

**LENT 2009: Sense Making Faith
Week 2 - Journey into Imagination**

ACTIVITY

Imagine Jesus told you that your church or the place you meet for worship was to be destroyed until it was just a pile of rubble. How would you feel about that? What would your reactions be? What would you want to ask Jesus and what do you think he might be telling you by giving you this vision of the future?

Suppose Jesus told you that your personal future was likely to be persecution, torture and death just because you were a Christian. How would you feel about that? How would you react? What would you want to ask Jesus and why do you think he might be telling you this?

Jesus suggests that we should pay careful attention to the things that are happening around us in our world. Why? What sort of distractions does Jesus mention? What sort of distractions from faithful Christian life might he want to talk about today?

PRAYER AND REFLECTION

“Let us not then make our prayer by the gesture of our body, nor by the loudness of our voice, but by the earnestness of our mind: neither with noise and clamour and for display, so as even to disturb those that are near us, but with all modesty, and with contrition in the mind, and with inward tears.”

St John Chrysostom

Psalm 111: 2-7, 10

Great are the works of the Lord,
studied by all who delight in them.
Full of honour and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures forever.
He had gained renown by his wonderful
deeds;
the Lord is gracious and merciful.
He provides food for those who fear him;
he is ever mindful of his covenant.
He has shown his people the power of his works
in giving them the heritage of the nations.
The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy.
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.



The ability to think and reflect on all our experiences and ideas is a remarkable gift and gives us the possibility of making sense of our past and looking forward to our future. The ability to reason and explore options with our minds is important to our spiritual journey and to our spiritual growth. It helps us to understand the words of Jesus and to offer ourselves to God in prayer. So when we think of imagination as a spiritual gift or facility, it has to do with using our inward focus to pay more attention to God. By this means we can learn more about how God is calling us and we can test this by sharing our thoughts and ideas with others.

The ability to dream, hope, wonder and imagine is subject to all kinds of distractions though. If we are well off, we can be distracted by all the things money can buy; products and commodities for entertainment and pleasure. We can also be distracted by dreams of power, success and reward. If we are poor, we can be so busy just keeping body and soul together

that there is no time to reflect or dream or to hope for something better.

Distraction was something that Jesus knew all about and he could see it going on in the world around him with its political struggles, religious power games, abject poverty and disease and pursuit of self over community. Again and again, he tells us to focus our minds back on God, help the poor and suffering, and lift our minds away from limited, worldly concerns. So to stimulate the gift of human imagination, he gave the people around him visions of the future, and told stories about God's kingdom that people needed to imagine in their mind's eye as he told them. He would then ask questions to get his listeners to reflect on the story and thereby understand more of what God is like and what God wants for his people.

This is as true today as it was in Jesus' day - and as urgent. Using the gift of human imagination we must think about tomorrow's world. What will it look like and

how far will that vision be anything like what God wants for this world and its people? Christian faith gives us the ability to imagine the kind of world God

wants and work towards that vision, one founded on hope in God's promises. But will we do this, or will we get distracted?

ACTIVITY

Look at this picture. Imagine pushing the door open a bit more and going through it into the flowery meadow. What do you see?



What else is through the door, animals, birds, people, buildings, an ocean, a great city? What is the weather like? What is going on?

Is what is beyond the door a good place where you might have good times and happy memories, or a strange place where anything might happen? What can you hear in your imagination, country sounds, children calling, animals, machinery?

Take a deep breath, what can you smell on the air through the doorway? Can you smell the countryside, the ocean, traffic? Imagine a bit more, - where will you go? Is there a path? Will you meet people? What conversations will you have? How will you find your way back again?

THINKING ABOUT MENTAL DISORDER

Good mental health is just as important as good physical health, but we often take our mental health entirely for granted - until it breaks down. The ability to think clearly, to use our imagination, to use insight, and to hope and to shape a vision of the future, is often such an innate part of our mental life that we forget to realise



how precious it is. Yet mental illness is extremely common. Many people will be affected by a mental illness such as depression at some time in their life.



Stress, worry, trauma, life crises such as divorce or bereavement, and physical illness can all affect our mental wellbeing. When that happens the facility of imagination is darkened and distorted. The gift of imagination and the ability to hope can become twisted until the mental images it offers are painful or

frightening instead of liberating.

The spiritual journey too can be affected by doubt, anxiety and crisis, so that even the most faithful Christian can have times when imagination fails and all seems uncertain. Yet even when our imagination fails, and everything seems hopeless, God is still there; there is no state so desperate that God will abandon us. We need to realise that we need the support of others when we cannot see clearly into the future and that we need to be a source of hope and inspiration for others when life seems dark for them.

ACTIVITY

Look at the picture again but this time try to imagine what it might be like for someone who has an intense, overwhelming fear of going outdoors.

How might you feel about the open door and the scene beyond it? What emotions might you experience at the thought of walking in the meadow? What frightening things might you imagine were beyond the door? Who would you trust to help you get through it?



READ Matthew 24:1-14, 30-35