

When Imagination and Abundance Dream Together

Luke 9:10-17

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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Sometimes we lack imagination. I can't help but wonder if that wasn't part of the disciples' problem in this story. And before we are too hard on them, it is fair to acknowledge that they were likely exhausted. Our scripture reading began with a reference to the disciples telling Jesus all that they had done. That's because if we back up and read earlier in Luke's gospel we would have heard about Jesus empowering the disciples to do the same work he had been doing - to proclaim the good news, to drive out demons, and to heal people. And, friends, that had to be exhausting work.

So the disciples returned to Jesus and what they wanted to do was to talk about their experiences, likely hoping to get a pat on the back from Jesus. The other thing we can assume they wanted to do was to rest.

But the crowds gathered and Jesus, in typical fashion, he welcomed them and talked to them and healed them. And before they knew it not only had there been no time for rest, but everyone was getting hungry and there was no plan.

And the disciples when faced with the prospect of feeding so many people, and again we say this without judgment, but they lacked imagination.

So their answer was simple:

How can we feed them?

We don't have enough.

Do we have to go buy food for all these people?

And, while Luke doesn't say it, in Mark's gospel as he tells this same story, he says that the disciples even point out the great amount it would cost to buy food to feed so many people.

But Jesus...he took a different approach. He trusted that there was enough. And whether we call it faith or imagination or, as the Gospel of John seems to indicate when telling this story, the simple inspiration to share...however we understand it, when Jesus believed in abundance, when he had the imagination to see beyond the dilemma, then the people were fed.

So, what happens when we stop acting from a position of scarcity?

What happens when we stop worrying that someone else having enough means we will lose something?

What happens when we start living from a position of abundance, not even because we are the wealthiest person around, but because we know what it is to be content with enough?

What happens when we stop being stopped in our tracks by the problem and instead seek creative solutions?

What happens when we allow our faith and our imagination and our commitment to the care of people, when we allow all those things to co-mingle?

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We only need to look around our community and out into our world to see what happens then.

In 1996 Table to Table rescued \$75,000 worth of food that without them not only would not have fed our neighbors but that would have gone into the landfill. And this mission of recovery and redistribution means that now about \$7 million worth of food is rescued annually (<https://table2table.org/>).

That's what happens when we let our abundance and our imagination dream together.

Recognizing that decent, affordable housing was needed, Clarence Jordan and Millard and Linda Fuller developed the concept of "partnership housing." These houses were designed to be built at no profit with the investment of volunteers and homeowners who worked together on building. Top that off with no-interest loans and you have a recipe for affordability. Rather than seeing what wasn't possible, Habitat for Humanity's founders dreamed about what could be.

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In 1983 a conversation between two therapists and a Lenten study group at St. Mary's revealed the need for a free meal for people in the community. That groups' response? "Let's do it." By 1989, the Free Lunch Program had expanded to a six-day-a-week meal program with support from so many local groups and agencies. A meal program that still today claims, "An open door, a full plate, no questions asked" (<https://iowacityfreelunch.org/about/>).

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In 1971 a group of people concerned about the high cost of health care established the Iowa City Free Clinic because they believed that access to health care was a basic human right and that everyone - regardless of their ability to pay - should receive needed care. What began as a pop up clinic now holds 6 medical clinics per week and from 2-5 weekly dental clinics ([History – Free Medical and Dental Clinic](#)).

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From the first domestic violence shelter opened in 1980 to expansions in service area and available housing over the years, DVIP has been saying yes in the face of growing and changing needs. Rather than saying, we can only serve here or I'm sorry your pet can't come along...rather than saying they can't imagine a new possibility...DVIP, now along with RVAP, works to provide comprehensive support services to victims of domestic and sexual abuse ([About DVIP & RVAP – DVIP & RVAP of Iowa](#)).

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And there are so many more stories like these represented in this room. I do hope you'll spend some time after worship learning about the important services that these agencies provide and finding ways you can support them.

Because, remember, that's something else we don't want to lose track of. Again I point you to that little sentence that began our scripture reading. The disciples came back from doing amazing work. But it was almost as if when they returned to Jesus they forgot how capable they were.

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I think we do that sometimes, too. We look around the world and we get overwhelmed by the difficult realities. And there are plenty of them. We work hard and we get tired and we aren't sure we have more energy to help. We see someone else, perhaps someone who does it better or has more resources or has been at this work longer, and we wonder what we have to offer.

But we are reminded, both by the gospel and by the work that we see happening in our communities, that we cannot afford to be overwhelmed or to check out of this work. Our neighbors cannot afford for us to be overwhelmed or to get distracted.

After all, not only does our faith call us to care for our neighbor, but we have the power to make a difference.

Friends, the world needs us to live from a position of abundance, a position that helps us see clearly all we have to share.

The world needs us to live with a little imagination, with the willingness to say, "Let's get creative and see how we can make a difference."

We need and our neighbors need this...because right now scarcity is getting too much press. Fear is driving the discourse.

And when this happens, then SNAP benefits that help hard working families make it through the month go away.

When this happens, immigrants who are so important to our communities are scared to leave their homes for fear they might be stolen off the street.

When this happens, the cost of health insurance skyrockets and more people go with medical concerns untreated.

But our faith and our humanity remind us "again and again: we are our sibling's keeper. We are called to love the stranger. We are charged with building a world where the hungry are fed, the oppressed are freed, and swords are beaten into plowshares" (Cameron Trimble, "Spiritual Work, Civic Ground" at Piloting Faith, Nov. 5, 2025, https://open.substack.com/pub/camerontrimble/p/spiritual-work-civic-ground?utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=email).

This is our calling. May it be so.