

How to Be Visionary

Sunday, January 22, 2023 | New Roots AME Church

Isaiah 65:17-22 + Revelation 21:1-6

Opening Meditation:

there is an edge (ode to radical imagination) by adrienne maree brown

There is an edge
Beyond which we cannot grasp the scale
Of our universe.
That border,
That outer boundary
Is imagination.
The only known edge of existence
The only one we can prove by universal experience –

We can imagine so much!
We can only imagine so much.

If perhaps it is a function of our collective minds
A dream of our endless nights
Then there will be abundance so long as we can imagine it –
Abundance on earth
If we can imagine it
Or abundance of earths
A sphere for every tribe
And every combination.
And to have it all
All we need is to remember
there is an edge
And grow our dreams beyond it.

Overview of the Month: Every January we focus on the topic of Vision. As we have explored both the Isaiah 65 and Revelation 21 texts, Rev. Mariama has reminded us of three key points as we engage in visioning (1) God is with us. (2) God is sensitive to our needs and traumas. (3) We are called to live the Kin(g)dom of God on Earth. Today we will face some of the barriers to visioning and explore how we might practice intentional imagination and vigilant vision.

Exegesis:

- Revelation is not a text that people often turn to for comfort. It can be scary because of its apocalyptic nature.
- Apocalypse means “revealing of divine mystery” - Three main tendencies in the interpretation of Revelation: historical, prophetic-predictive, and symbolic.
- The Book of Revelation is John sharing his visions - with a critical eye, we can say John had to have some proximity to power in order for his words to be recorded, printed, shared, and held in the canon for so many years. Whose visions of his time were not recorded, not taken seriously?

- As the last book in the Christian Bible, this book *can* be an invitation to ignite our imaginations, to imagine a future where God's vision is fully realized
- One thing is clear - God's vision for all of creation is not a veiled mystery or wholly unknown.
 - **Where have you received glimpses of God's vision for the world?**
- The Prophet Isaiah tells us again and again what God's vision is: cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. These are not symbolic instructions.
- The question today is less about what is God's vision for the world and more *How do we practice God's vision in the world?* The truth is we do not have to have every i dotted and every t crossed on God's vision to start living in the way of God's vision.

Key Points: How to be Visionary

Visionary as adjective versus visionary as a noun.

- Who would you identify as a visionary?

It is far more important to be visionary (adjective) than to be recognized as a visionary (noun). There are many greats and giants who we call "visionaries." These people likely have platforms, special skills/talents, access to resources, etc. Although we can learn so much from visionaries, some people might feel intimidated, silenced, anxious, afraid to step outside of what they know because they don't see themselves as a visionary.

1. **Acknowledge that we do not live in neutral or imagination-less times.** I had a professor in a Sociology 101 course who on the first day of class said "I can tell your futures...not because I have a sixth sense or a magical ball ,but because of who you are, the fact that you are at this institution, in this city - I can tell you who you will marry, how much money you will make, with a very little margin of error because of the carefully curated and iron clad social structures we live in." I remember feeling like I had absolutely zero sense of agency and that as a collective, we had become so deeply unimaginative.
 - When we are not actively engaged in vigilant visioning, we are succumbing to the imagined realities of people in power - past and present - who dictate what is possible and for who. We are living in the realized imagination of colonizers, the imagination of white supremacists, the imagination of capitalism fueled by forced labor, an imagination where advances in technology and convenience are more important than care for the earth - in the church we are often living in the imagination of sexism, racism, homophobia, power struggles. There is no neutral.
 - a. "Imagination gives us borders, gives us superiority, gives us race as an indicator of ability. I often feel I am trapped inside someone else's capability. I often feel I am trapped inside someone' else's imagination, and I must engage my own imagination in order to break free." - adrienne maree brown
 - b. Acknowledging that we are always actively participating in the imagination can fuel us to clarify our own commitments to God's vision, signal the urgency of being visionary, and stimulate our own imaginations.
2. **Cultivate practices and surround yourself with people who push the boundaries of our cognitive knowing.** Spirit is most active in the wilderness, in our unknowing. Living into God's vision means swimming against the current of the powers that be. We are programmed and socialized to fit in, to assimilate, to not question things too much. It is far too easy for us to get caught in a cycle of comfortability of submitting to things as they are. We need practices and rituals that keep us uncomfortable. We need to cultivate authentic relationships with people who experience the world in radically different ways, people who have different skills, who speak different languages, sing different songs. We need to steep ourselves in practices and with people who will keep us swimming upstream, keep us in the way of God's vision.

3. Put God's vision to practice. Rinse. Repeat. God's vision is meant to be lived into right now - on Earth as it is in heaven. We are meant to inch our way toward the realization of God's vision - not just in prayer but in practice. This is not a symbolic request or invitation. This is also not meant to minimize God's vision into a simple checklist that we can cross off and say - well, I have done it. I fed the hungry on Tuesday, volunteered my time with this organization, donated to this cause, and now I compost and recycle so I am really doing it. Putting God's vision to practice, especially when we are embedded in so many systems and structures of perpetual harm, means to take steps everyday toward your own belovedness and the belovedness of all of creation. How are your actions and decisions on a daily basis affirming the belovedness of all creation or upholding death-dealing systems? How are we rewiring ourselves so that our default alignment is with God's vision for the world even when it is inconvenient, uncomfortable, or does not directly benefit us in the moment? As we see in the scripture - God is making all things new - we get to be a part of that here and now, in everything we do.

Reflection:

- 1) Write** two haikus [5 syllables, 7 syllables, 5 syllables]. Write the first haiku to represent our current lived social imagination. Write the second haiku to represent God's vision for the world. Allow the movement between these poems to be a prayer.
- 2) Draw** a physical representation of your imagination - including its boundaries. Use colors, shapes, words. Let the center be your comfort zone. Let the outer boundary be your most uncomfortable and unfamiliar places - where is it hardest to release control? Identify the people, places, and practices that nudge you closer toward the boundaries of your imagination.
- 3) Notice** your schedule for tomorrow. Write down all that you need to tend to: chores, work, phone calls to friends/family, appointments, etc. Imagine how you might step your day in God's vision and physically show up to these tasks in a way that more deeply aligns with God's vision of "delighting in God's people" and "making all things new."