps we need to raise our expectations of what God will do with us in worship.

Imagine... just imagine...

Jesus imagined a different world and came to do something about it. The heart of his message was that **the Kingdom of God is at hand everywhere**, all the time not just here in worship. What happens in worship doesn't stay in worship. This isn't Las Vegas. What happens here is to equip us to live lives of faith in the world.

Jesus' message of hope is for the entire world. Jesus said the Kingdom of God is here, right now, unfolding in our midst, wherever we are. The Kingdom of God isn't limited to an hour or so on Sunday morning *and* it isn't some far-off reality either. It's not some destination we finally get to after our time on earth is finished. The Kingdom of God is right here, right now, all around us, all the time, for all peoples.

Saint Paul taught the Christians in Rome saying "... *the Kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*" (Romans 14:17). The Kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit...

Imagine that...

One day my children were just being children – arguing like children sometimes do about who was right. Children will do that from time to time. I listened to them arguing and then I said, “Please stop arguing about who’s right... It’s not about being right or wrong it’s about getting along...” Simon, our 7-year-old son said, “Hey dad you rhymed...” I responded, “Yeah I did! Cool!”

It was a God moment.

I repeated my words and I listened to them and thought about how often we – as children of God – tend to do that from time to time. I tend to do that from time to time and I don’t ever realize it. I wonder – why do we so often argue with each other? Why is it so important for us to be right? I learned something very powerful in that God moment. It’s not about being right or wrong it’s about getting along. And it’s more than simply agreeing to disagree.

The Kingdom of God is where righteousness, and peace, and joy are shared because of our relationship with God in Christ Jesus. That’s our hope. That’s our message. That’s our reason for being.

Imagine that...

Imagine this place called Friedens Lutheran Church being the talk of the town because of the righteousness and the peace and the joy that is shared in this place with one and all – a place of grace where all are welcomed and supported to grow in the faith everyday.

I can’t help but think that what we are talking about is more than personal salvation. It’s more than getting into heaven some day. It’s about living into God’s kingdom work in the world. It’s about being part of the reconciling, redeeming, and restoration of all creation. That’s what God imagines for everyone today, and tomorrow, and for all eternity.

Imagine living everyday not by fear but by faith as we pray... “thy Kingdom come, thy will be done (in us and through us) on earth as it is in heaven!” Just imagine!

The Bible reveals that God imagines so much more for you and me and all of creation. God imagines you and me living together in a special relationship because of Jesus. Listen to our reading from Colossians 1:15-20...

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the

body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹*For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,* ²⁰*and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

Imagine that... nothing is more important than our relationship with Jesus. Nothing. If we aren't living with him and for him then we really aren't living. He offers a peace that surpasses all misunderstandings.

I had one of those day's this past week. A meeting didn't go as I had imagined it would. That night I didn't sleep very well. I woke up early – about 2 hours earlier than my usual time. I turned to the Bible (I've been reading through Mark's Gospel) and then I spent some time in prayer. During that prayer time God whispered these words to me... *(write this on the grease board)...* **No Fears, No Worries, Know Peace**

Imagine those words written on your heart. This is life in the kingdom of God. And with these words I viewed the struggles of the day before in a new way. I understand the situation in a new way. And I have a contentment now that I never had before.

With Jesus we have No Fears, No Worries, because we Know Peace. A peace that Jesus offers us for living everyday. It doesn't mean we won't have conflicts or struggles or problems. It means Jesus is willing and committed to help us and guide us and grow us into being servants in his kingdom.

How might you live into the reality that the Kingdom of God is at hand and that you are a servant therein? How might you live into this kingdom reality in your life? In your relationships? In the church? In the world?

Imagine how our lives would be different if we were willing and committed to helping all people live with no fears, no worries, because we know peace.

Imagine that...

It isn't hard to do. Imagine all the people living for today. Nothing to kill or die for, no greed or hunger in anyway. People sharing all the world, living life in peace. You may say that I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us, and the world will be as one. And the world will live as one.

Imagine that... Amen.