

August 15, 2021

Finding Truth in Imagination



Imagine

John Lennon (Sung by Shakira)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-3wIW1Rpiw>

Colossians 3:2

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

I TRIPPED ON MY IMAGINATION

Walking down the garden path
The moon dangled from a silver thread
Casting silhouettes
Of mighty ships
And dragons in my head

I tripped on my imagination
I should have seen it there
It twinkled, danced
In happenstance
Completely unaware

That I had many things to do
No time to dwell on filigree,
Dance on clouds,
Weave silk shrouds,
Or see dragons in my tea.

Life's too short for wispy thoughts
Images among the stars,
I should choose facts
Not circus acts
Or genies in a jar.

Somehow, I just can't help it
I have to rope my dreams

I chase the moon
And someday soon
I'll gather all its beams

Into a lantern made of tin
Let it shine into my nights
Casting silhouettes
Of mighty ships
And stars of dancing sprites

I'll take my time and think a bit
And trip across my dreams
I'll stand up tall
And share them all
Dragons, ships and tea.

God made my mind a playful thing
Where dreams run wild and free
Where whimsy reigns
Amongst the strains
Of music in the trees..

It is within this shadow state
That I can see tomorrow.
Take it, shake it,
Mold it, make it
Creating joy from sorrow.

I'm grateful that my God allows
A space for my mind to ramble
And help me see
The way things could be
Instead of take a gamble

On the paths we have fixed before us.
The road ahead has many choices.
But it is in our minds
Where truth unwinds
Which leads us to our voices.

A COMPLETE SOLUTION

Julie saw the young lady with a stroller standing outside the dollar store. The morning sun was warm, but it was obvious the day was going to be a hot one. The woman had sought shelter in the shade of the awning outside the store as some relief for her and her child. She looked confused. She held a cardboard sign in her hand but didn't seem to want to share its message with anyone. The baby in the stroller was fast asleep.

Julie asked the woman if she was alright, but the woman did not seem to hear her. Julie spoke a little louder and the woman turned toward her. Her face was smudged, and she had not bathed in a several days. Her clothes were rumpled and musty.

"I asked if you were okay," Julie said again. "Can I help in any way?"

"I don't think so," the woman whispered. "It is almost over."

"I'm sorry," Julie said. "Did you say it is almost over? What is almost over?"

"Everything," said the woman.

Julie paused, thought for a moment and replied back, "Look, it's getting mighty warm out here and I am sure you would like to get your baby out of the heat for a while. There's a small restaurant next door. Let me buy you cup of coffee and give you and your sweet baby a little relief."

The woman stared straight ahead and then slowly nodded. She took her cardboard sign and carefully placed it in the pocket of the stroller. She treated it like it was almost fragile and very precious, something that she did not want to lose. Then they all went next door to the cool air of the restaurant.

Jonas, the restaurant owner and manager, met them as they walked in the door. “Hi Julie! So great to see you this morning. And who is this you have with you?” He shook their hands and led them to a quiet table.

“I’m sorry, Jonas,” Julie replied. “This is my new friend...” She paused, realizing she had not even asked the woman’s name.

“Gloria,” the woman quietly filled in the blank. “And this is my daughter, Elizabeth.”

“Well, it is great to have you all with us this morning. And so nice to meet you, Gloria. Let me get y’all some coffee. We’re a little backed up at the moment. I lost a waitress this week. Her husband got transferred. It may take a few minutes to get someone to take your order. I apologize for the inconvenience.”

“No problem, Jonas. We’ll just chat until someone comes. Thanks so much.” Julie responded.

Jonas quickly brought them some coffee and went off to greet some more customers.

Julie turned to Gloria and whispered, “Now Gloria, we are alone. Please tell me how I can help.”

Gloria was hesitant, but finally explained, “Todd, my husband, got laid off at the beginning of COVID. He hasn’t been able to find another job. We lived north of here until the money ran out. One night last week, he just took off without saying a word. He did leave a short note explaining that he just couldn’t do this anymore. He just... took the truck and left. I have some friends down south that I was hoping would take us in, but without a phone I really had no way to contact them. We hitchhiked this far but could go no further. What little money we had is gone. So, I guess... it’s over. I have nowhere else to turn. I haven’t eaten in two days, and I ran out of formula and diapers for the baby this morning. I’ve never been in this position before. I have my little cardboard sign, but I just haven’t been able to bring myself to use it. I’m not even sure how this is supposed to work. Not that it matters, anymore.”

