

Reimagining, with God's help

Reimagining: it is one of those Covid-19 buzz words. We are reimagining schools as virtual learning; reimagining restaurants as take-out only; reimagining doctor's visits as telehealth, and reimagining church whether we want to or not.

Reimagine: to re-interpret; to imaginatively re-think. It is gospel. It began in the beginning, in the book of Genesis. Imagine life in the Garden; then the status quo changes, in one grasp. Life is reinterpreted, reimagined on the other side of paradise.

If we want to talk about reimagining, another place to begin is the prologue, the beginning, of the gospel John.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. . . ,

And the Word became flesh and lived among us.

More than Matthew, Mark and Luke, John reimagines who and what Christ is, was, and will be. Here is the Messiah and then some. God is beyond the One who dwells only on mountain tops and in segregated holy places, accessible only to priests, prophets, and special designees. The Word that was God has come to dwell among us, among the people, has become flesh. And the Word was with God in the beginning. And from the beginning, what came into being was life and light of *all people* (not just a select few). And this light shines brighter and stronger than any darkness. And this light is full of grace and truth. Reimagine this!

John also reimagines that good shepherd of which the prophet Isaiah and the psalmist spoke. The good shepherd remains the good shepherd, and he is revealed as a humble man, of flesh and blood, who lays down his life for the sheep. In Christ, new life and light is reimagined in the same breadth as death and darkness. Resurrection is not without death.

Reimagining is deep in our Episcopal tradition, with roots in the 16th century English reformation, when reimagining was about finding the middle way. Reformation is a close cousin, which often follows reimagining. Since that time, lesser reforms have continued in the church, as theologies and practices are being reimagined. Women priests and prayer book revisions, who could have imagined?

Resistance is often part of the process of reimagining. Reimagining usually doesn't come without loss of something – beneficial or not. And because of this, it often takes a crucible moment, a heated times and places where powerful forces come together to cause or influence a change. A pandemic is a crucible moment.

Reimagining is where we are in the church. How do we do it? This isn't an easy thing. As the gospel of John makes clear, the Word became flesh. Christianity is a

material religion. Matter matters – the incarnation, bread, wine, and water, and a kiss of peace. Spiritual connections are material -- visible signs of invisible grace. Pastoral presence is a tool of the good shepherd.

How do we reimagine being a sacramental and pastoral church when social distancing is being called for to help slow the spread of death and disease? How do we imagine reentry when risk and fear remain? Help is found the gospel of John. God, Christ, is the I am, the light of the world. The wonder, magnitude, and mystery of the great I AM, whose name could only be spoken by faithful Jews with the word *Adonai*, meaning Lord.

How do we re-imagine the church in this time of pandemic and beyond? We trust in that light, we trust in the I AM, and we do the best we can -- sure that we will make mistakes and get it wrong at times.

For me this means living in that tension between the past and future, between what was and what will be; between virtual conversations and in-person connections. It means reimagining traditional practices of prayer at home and of family time. I have begun to explore what it might look like to share a prayerful agape-like meal on a more regular basis. To do so would mean having one less family dinner that moves to quickly from blessing the food to retreat to our individual electronic devices. Those “old fashion” things like phone calls, letters, and family game night are back in fashion. Many are finding new life and light in this time of reimagining. Creativity, generosity and humor are shining through in virtual places. These lights cannot be overcome even in dark times. And at the same time, we are still struggling, with all sorts of experiences of loss – graduations, trips, jobs, Sunday mornings, and of the routines and rituals that have given our lives meaning and identity.

For some reimagining is too much to ask or even think about right now? I suggest we start small, like in our own beginnings, taking baby steps. Trusting in the I AM, and the guidance of the Good Shepherd, in the words of the singer, Carrier Newcomer, ["You Can Do This Hard Thing"](#)

Peace and blessings,

Emily