

# “Stones of Hope”

Isaiah 25:6-8, 43:18-19, 62:1-5 & John 2:1-11

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The prophet Isaiah proclaims. **Isaiah 43:18-19 NRSV “Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”**

God’s love, joy, peace, goodness, and blessings will always be far grandeur than are ability to perceive. For eternity, God will lead us into new facets of joyful love. Imagination is the ability to enjoy the new things God is doing. It takes imagination to envision God and let go of the limiting old ways of describing God. It takes imagination to envision the glorious person you are becoming and let go of your old baggage. It takes imagination to envision the ways the world is becoming more loving and let go of the divisions of what some call “the good old days”. It takes imagination to envision how we as a church are growing in grace and let go of familiar ways of being a church. God invites us to join God in the work of imagination, in transforming into ever more spectacular ways of being, relating, and loving. God is always creating new ways, grandeur ways.

JK Rowling wrote, “Imagination is the capacity to envision that which is not, and therefore the fount of all invention and innovation. In its arguably most transformative and revelatory capacity, imagination is the power that enables us to empathize with humans whose experiences we have never shared.”

Lewis and Clark were commissioned to find a waterway across America. They were military leaders, expert water navigators, and canoe craftsmen. They traveled as far West as possible on a river and charted the rivers origin. They mustered up every fiber of their imagination to envision a route over the imposing Rocky Mountains.

Friedman wrote, “Imaginatively gridlock stuck systems cannot be unstuck by trying harder. What is required is a spirit of adventure, imagination, a shift in values, expectations, attitudes and habits.” No matter how hard they tried, no matter the amount of resources, the expedition was never going to make it over the mountains by trying the good old days way of canoeing harder.

Change is hard, because change is loss. Change requires grieving the loss, so we are free to imagine and go forth with a spirit of adventure. The Lewis and Clark expedition grieved the loss of canoeing, a military style of leadership, and the familiar. The expedition shifted to hiking and climbing. The expedition shifted to letting a young native America, single mom with her baby, Sacagawea determine their route and letting an African American slave, York, train them in new essential skills. When they made it to the West coast in 1805, they took the first inclusive vote in America. Each person including York and Sacagawea had an equal vote. The challenge of the journey met with imagination, grieving their losses and a spirit of adventure lead to transformation, a wonderful new way; inclusive, equal voting for all.

Consider again JK Rowling words this time in reverse. Imagination is the power that enables us to empathize with humans whose experiences we have never shared. Imagination is the power to understand, relate to, identify with people with which we have nothing in common. The privileged, free, educated, military trained learned from a young Native America mom and an African American slave. This imagination to empathize is transformative and revelatory yielding the capacity to envision that which is not, and therefore the fount of all invention and innovation.

Presbyterian Pastor Tod Bolsinger explains that as a church we are standing at the rivers beginning with canoes looking up at the Rocky Mountains. Everyone of us can unite together with all of us trying our hardest to canoe the mountains, to invest in familiar programs, missions, ministry, and worship, but it is doubtful that those efforts will get us into the glorious new ways God is calling us to be as a church.

We are in a tough place. Our experiences, training, and tradition have not given us the technical skills needed to go forward. However, they have taught us how to be a community, to care for each other, to listen and understand each other. Only the teenagers here among us know what it is like to be a teenager in today’s world. Imagination gives us the ability to ditch our canoes, to let go of the old ways of being a church, so we can truly listen to them, to learn what they need and then to be whatever that is. Visa versa is true as well. We

are blessed with diversity. Historically when the church embraces and learns from those on the fringe, a wondrous new way emerges.

As we hike into the mountains, it will ease the journey to be extra gentle with each other for we are all mourning the loss of the familiar. Even when one initiates change, is excited about change and is envisioning numerous benefits of the change, they still need to grieve the loss of the old way. Each of us grieves at a different speed and in a different way. People don't resist change, they resist loss. A great question for our self is: *What are my losses and what am I learning from them and how am I growing from them?* A great question for each other is: *I have heard about your loss, how have you grown, what have you learned?* Change is inevitable the choice is to be bitter or imaginative.