She pulled out her sign and gave it to Julie. It read, “Mother and baby. Hungry. Trying to get to Corpus. Any help appreciated. God bless.”

Julie looked up with tears in her eyes and noticed Jonas giving her the eye. He had obviously heard the story as well. He sauntered over to the table, pretending he was going to take their order.

“Hey Julie, I am really desperate for some help here. Do you know of anyone looking for a job? The pay isn’t great, but I also have a little apartment out back that I can throw in rent free.”

There was a sudden spark of hope in Gloria’s eyes, and she quickly spoke up, “Jonas, is this something you think that I might be able to help you with?”

“Consider yourself hired, Gloria. It is a God send that Julie brought you in here today. You can start tomorrow. After we get some food in you and the baby taken care of, I will take you out to the apartment and you can get settled.”

This was not at all what Julie had planned. She was more than able to meet Gloria’s immediate needs. She would have made sure that Gloria had something to eat and would have bought formula and diapers for the baby. But Jonas could see the opportunity to change the direction of Gloria’s life, bring a light of hope into a very dark place. Sometimes, solving the problem is so much better than alleviating the immediate discomforts. Both acts of kindness were greatly needed and appreciated. It is the solution that can only be arrived at by leaving the problem in God’s hands because He sees not only our needs today, but what we will need tomorrow.

I have a love/hate relationship with John Lennon's "Imagine." That's probably because of my grounding in Christian Theology. I have a personal relationship with God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. They are actually more real to me than this world that surrounds me. I believe in heaven. I believe in hell. I believe that the life awaiting us is more concrete than death being the end of all we know.

That means that I can't imagine there being no heaven or hell. It's just not possible for me. For me, it's not a matter of opinion. Do I ever have my doubts? Of course, I do. But I have even more doubts about this world we claim to be our reality. Where we believe that what we see, feel, hear and touch is the completion of truth. There is so very much more to life than what we see, feel, hear, and touch.

Why would I use such a controversial piece of music for the special music today? The simple truth is that this song delivers so much insight into the human condition, we can hear the beat of a person's heart, we can hear the very voice of God trying to get us to understand something about how we live and grow, even in secular music, even in music that we might find offensive. John Lennon did express in a most beautiful, if somewhat backhanded way, the base root of a problem that has a direct relationship to how our hearts, minds, and spirits work. He talks about using our imagination to get rid of our prejudices, fences, and beliefs; the things that tend to separate us.

But if we got rid of our opinions about heaven, hell, God, religion, countries, political ideals, possessions, hunger, poor people, rich people,

beautiful people, ugly people, gay people, white people, people of color, hair color, eye color and anything else that might put a fence between us, things that might separate us, then the world would be perfect. A brotherhood of man.

It's a wonderful dream, isn't it? Or is it? Just what kind of world would it be if we were all identical in the way we looked and the way we believed. It sounds like it would be a pretty boring place to me. We would be born, we would live, we would die, never leaving a footprint. Because footprints can be divisive.

We wouldn't have Martin Luther Kings, John Kennedys, Billy Grahams, Abraham Lincolns, George Washingtons, John Wesleys, or any other great thinker that allowed themselves to think beyond what they could see, hear feel and touch. People who have envisioned the world as it could be rather than the way it is. Most of the world's literature would disappear. Nobody would care about politics, philosophy, human rights, or religion.

But I think that is what John Lennon was alluding to, even if it was a little bit "tongue in cheek." There simply is no way to get there from here. The idea that everyone simply drops everything they believe in so that everyone thinks alike. That just isn't possible. But I have to admit, it's a little more appealing to try and convince people of that possibility, than taking a single opinion and forcing that opinion on everyone else. That's the way wars are started.

Here is the glorious part having a space in our brain dedicated to possibilities. God gave John Lennon the ability to imagine such a world given to unity. It was firm enough in his imagination that he was able to write it down and

put it to music. That's a gift. The gift of imagination that God anointed us with allows us to envision a world different from the one we live in. A world where we can just flip the switch off on God. What kind of a God would allow such a thing?

It's a lot like free will. You can't put a fence around free will. Either a person has the right to make their own choices, or they don't. Even if the choices we make are bad. Even if the choices we make hurt others or result in catastrophe. Just as God allows good men and women to choose to make the world a better place, He also allows men and women to make choices that will bring destruction raining down around us.

God does not put an electric fence around our imaginations. He doesn't forbid us to go wherever our minds wander. That is up to us.

