

Holy Imagination

—Week 6, Day 1—

I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Psalm 139:14

Imagination gets buried beneath the rubble during a crisis. Creativity only comes into play when it's fashioning some sort of weapon or survival tool. Dark days are good for the candle-making industry. But they don't inspire much candle-light dancing.

It's beneficial to revisit the dawn of imagination where God spoke light into existence out of something he saw in his mind. He carved out canyons with the tip of his fingernail, brush-stroked the bird's plumage with vivid form and color, designed the workings of an atom without a calculator.

He "dared" to imagine. He spoke. Life exploded out of dark nothingness. Was this a one-time deal, or might God be setting a precedent?

God is up to something in this world ... still. This gives us hope. But what if this is about more than hope? What would happen if we jumped in with what he's doing? Imagine that!

But do we really have to imagine what God would do if he were here in person? No, he's already been here. So let's start there.

He stood against hatred and injustice. He held babies. He touched the unclean. He listened. He gave. He was present. He included the excluded. He washed feet. He laid down his life.

Something to consider:

Zero constraints, what would you like to do with your life?

(wcvv)

Loving Means Learning

—Week 6, Day 2—

When I was a child I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an [adult] I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now, we see only a dim reflection in a mirror. 1 Corinthians 13:11-12

In fourth grade, my best friend and I decided to make up our own sign language so that we could communicate without words. I was signing “pass the pencil sharpener” as we were lining up to leave the classroom one day, when all of a sudden, our teacher pulled us out of line with a very stern look on her face. She asked what we had been doing—and we learned that she had understood our sign for “pass me the pencil sharpener” as a rude or crude gesture.

I was ashamed and embarrassed. I hadn’t meant any harm. But I was a child--and I was thinking like a child. My knowledge was growing—and I learned that since adults interpreted our gesture as rude, my friend and I would need to change our behavior so we weren’t offensive.

We know in part. Whatever we believe has been shaped by so many things that we can’t control—skin color, biology, childhood experiences, geographical location, socioeconomic status. No one has a God’s eye-view. Our response to that truth should be a humble acknowledgment of our limits, a curiosity about what there is to learn, and an openness to correction.

Sometimes we don’t want to know more because we fear what we will discover, and we definitely do not want to change. We don’t want to dispense with the certainty that gives us such great comfort. It’s not always an enjoyable process to discover our old beliefs are inadequate and to engage in the hard work of learning to

see things from others’ perspectives. It’s not easy to listen to the people whose lives are affected by societal problems.

As humans we don’t see the whole picture. But even though we will only see through the glass darkly, our knowledge can grow. My 9-year-old self had no idea what she was doing—but I learned. And such growth is normal and desirable when we are willing to acknowledge the reality that we can only ever see in part.

Something to consider:

Write about an area where your thinking has developed or matured.

(kab)

Remember...
—Week 6, Day 3—

When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, *for you were foreigners in Egypt.* Leviticus 19:33-34

Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice...Remember that *you were slaves in Egypt* and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this. When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the *foreigner, the fatherless and the widow.* Remember that *you were slaves in Egypt.*

That is why I command you to do this.

Deuteronomy 24:17-18, 21-22 (emphasis added)

By the time the Israelites settled in the Promised Land, the first generation of Hebrew slaves had passed on. Nevertheless, the memory of their ancestors' experience was to motivate them to care for the foreigners, the fatherless, and the widows. As the texts above say, they were (1) to treat foreigners as native-born; (2) to treat them justly; and (3) to leave the extra grapes for foreigners to glean—all because the Israelites had been *slaves or foreigners in Egypt.* How did their past affect their present? The memory of their ancestors' experience as slaves and foreigners radically shaped their laws and ethical practices and obligated them to protect the most vulnerable among them.

How does our past affect the present? What virtues ought we to embody in grateful recognition of God's provision for us? I think about what it means for me to live into this grace—not just to *do* generous things but to *be* generous—in grateful response to God's work in my life. I know what it's like to be overwhelmed and exhausted by a baby, and so I will always try to make a meal for new parents. I know what it's like to be new to town and trying to make friends, and so I try to be hospitable and to connect people. I know

what it's like to be excluded, demeaned, and bullied, and I try not to do that to others.

How does collective memory shape our communities? How do we live corporately in response to God's generous work in our lives? As humans, we are loved and beloved of God, and the evidence of the Spirit's work should be in our fruits. Whatever the particular implications of our community's experiences, may we—as Christians, Kentuckians, and Americans—live with intentionality and with generosity because it is *who* we are *and* what we do.

Something to consider:

How have your experiences affected the way you show Christ's love incarnate to others? What evidence of your community's history can be seen in its identity and ethical commitments?

(kab)

Creating the World

—Week 6, Day 4—

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart—
As for God and not just for humans. Colossians 3:23

When the pandemic started, our artists and musicians unleashed their creative power to bring comfort and healing to a weary world. YoYo Ma recorded #SongsofComfort, and other soloists and bands went live on Facebook and YouTube. Even Disney Plus made available Frozen 2 and Hamilton, to our everlasting delight.

Thousands of people tuned in for talks by the Cincinnati Zookeepers. Local non-profits, school staffs, and congregations responded creatively to their communities' needs by distributing lunches, holding wave parades, and hosting morning prayers online.

Such actions create and re-create our world, and they foster virtues like connection, imagination, conservation, literacy, and love of neighbor.

We are all artists who work with different media. As a wife, mother, Christian, minister, and ethicist, I aim to foster virtues in my children's moral formation. I teach them that we follow public health recommendations as a way of loving our neighbors, especially those most vulnerable.

We cultivate gratitude by writing thank you notes to the teachers who prepared their lessons and the bus drivers who deliver free school lunches. Such actions contribute to the creation of a world I very much want to inhabit.

As we rebuild our lives and our communities, these words about grief by Laura Kelly Fanucci really speak to our experience: "When something is shattered—a bone, a bowl, a dream—it can never be put back together in exactly the same way again. Cracks, jagged edges, trauma's hard memory persists. But an artist catches the glint of hope under the rubble and refuses to let destruction have the final word. Every creation is a mosaic, built from brokenness."

We are all artists, and we encounter a broken world. We don't aim for perfection, but we do join in this effort to create a better world.

Something to consider:

What is your sphere of influence, and what kind of creative work is yours to do?

(kab)

From Where I Am to Where God is Leading
—Week 5, Day 5—

The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.
Numbers 6:24-26

Questions to consider:

- *What were your expectations as you began this Lenten journey?
- *Which days or weeks have you found most challenging?
- *What have you learned about yourself?
- *Where on this map do you most frequently find yourself?
- *Where do you go from here?
- *Where do WE go from here?

