

“Transforming the World: Imagine”
Luke 1:46-55

Today, we celebrate graduation and one of the funny gifts I considered giving to our graduates is a book by the title *The Worst-Case Scenario Survival Handbook Travel*. The book poses all kinds of interesting scenarios and gives advice on what to do. Things like riding a runaway train, walking through a minefield, or being lost in a jungle. This little book claims to give the right actions for such dangerous situations such as ways to control a runaway camel, crash-land a plane on water, escape from a car hanging over the edge of a cliff, or cross a piranha-infested river. One of the funniest pieces is about “How to Foil a UFO Abduction. 1. Do not panic. The extraterrestrial biological entity (EBE) may sense your fear and act rashly. 2. Control your thoughts. The EBE may read your mind. Avoid mental images of abduction (boarding the saucer, probes). Don’t give them any ideas. 3. Resist verbally. Firmly tell the EBE to leave you alone. 4. Resist physically only as a last resort. Go for the EBE’s eyes (if they have any) you won’t know what its other more sensitive areas are. The authors believe ‘No matter how bad things are, they can always get worse.’

Our view of life tends to be that way. We see danger or problems and our negative imagination is triggered. Even the way we try to solve problems in life is a problem because we tend to focus on the negative instead of imagining new ways of being. A few years ago, I learned about Appreciative Inquiry for planning. It is a totally different approach for life. Here is a short clip to just give you an overview of AI:

<https://youtu.be/QzW22wwh1J4>

Our Bible story for today is about someone who dared to imagine new possibilities based on the power of the positive that was already in her life instead of the great odds she was facing. It is the story of Mary’s song which inspired millions of people throughout the centuries. Mary chose the words from ancient song, the song of Hannah, to proclaim hope and a new vision for her people without being stuck in all the odds that were against her. This was a desperate time for the people of Israel with the Roman occupation and its oppression. So as she received the challenging news of the angel about her pregnancy, Mary turned to song to express her feelings and to inspire others to join her on this path of radical hope (Read Luke 1:46-55) Keep in mind that Mary was around 14 years old, a teenager, a female, and one who most likely came from an ordinary peasant family. She could have seen all the potential problems with this divine plan and stopped it right there. In that culture, a woman was not thought of very highly. It was scandalous for a woman to get pregnant out of wedlock. Yet, Mary chose to imagine new possibilities that were not seen before because of her faith in God. Mary’s celebration in the Magnificat is a celebration of how God works. Throughout the Bible, God chooses to work through those who are deemed unfit or marginal by society but who have faith and imagination. This is the story of God’s love as reflected by Mary and her song in the presence of her cousin Elizabeth. God’s love and blessings are not given based on our success, beauty or power, but on faith, courage and the willingness to imagine a different kind of world.

So today, I want to invite you to consider the importance of positive and faith-based imagination for the transformation of the world. When we look at the state of our world today, we can get cynical about the future. We can cite many examples where people are being cruel to each other and where evil seems to be winning. But in faith, we can imagine new possibilities and ways to be. These possibilities are based in the past, in how God has acted before, but they also defy our expectations. In the song of Mary, we hear two themes. The first one is about the past. Mary's song is not new. It was actually the song of one of her foremothers, Hannah the mother of Samuel. The second theme is daring to imagine a world of justice with a future that is completely different from the past or present realities of the world.

As we conclude our sermon series about transforming the world, I invite you to examine how you imagine your life and our world. How can we reimagine them for today's challenges? What keeps your imagination alive?

(First service) I would like to end with a scene from the movie "The Pursuit of Happyness." This 2006 biographical drama film is based on entrepreneur Chris Gardner's nearly one-year struggle of being homeless with his son. The scene we are going to watch is about the power of imagination in the face of great odds. They were facing homelessness and the dad did not want to lose his son.

https://youtu.be/d8StlLqaS_Q

What you imagine makes a huge difference for the future and for the transformation of the world. The difference between imagination and the lack of it could be the difference between life and death, between a world where God's vision is alive or forgotten! So keep your faith imaginative and open to what may seem impossible today! Amen.