



The Trinity Pulpit

Summer Short Stories

Imagine That!

Luke 13:18-21

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One of the most popular songs in recent years in Christian music has been "I Can Only Imagine." The writer describes the scene of coming into God's glory and to Jesus presence in heaven. The song describes the struggle of trying to grasp it all with only our imaginations. However, I think the term "only imagine" might not give imagination its due. Have you ever thought about the power of imagination? Our imagination is a gift from God. Our imagination is one of the ways that we are like our creator. The mind of God imagines creation and then speaks it into existence. If we do not think God has a great imagination, then how can we explain the platypus or the aardvark, let alone the very delicate balance with which our universe was created and remains functioning? It is the imagination of God that becomes the creative force of God that becomes reality. Of course one of the main difference between us and God is God can bring into reality all that God imagines where we must learn to wait on God and learn to use our imagination for God's glory.

Imagination can not only be constructive but destructive. Our imagination can be destructive when it becomes a part of obsessive worry. It is that use of imagination that Jesus speaks of when he says; do not worry about tomorrow for each day has enough trouble of its own. There he not speaking of concern, but that obsessive worry where our imaginations run wild. We can use our imaginations to create scenarios which are many times much worst than anything we actually experience. In this way our imagination can cause us stress, worry, fear and anxiety.

However, our imagination is a powerful force. It can be creative and it can take us to new possibilities. This is especially true when it comes

to the Kingdom of God. What can we imagine for the Kingdom of God? What is possible?

Jesus' told parables and sometimes they were full stories with several characters. Sometimes they contained just one character. Sometimes Jesus parables were just simple comparisons. This is especially true when Jesus would talk about the Kingdom of God. Jesus would make comparisons about the Kingdom of God. Today he gives us two comparisons which share a common thread. The two comparisons in these parables are about how small beginnings can make a large difference in the world.

Jesus says the kingdom of God is like a man who went out and planted a mustard seed in his garden, and it grew into a great tree and the birds came to perch in its branches. Continuing the kingdom of God is like leaven in bread that is put into the dough and works it way throughout the whole loaf.

Something small like a mustard seed or leaven can create something great and change everything. Who would imagine that?

The first parable is about a man who went out and planted the mustard seed in his garden. Luke does not stress the size of the mustard seed like Matthew does. The mustard seed was the smallest imaginable seed. Yet, when the mustard seed is planted and given time to grow, it produces a tree that is 10 to 12 feet in height. The tree is so large that birds can now come and perch in its branches. There has been in the past by commentators, preacher and scholars a lot of speculation about the birds being the nations of the world or the gentiles, but Jesus' point seems to be simpler. Jesus' point is that the Kingdom of God would appear small, but grow into something great. Jesus stresses the difference between the mustard



seed, the beginning, and the mustard tree, the end. Who could have imagined that something so small could create something so great?

What great thing does God want to do in your life that must begin with a small act? What can we imagine for the kingdom of God? Jesus seems to be telling us that small things are significant in the kingdom of God.

From our first parable Jesus reminds us that we should not underestimate the small act in the Kingdom of God. The small act can be useful and serve a purpose. The smallest of acts can become something great. Whether it is the little boy who shares his lunch to feed 5,000 or the woman who gives her two cents and gives more than anyone else, small acts make a difference in the Kingdom of God.

What simple small act is God calling you to do for the Kingdom of God? Maybe it is a small act of kindness toward another. Maybe it is a ministry in the church that seems insignificant on the surface, but as we know every act of ministry and service in the church is needed and significant.

A few years ago five pastors had lunch for fellowship and to plan a joint worship service. During the conversation there was a discussion about how each church was trying to help the poor and those who had needs in the community. One pastor suggested that we might find a way for all of the churches to work together to care for the needy in the community. So was born the concept of what is now North Raleigh Ministries. It began as a food closet and counseling center to help folks find resources. But as you know it grew. When faced with the need to leave its humble beginnings in a rental house the board imagined an idea of a thrift shop to pay the rent for the facility to run the ministry and so was born an incredible idea. Now there are 12 churches who give to the ministry and many more that participate as volunteers and with donations. The ministry has grown in size and ability to care for others. Who would have imagined that a small beginning that was just an idea to care for the needy could have grown into such an amazing ministry? God did... that is how the kingdom of God works. It begins with small acts that are for God's glory and for the good of others. These small acts become something great in the Kingdom of God.

The second parable is about a woman who kneads leaven into dough. The parable describes the smallest amount of leaven and three bushels of flour. The point Jesus is making is that the smallest amount of leaven can completely leaven all of that flour. It really does not take much in God's hands to transform a situation.

Ben Newell is a CBF missionary who uses his gifts in entrepreneurship to help others learn jobs and skills where they can produce funds for themselves and their families. One great story is of the Delta Jewels. Young predominantly African American girls have been taught how to make jewelry and sell it. It started out as an idea of something that the girls might be interested in and be able to do. It has been a great success. The girls have developed a cottage business where they are able to not only create jewelry but also make money that has made a difference in their lives and the lives of their families.

To face the rising crime in poverty areas in Memphis, a group of business men took an old abandon warehouse and placed fork lifts, pallets, and other equipment. They created a place where young men could go and learn how to drive and operate this type of machinery. They are teaching them a needed and employable skill. All of a sudden young men, who had no choices, now have choices. It is transforming a community one young man at a time.

Now no one is getting rich in these situations. This is not for Donny Duetch's Big Idea show, but they are stories of the Kingdom of God at work. They are stories about a small act or a small idea that can transform the lives of individuals, families and communities. Who could imagine such a thing? God...and people who have an imagination that has become ruled by the kingdom of God.

How are we going to use our imaginations? We can use them to be destructive. There are people all over the world who use their imagination to destroy the lives of others and their own lives. What if we would use our imaginations for the Kingdom of God? What if our imagination would become Holy imaginations?

As we come to the table of our Lord today, we remember the greatest act of God's holy imagination. Who could imagine that the death of an intenerate preacher over 2,000 years ago could solve the sin problem of everyone who has ever lived.

Who could have imagined that God would love you and me so much that he would send his one and only son to die on cross for sin.

Who could have imagined that this same God would raise his son from the dead and change forever how we view eternity.

The cross was God's greatest moment of holy imagination.

Now we come to the table and we too must enact holy imagination. As we take the small piece of bread and the small amount of juice, we use our imagination to remember

God's love and we use our imagination to remember the cross and we remember that night Jesus was betrayed. It is the gift of our imagination that makes these next few moments so special, as we take the bread and drink the cup we remember God's wonderful love.

It is just small piece of bread like a small mustard seed. It is just a small cup of juice like the small amount of leaven in the dough, but God uses it to remind us of the most important event in human history.

At the table, we are reminded that small things matter and that everyone of us are loved by God. We are reminded that God wants to use everyone of our lives in the kingdom of God. That you and I can have lives that not only has significance here, but an eternal significance. That is what you are invited to do at the table. You are invited to remember that God loves you. Can you imagine that?

