

Meditation on Luke 13:18-21
What if . . .? Sunday
Sept 11, 2022
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In this BTS Center program on “Fostering Imagination,” we reflect on small things. We are all from small churches. We may not have a lot of people or resources or time. We live in a society focused on big—the bigger the better, progress means more—more money, more influence, more space, more people.

But Jesus talks a lot about small. The kingdom of God, or kingdom or community of God, is like really tiny things. A mustard seed. Some yeast. Things that you can barely see. But things that hold great potential. That, given the right conditions—some soil and water, some flour and water—can grow massive and change everything. Becoming a massive tree that shelters birds or a huge amount of bread, ready to feed hundreds.

I am a baker and I love making bread. I love watching the yeast bubble up as it starts working; I love the smell; I love the feel of the bread as I knead it, and it changes texture. Of course, I love that first slice of bread, slathered with butter, as it comes hot out of the oven. But it wouldn't be bread without the yeast. The yeast that changes the form and makes it rise; the yeast that changes the texture and holds it together, the yeast that gives it that wonderful taste. All this from something that we can barely see.

From the handout on our BTS Center assignment, it says that Rob Hopkins, author of From What Is to What If: Unleashing the Power of Imagination to Create the Future We Want, “suggests that one of the most powerful phrases human beings utter is this simple two-word question: “What if...?” When we begin to ask big questions that begin with these two little words— when we join together to dream about the possibility that things could be otherwise— when we embrace the conditions that allow collective imagination to flourish and create the space, in community, to imagine a better world, to tell stories about it, to long for its realization, then we become part of a great movement for positive, loving, life-affirming change.” These two small words can, like mustard seeds or yeast, lead into lasting positive change. Not every idea will bear fruit, but every idea is worth entertaining.

So we're going to do an experiment in dreaming. Of asking what if questions. I will lead you in a brief centering exercise, and then we will sing a hymn, and then I will give you instructions about what you are going to do.

Centering: Sit up straight and supported in your seat. Place your feet on the ground. Feel that you are supported by the ground, the seat, the seat back or the strength of your spine. Close your eyes or gaze softly downward. Take in three breaths with 4 counts in, 4 held, 4 out. Breathe in, 2, 3, 4, hold, 2, 3, 4, out, 2, 3, 4. Again. Again. Invite in a spirit of curiosity . . . what could be different? What could I imagine? Invite in a spirit of playfulness. Invite in the Spirit of

God, to see, to wonder, to dream. Allow your body to open. Your mind to be calm. What will I see? What will intrigue me? Allow yourself to be excited, to anticipate, to enjoy the process.

God of surprises, infuse me with your wild wonder,
sustain me in the daily practice of opening my heart to grace.
Expand my imagination to see more widely than before,
open my heart to experience compassion beyond my dreams,
call me to begin again and again. Amen.

You may open your eyes. Let us sing together hymn #689.

Directions: Purpose—as a community, to generate as many “What if?” questions as possible.

The way: as pairs, walk around the neighborhood for 20 minutes and dream up questions, that you write down on notecards and bring back.

Some of you won’t be able to walk, so we invite you to go outside and sit in pairs and do your dreaming there. If you really really don’t want to go outside, you may find a partner and sit inside, but we encourage you to go outside, so that you can see what’s around St. John’s and are spurred in your questions that way.

Here is how it will work. If you are going to walk, I’ll invite you all to stand up. Quickly get a partner from across the aisle and head out the door. Pick a direction to walk in—down to the Promenade or up Washington Street or up Middle Street, for instance. Once you are ready, put your phone alarm on 10 or 12 minutes to remind you when to turn around. Then start walking, start dreaming, and write down your questions.

For the people not walking, wait until the walkers have left, then head outside, find a partner, and start dreaming and writing. We’ll ring a bell when 20 minutes are up.

Once time is up, come back into the church and place your cards in the basket. We’ll continue with the offertory.

The Ground Rules. Our goal is to cultivate openness and invitation to dream.

- o Dream small. Dream big! You may come up with “What if...?” questions that relate to the church, to your community, or to the broader world. The sky’s the limit.
- o There are no bad ideas. Every “What if...?” question is valid and appreciated, and every question helps to open up the possibility for deeper imagination to flourish.
- o We will defer judgment and resist the inclination to evaluate ideas as they come. Our intention is just to list as many questions as possible.
- o Wild and crazy “What if...?” questions are welcome!
- o It’s okay if the “What if...” seems impossible! Today we are dreaming, not thinking about how to get there.
- o Feel free to build on the ideas of your partner with a simple, “Yes, and what if...?”

Ready? Walkers first . . . stand up, find a partner, take your cards and writing implements, out you go! Don’t forget to put a timer on or note the time you start on your watch.