God gifts prophets with spacious imagination. Isaiah illustrates our sure, coming future as a marvelous wedding with well-aged wine. **Isaiah 62:1-5 NRSV** **"For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you."** **Isaiah 25:6-8 NRSV** **"On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And God will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; God will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of God's people God will take away from all the earth."**

When Jesus walked the earth with our ancestors, they believed that the way into God's glorious future was through purification rituals. They tried harder and harder to be clean through purification, sacrifice, and an ever-growing list of rules. One got into the wedding with the well-aged wine by washing from a stone water jar. Jesus began his ministry with radical change. Jesus transformed the water being used for purification into a large quantity of wine freely give to all. The way into God's glorious future is not adherence to old restrictive, dividing, scarce, arduous, pious ways rather by grace, freely given to all, uniting all, abundant, easy, and accepting.

**John 2:1-11** **"On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. Jesus said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.' Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.**

This is an exciting miracle. Jesus transforms the water of guilty obligation into the wine of celebration, a sign that our life is being transformed, our world is being transformed; scarcity into abundance, shame into joy, embarrassment into delight. This miracle gives us more than a reason to be hopeful. We see a guarantee of our glorious destiny. It sparks our imagination to see the coming Kingdom of God as we journey through every storm, fight, up day, and down season to our extravagant celebration feast with everyone. God is transforming you. The Holy Spirit is doing generous, beyond your grandest imagination things within you. God is transforming every form of death into eternal life. God is transforming hunger into feasting, lament into dancing, tedium into festival. The bride and groom could only purchase a few jugs of cheap wine. Jesus provided 150 gallons of fine wine. We have only tasted mere drops of God's goodness. We will enjoy an immense river of marvelous blessings of every kind. Sometimes we may feel like mundane water, yet we are

becoming grand wine. Purify washing is no longer required for Jesus' wine freely provides perfect purity and abundant life.

This is an alarming miracle for us, because we are the religious leaders of today. Many of the regular temple worshippers resisted Jesus' new way of grace. The old way was working for them, even though it excluded most and was not working for the majority of the people outside of the temple. This old way was familiar, safe, and comfortable. They enjoyed its privileges. They did not want to change to be more gracious, rather they wanted everyone else to change and be like them, to worship just like them. Instead of going out enjoying the wedding, partaking of the wine and discovering more facets of God by getting to know more people, they resolved to try harder in doing things the old reverent way, to force people into their way through laws. They resolved to cling tighter and tighter to the past instead of imagining all the wonder, love and joy God is giving all people. They were unaware that their old way was a barrier to others, hurt, discouraged, and frustrated others.

As a church, we have gone through many losses. I perceive that our grieving has made us more caring, gracious, and open to new ways.

Martin Luther King Jr is a prophet with spacious imagination. In his "I Have a Dream" speech he quotes from Isaiah about God creating a new way for us in the wilderness and says. "With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of siblinghood."

Our world today is standing before a mountain of despair. We can choose to be bitter, to hunker down, to cling to the old ways, to get stuck in grief or we can choose imagination, a spirit of adventure, to shift our values, expectations, attitudes, and habits, to journey into the new glorious way God is bringing to us. Regardless of our choice, God will get us into the future. When we choose imagination, the journey is more joyous. We are all on this journey, so let us help those struggling with change, those lashing out in anger from their grief, and those who want to go back.

Will you partner with God in hewing out stones of hope from a mountain of despair? God wants to use your transformation to transform the world. Hewing out a stone from a mountain is work. Chopping off prejudices, favoritism, exclusivity, greed, selfishness. Cleaving off losses by grieving them. Slicing off hesitancy to get to know those who are different than us. Slashing off allegiance to a political party, country, church, denomination, religion, so we can find harmony with all people. Hacking away doubts, cynicism, fear, distrust, and hate, so we can see the new way: Not bigger walls rather bigger tables; Not bigger bank accounts rather more generous service; Not more shame rather more acceptance; Not more work rather more celebration; Not belittling others rather building others up; Not more rules rather more grace; Not more seriousness rather more imagination. I don't know what else to put here, but some of you do, because some of you have the gift of spacious imagination, some of you are more adapt at perceiving the glorious kingdom of God that is coming, some of you are perceiving the way. Please God give the rest of a greater ability to listen to those who are navigating the most excellent way of love. Amen