We can't teach imagination, but we can encourage it. Some of us have broader imaginations than others. There is room for both kinds of people in this world. It is the imagination side of us that has brought about great inventions, the ability to conceive of things that others considered impossible or a flights-of-fancy. It is those among us who are more grounded that manage to turn those notions of whimsical wonder and possibility into reality. It's the imagination that sees the problem and figures out possible solutions. It is the practical people among us that take those solutions and bring them to life in order to make our world a better place. It is the composers that hear music in their heads and put it down on paper so that the musicians can play it. There is always two sides to the coin of imagination. If there is no attempted implementation, then that coin remains somewhat imaginary, a dream cast aside.

I was the kid that was always caught looking out the windows in school. Yes, my teachers would scold me. But I was also the kid who would write short stories, write songs for the guitar, write poetry, enjoyed art and theatre. Dreamers are essential to the progress and survival of our species. They ask questions like:

“Why can’t we...?”

“Maybe if we...?”

“To make the world better, shouldn’t we...?”

“Can you see what I see?”

Dreamers see all the colors of the rainbow in every sunrise and sunset. It doesn’t make them given to fancy. It’s just the way they see the world. Some people believe giving into such whimsical manifestations is to ignore the reality that people are hungry, people are thirsty, people are hurting. But history tells us; truth tells us; out of those very whimsical imaginations comes the ability to find solutions for feeding the hungry, quenching thirst, and easing the pain of those who are hurting. It is the minds of the dreamers, the people with imagination, that God can plant ideas into that will become the fruit of powerful solutions.

There is an old adage used way to often. **“Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.”** The aspect of giving the man a fish is a common way of talking about how we, as Christians, should be taking care of those who are hungry. It is only by delving into our

imaginations that we arrive at the idea that we are able to teach that man to fish and eliminate his hunger altogether.

There is a wonderful organization that I try to support called Heifer International. While so many ministries provide food for those who are hungry in third world countries, Heifer International provides them with live animals, plants, and trees. But they also know it isn't enough just to provide these resources to the poor. They also teach them animal husbandry and horticulture so that they can grow those resources and continue to provide for their communities.

“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

It is so difficult for us to imagine what is possible if we don't allow our minds the freedom to explore solutions beyond meeting basic needs. It is much like a doctor only treating the symptoms of a disease rather than digging in and finding the root cause of the disease and addressing it in such a way that the patient will no longer have to deal with just alleviating the symptoms.

Sometimes we get so busy that we just don't look for solutions beyond just alleviating the symptoms. We don't allow ourselves to look for creative ways that we might actually remove the root cause of the issue in someone's life. I will also admit that is sometimes easier to just feed someone than to take the time and energy to get to the root of the problem. I also know that there are times when people just want to be fed and do not want us to look to find the cause of their problem. It can be a vicious cycle.

“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

Sometimes we just have to pause, stop the conveyor belt and change the way we think. Sometimes we have to stop doing what we think is the right thing to do, pause meeting a need, and take that time to reflect, allowing God to reach into that portion of our brain that allows us to see the possibility of something better, something more long-lasting, something more productive, something that leads to self-sufficiency. He can help us realize we can spend a little more of the resources He has provided to us (time, energy, money, provisions) in order to provide a better solution with longer lasting results. He can show us it is in the best interest of everyone involved and also better stewardship on our parts to teach someone how to fish. Teach someone how to raise chickens. Teach someone about farming. Teach someone a trade. Mentor someone through a crisis. Helping someone so they can get back on their own feet.

But the key is to pause and let God speak into us. The key is to **“Set our minds on things above.”** That does not give us permission to ignore the basic needs of those around us, but by setting our minds on things above we begin to realize that we have a real opportunity to change the direction of someone’s life rather than just extend it.

In our story today, Julie saw need and worked towards providing relief for Gloria’s immediate condition. She got Gloria and her baby out of the heat and was prepared to take care of her basic needs. Jonas saw beyond those needs to

what Gloria was going to need tomorrow. It took the joining of the two solutions to meet Gloria's and her baby's needs.

That is where our imagination, God's playground in our mind, comes into play. It is only by allowing God to show us the possibilities found in a complete solution that we are truly able to meet people's needs. Our imaginations don't ignore the here and now but find hope and possibilities that are beyond the immediate.

Our imagination is one way that God speaks into us and provides guidance. Whimsy, fantasy, and dreams can all lead us to truth if we allow God to use our imaginations for His purpose.

AMEN

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