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July 6, 2019

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The website "The Beatles Bible" dubs "Imagine" as John Lennon's most iconic song. According to Wikipedia, Lennon once explained that it was an "anti-religious, anti-nationalistic, anti-conventional, anti-capitalistic" song that got "sugarcoated" into acceptability.

In 1971, Lennon canonized the idea that if only we could imagine a world not bound by heaven and hell, not looking to the transcendent, we could live for today, and everyone would be at peace. While the Vietnam War raged, young people whose rebellion boggled the minds of their elders celebrated the song as an anthem of what had to be eliminated. Lennon's proposals came at the end of each verse: "living for today," "living life in peace," "sharing all the world." His final goal: "And the world will live as one."

Today, we will hear a 2,500-year-old version of something similar and yet radically different. While Lennon was suggesting that some version of socialist anarchy could solve the world's problems, the prophet Isaiah promotes awareness of God's love as the way to human flourishing and joy. Lennon wants to be rid of dreams of heaven. Isaiah wants people to imagine how God's loving power working through them can satisfy all human hungers.

If Isaiah's vision also sounds like a sugarcoated dream, Jesus brings the invitation down to Earth as he sends the 72 evangelists out to proclaim the reign of God. From the get-go, Jesus tells them to pray for more missionaries because there is too much for so few of them to do. Rather than fantasize about simplistic harmony, he lays it out for them with the stark realism of a prophet: I am sending you out as lambs among wolves. (How is this for a vocation poster: "Enjoy the excitement and challenge of being lambs among wolves!"?)

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Isiah 66:10-14c

Psalm 66

Galatians 6:14-18

Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

Every profession has standards, and the church specifies the gender and educational requirements for different ministries. Jesus, too, demanded certain qualifications of those who would represent him. In order to further his mission, they had to be ready to go out, carrying "no money bag, no sack, no sandals." They weren't to dawdle along the way; they were to stay with the first person who offered them hospitality and never complain about the food. (There's no pension plan because there's no retirement.)

Their job description? Teach: "The kingdom of God is at hand." Do it by curing the sick and sharing your peace. And to those inclined to retribution, he said, "Whatever town does not receive you, go out into the streets and say, 'The dust of your town that clings to our feet, even that we shake off against you.' "

So there!

Jesus gives them no catechism from which to teach. It all rests on healing the broken, along with that elusive command to share their peace. Evangelization in Jesus' style is a ministry of presence; the way his missionaries are with others is their first and strongest proclamation of the kingdom of God coming to life. They do good. Eventually, after people have been hooked by the joy of their way of life, they invite them to be followers of Jesus.



(Mark Bartholomew)

The experience of one of my Romanian friends explains this for me. She entered religious life while their church was illegal; celebrating the liturgy could get you arrested, and secret communities of monks and nuns operating underground constantly risked imprisonment. She had been working in a factory where some other young women workers attracted her attention simply by some intangible quality of their presence. As she got to know them and asked what made them different, they admitted that they were believers. One day, they invited her to pray with them at their apartment. Time went on and trust grew. They eventually admitted that they belonged to a secret religious congregation and invited her to join them. Being lambs among wolves, they had learned to evangelize by presence and only much later by formal invitations to discipleship.

People who evangelize by their presence are recognizable first by their freedom. They can hang out with anyone, without concern for what others might think or say. They notice needs and respond to them with whatever power they have. They aren't

anti-establishment as much as they are utterly unimpressed by power, prestige and glittery stuff. They live in today, knowing that tomorrow is beyond their control and that the future holds invincible promise.

Lambs among wolves? Without a doubt, but they are convinced that concern for their own hide only ties them down. They have learned to imagine a world where everyone can flourish because it starts happening wherever they show up. If people reject their message, there is no argument, no revenge, they just dust off their shoes and move on. Imagine that.

[Mary M. McGlone is a Sister of St. Joseph currently writing the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the U.S.]

Advertisement

A version of this story appeared in the **June 28-July 11, 2019** print issue under the headline: Imagine.