

Village Guide

Current Series: Vivid

Texts: Ephesians 1.15-23 CEB

Core Value Focus: Transformation

Big Ideas from the Message:

- Big Idea: Although we can't see God with our eyes, we can imagine and experience the person of Jesus. Our imagination curates our experience of God.
 - “The human brain is incredibly creative, and it dreams up positive and negative scenarios all day long... [R]epetitious patterns of thinking form strong neural pathways that are highly resistant to change. That's why we have to continually impose new styles of thinking, speaking, and listening to get new neural circuits to form. That's the power of imagination: it can trap us in a spiral of negative thoughts, or we can use it to change decades of habituated behaviors that no longer serve us well (36-37).” (Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman in *Words Can Change Your Brain*)
- Jesus can change our minds.
 - “In order to form a Christian community identity within a pluralistic pagan world, Paul repeatedly calls his readers to a 'conversion of the imagination.' He invites them to see the world in dramatically new ways, in light of values shaped by the Christian story... Paul calls on them to change in fundamental ways and to shape a different kind of community, rethinking their inherited sociocultural norms and practices, as well as the ingrained conceptions on honor, value, and leadership... Paul refers to it as transformation through the renewing of the community's mind (Romans 12.2).” (Richard B. Hays in *Interpretation Commentary: First Corinthians*, 11)
- Jesus desires to convert our imaginations.
- An imagination centered on Jesus has 3 conversion points: cross and resurrection, community, new creation.
 - Ephesians 1.15-23 (CEB) was read
- The imagination is where we attune to the deepest reality.

CONNECT (5 min)

- Question chosen for group discussion or someone pre-invited to share their story. (Optional)

HEAR (5 min)

- Spend some time in your group sharing what you recall from Sunday's message. Give a loose theme or subject of the sermon to jumpstart everyone's thoughts and recollections. (Example: *On Sunday, Kurt (or another speaker) started/continued our series. Who was there on Sunday? Can you recap the content for us? What struck you, and what questions did it leave you with?*)
- Read Ephesians 1.15-23 (CEB). What did Kurt say that this passage reveals about God? About us? Do you see anything differently or that wasn't mentioned in this particular sermon?

TALK (20 min)

*Note: This format is intentionally less linear in an effort to generate discussion. It is not meant to be followed left-to-right, nor do all the questions need to be asked. As a facilitator, stewarding good discussion means modeling **true listening**, which also means a conversation without an agenda. Use your discernment to see what your group needs to talk about.*

<i>Conceptual</i>	<i>Practical Implications</i>	<i>Spiritual Formation</i>
Scripture	Regular Life	Transformation
<p>In the Christian Tradition, and in the New Testament, we have this understanding that God engages people within their imagination. Whether it was dreams, contemplative prayer, or overall changes in the ways one sees the world, God communicates (then and now) in our sacred imaginations. How does this understanding of imagination bring new light to the idea of “repentance” in the Bible?</p> <p>Kurt talked about a theological idea called “the conversion of the imagination” as central to the New Testament vision for humanity. Read the quote by Richard Hays above, for a frame of reference. How do the following ideas help us to get a more vivid picture of the Jesus revealed in the Scriptures?— 1) cross/resurrection (dying for one’s enemies and defeating the powers of evil), 2) community, 3) the renewal of all creation (as the Christian hope rather than ‘going to heaven when you die’).</p> <p>As you read the passage in Ephesians, do you see (in a broad sense) ways in which all three of the above ‘conversions of the imagination’ are present in Paul’s prayer?</p>	<p>Neuroscience shows us that it is in our imagination that mental pathways that have reinforced harmful stories about Jesus/God can be rewired with better stories. Prayer can change our brains. Engaging with the Vivid person of Jesus can change our minds. In light of the quote from the book, <i>Words Can Change Your Brain</i>, what sorts of spiritual practices do you think are helpful for inviting Jesus into our imagination?</p> <p>Do you have a memory of a time you felt unconditionally loved and accepted without having to do anything in return or having to earn it? Does this parallel your experience of Jesus? Can you imagine him being the generative source of all unconditional love?</p> <p>When you consider your own experience with Jesus, which “conversion of the imagination” area is the easiest for you to connect with? Most challenging? How do each of them have the potential to help you see Jesus more clearly? How might they help you connect better with others, as well?</p>	<p><i>Take a few minutes of silence to think of what your current experience of life these past couple weeks have been like. (Give a few minutes for reflection before asking the question).</i></p> <p>Is it challenging or refreshing to sit in the quiet? Is your imagination a space of ‘loudness’ or is it easy to enter into a meditative space?</p> <p>For those of you who were present on Sunday, Kurt talked about an ancient Christian practice that invites Jesus into memories. Kurt told of a powerful experience he had doing this with a negative memory. Then, he invited the community to do this with a positive memory. What do you remember about this? Although it was short, what was this like for you? Can you imagine doing something like this with other memories as a spiritual practice?</p> <p>Can you imagine yourself carving out 30 mins in the next week to pray with your imagination? Perhaps you might consider finding a peaceful place, closing your eyes, and imagine Jesus looking at you. What do you see in his face? Is he happy? Disappointed? Joyful? (If, by the way, you experience anything utterly shaming, this is likely a spiritual imposter: not Jesus.)</p>

(Space for your own questions or notes)

LIVE (20 min)

- How might this conversation impact you this next week? What are you taking with you?
- How might we pray for each other based on this conversation and other highs/lows in life?