

Problem: Some things are hard to imagine, especially on a cross.

-My dad would occasionally have business partners and fellow co-workers from Honeywell (where he still works) over for dinner. For quite a while, he became really close to a department in the company based out of Bangalore, India and there was quite an exchange of personnel and ideas that happened for a number of years (my Dad went to India several times as well as others from India coming to Minnesota out of this partnership). I remember one such co-worker/visitor from India coming to our house for dinner one time while I was in highschool. I remember it was amazing conversation with him bringing gifts for each of us. Following dinner, we went on a nice summer walk around Medicine Lake, the lake located near my childhood home. While standing on the shores, our visitor exclaimed: "So this entire lake freezes over in the winter?" After our replying yes and the additional fact that you can drive pickup trucks on the ice, he let out a few expletives and then simply said: "I can't even imagine it!" He kept saying this the rest of the evening how the lake freezing over was completely outside of his realm of imagining.

-Verse 34 in our gospel today reads: "Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.'" This verse, interestingly, is not found in early manuscripts of Luke's Gospel. It obviously was added later, maybe even 100 years later after the original writer passed away. I find this incredibly interesting as this verse is quoted so many times in our present day, yet was probably not written by Luke, the original Gospel writer at all. Why was it not part of the original text?

-Perhaps it is because these words that Jesus says were so radical, that Luke's original community, a community suffering incalculable amounts of persecution and despair couldn't imagine them.

-How can forgiveness happen, even on a cross? It can't be possible.

Solution: Jesus' words on the cross to the other 'bandits' challenge them and us to imagine something different.

-I went to a training this week down in Dallas, Texas which focused on community organizing. Community Organizing, for those who don't know, is the process of leading cooperative efforts usually by local residents to promote the interests of their community. It is an effective way in which communities can deepen relationship within themselves as well as focus on issues that are important to them. By more and more community members turning out for local elections, city council meetings, issue campaigns, as well as speaking out and giving voice to certain injustices, we can build real power to change things in a positive way. Almost every major movement in the United States began with local community organizing: Union movement, Women's Suffrage, and of course, Civil Rights. Organizing for specific goals, I learned this last week, can bring a lot of good. But here's the real challenge that the speakers at this

training hit home again and again: in order to do all of this you have to imagine something different.

-You can't organize what you can't imagine. You can't organize what you can't imagine. So what can we imagine?

-It's "Reign of Christ" Sunday today, the last Sunday of the "church calendar". It's a Sunday which was created by the church for political purposes. It was created for the church to make a statement and has been used very effectively over history to demonstrate that: no matter who is president, King, ruler, or in power, Jesus Christ is the one who reigns supreme. We are in the reign of Christ always.

-There is no denying that this is true and important for all of us to remember. However, if you ask me, I think just throwing "reign of Christ" around and saying to ourselves: "Christ is our true king" becomes a cop out. I think too many Christians say: "Christ is my King above all" and yet do things that aren't very Christlike at all and in fact have no idea what that really means. It has become, in my opinion, a generalist, empty saying that becomes hollow within church tradition. So, either we need to reclaim it or get rid of it in my opinion.

-If we are going to reclaim this term, really the only way I know how is to go back to my Dad's co-worker flipping out about the lake freezing over. Reign of Christ Sunday can be a Sunday that challenges us to imagine the unimaginable. Then it demands for us to start working/organizing in order to make that unimaginable reign of Christ real.

Implication: What can we imagine differently together?

-It challenges the church to say that yes, there even can be forgiveness on cross, even if Luke's community could not imagine it right away.

-We think of these two other men hanging with Jesus as bandits, but they probably were something else. We know from Roman Empire records that execution by crucifixion was the most gruesome of all punishments done by the Empire and was saved for "special kinds of crimes." Normal crimes, even murder, was not even punished in this way. The most common crime that was punished by crucifixion was actually.....community organizing. These men were probably "Protesters" or "Freedom Fighters" whom the Roman Empire wanted to make an example of. They were probably working to liberate their communities from the bondage of the Roman Empire. They were probably ones with incredible imaginations, yet even they could not imagine what the Reign of Christ looked like.

-"Save yourself and us!" Such a shrill call of despair. (Perhaps it reminds you of the calls we are hearing following such a divisive election). And Jesus does save himself and them, yet not in the way they imagined.

-What things can you imagine for our world? How can we open to our imagination coming true, but not in the way that we expect?

-I met a priest down at this training who was from Little Rock, Arkansas who told me me of the pervasive problem of payday loans. Many people in his community would have nowhere to turn to borrow money because they didn't have a driver's license or other documentation. So they had to go to these payday companies which would charge 30%-40% on a loan. This priest told me he knew of a couple paying \$600 a month on a \$3,000 loan. He pushed one of their state representatives to sponsor legislation which would regulate these payday companies, but it failed. He was incredibly frustrated until one member of his church who was vice president of a local credit union approached him and said: "I bet we could work something out to switch these high interest loans over to our bank." Turns out, it worked thanks to this little catholic parish which now helps and sponsors community members to switch and multiple payday loan companies in the community have closed up shop. "We are well on our way to addressing this problem," the priest told me. "In a way I never expected or thought possible." Things happen....even on the cross.

-May we have the courage to imagine a better world this day. May we also see our imaginations pushed and surprised, broken and renewed. What can you imagine? For today, in the reign of Christ and in the love of God, it can/will become a reality. Amen.