

Reimagine

I learned a new term last week that names everything we've been experiencing and feeling. It's called crisis fatigue. Strictly speaking, it's not an officially recognized psychological disorder. At least, not yet. But social scientists tell us that people are experiencing it. Lots of people.

So what is crisis fatigue? Well, confronted by a relentless barrage of stress-inducing events, we respond with a draining mixture of exhaustion, rage, disgust, despair, and grief. We want things to change, but the problems seem so huge that we don't know where to start. We begin to wonder if we could make a real difference. We're overwhelmed. And when we are feeling overwhelmed, the sheer size and scope of the challenges we face can sap us of the energy we need to confront them effectively.

If we look at our challenges as a whole – systemic racism, a global pandemic, the deep fractures in our country – we may feel too small and inadequate to do anything about them, let alone reimagine things. We know that we should do something, but we may struggle to get started. Where do we even begin to reimagine? If you're feeling hopeless, you're not alone.

And to drive home that sense of hopelessness, we have the story of the widow's mite, as it's affectionately known. How can we possibly live up to her ideal? You heard Brandon read the story and you probably know the story. You have probably heard countless stewardship sermons based on this story. I know I've preached a few of those sermons.

The widow gave everything she had, her last 2 coins, all of her money, to the temple. To her church. Everything. This is a hard story.

But most of Jesus' parables about money are hard. Last week we heard Jesus say to the rich young man that he should sell everything he has and give the proceeds to the poor. Today he's giving praise to the widow for giving everything she had.

It's ok to admit that these are hard stories and we may feel hopeless in the face of them and have a hard time living up to them. Which is probably why we dance around them, explain them away or re-interpret them. That's what I've done with this story about the widow in previous stewardship sermons.

But today, let's take it for what it is, and not re-interpret it or dance around it. I'm not really in the mood to sit with it in that space of discomfort...but maybe that's what we are called to do. Maybe we should just stop playing around, and tell ourselves the hard truth, which is that Jesus really does want us to give everything. To give our all.

To give our all to this world, and country that is a mess. Where almost 240,000 Americans have died of a virus none of us had heard of a year ago. Where over 10 million Americans have been infected by it, including those in the White House.

Maybe Jesus really does want us to give our all to a world and a country that is in desperate need of help, where not everyone has access to healthcare to fight the virus; and not everyone's well being goes up with the stock market.

Maybe Jesus really does want us to give our all to a world and country where not everyone's lives matter. If they did, we wouldn't be fighting about it.

Maybe Jesus really does want us to give our all to a world and a country and a city where people are still living without water, especially in the midst of the Coronavirus.

Maybe Jesus really does want us to give our all to a world and country and city where there are nearly 80,000 food insecure people and where this is expected to increase more than 50 % because of COVID-19.

Maybe Jesus really does want us to give our all.
Let's look at our art for today.



This is a digital painting called Lament of a Gift by Hannah Garrity. She writes this:

In this painting, I have depicted two coins from the time of Jesus. Two. Two is not enough to live on. Economist Thomas Picketty's new book Capital and Ideology, details how societies throughout the ages have structured inequality into their/our economic systems. He argues that the economy is not a force of nature. Human Ideology shapes the economy. Marshall Steinbaum sums up Picketty's new work: "In his sweeping new history, the economist systematically demolishes the conceit that extreme inequality is our destiny, rather than our choice.

In this text, Jesus agrees with Picketty. An exegesis of this text by Addison Wright establishes that Jesus is actually lamenting the widow's gift. Wright cites Jesus' overall viewpoint on the financial structures of the day, arguing that this cannot be an affirmation of the widow's selflessness. Rather, it must be a lament of the societal structures that cause the widow to give all of her resources to organized religion.

For me, the lament perspective on this traditional stewardship text is transformational. It is inspiring me to engage financially with the Church in a much more personal way. With sudden clarity, I connected the fact that Jesus' Church is the financial ideology I believe in. The hypocrisy that Jesus observes in this text is the same hypocrisy that I have always struggled with as a member of the church of the present. So, what actions can I take, what questions can I ask, and what conversations can I have to ensure that the Church I am giving to is the Church Jesus meant to create

See, here's the thing. The hard truth. This story really isn't about us. It's about God. Most parables are about God. This story is about God, more specifically, it's about how we see in the widow how God acts. And God acts by giving God's whole self, everything God has, to this world. To this messy, messed up world.

And why would God do that?

Because that's who God is. God has always given God's entire self to the world. Always. From the very beginning of the Bible to the very end is the overarching narrative that God created the world, loves the world, and loves everyone in it. Even when it's a hot mess. Even when we are a hot mess.

Because that's how much God loves you.

And how do we respond to such love? We give. We give back. We work for a better world. We work to reimagine a better world, a world where:

- We do our part to stop the spread of the virus. Wear a mask, wash your hands, maintain your distance.
- We work towards a system where sick people get well. Why does this need to be such a battle?
- Where all lives more than matter. If you're white, listen to people of color talk about what it's like to be black or brown in our society and resist the urge to defend yourself.
- Where people have something as basic as a roof over their heads and food in the bellies. Why are there so many homeless people in the world's richest nation?
- And where saying all of this isn't viewed as political, but is viewed as Biblical. Sit with your Bible and read what Jesus says about the poor, the stranger and loving your neighbor.

There is work to be done, a world to reimagine.

Next week we will gather together all of the pledges you have sent in (so please send them in this week. And as you consider your pledge for 2021. I ask that you put yourself in the position of the two coins. You are the two coins. Your life is an offering to God. What are you going to do with it? As the late Rev. Peter Gomes said, “You are asked in the time that you have to use wisely what you have been given for the kingdom of God. That means you must consider...how you spend your money?

What are you going to do right now, today, with who you are and what you have? What do you have to offer? When Jesus gave himself he was telling the world that what he valued the most and what God values the most – is a life that is lived in such a way that our offering, our coins, are shared for the sake of others.

And so I’m asking you to join me in making a pledge to Detroit Central United Methodist Church for 2021. What gift can you offer? Because all of us have a gift to offer.

John Wesley was once asked what one person could do on behalf of the kingdom of God. He answered:

Do all the good you can,
in all the ways you can,
in all the places you can,
at all the times you can,
to all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.

There was once a poor widow who did just that. Let’s reimagine and work for a better world.

Reimagine an economy where practices of predatory lending, student debt, medical debt and wage inequity are upended.

Reimagine an economy where the dispossessed are cared for.

Reimagine the identity of neighbor, regardless of geographic location, as a child of God.

Reimagine how our faith communities can engage in years of Jubilee.

Reimagine a relationship with money where it is used to repair rather than provide security, sustainability to institutions.

I close with this poem by Sarah Are entitled Love, By Another Way

I used to think that love was simple
You would know when you know,
What was meant, would be.
But I fell in love
And it’s not that easy.
It’s compromise and identity,
Mountains and valleys,
Apologies and memories,
Imbalance, recentering.
It turns out,

Love took reimagining.

I used to think that Church was simple.
Church was community, not the walls,
Faith and hope mixed with call.
But then the world grew violently sick
And the way to be Church
Was to keep distance.
So doors were closed,
And people sent home.
It was all love, by another way,
And yet it was not how we imagined Sunday.

I used to think that justice was simple,
That I could make a difference, all by myself.
There was a clear right and wrong,
a way I could help.
But then I learned of privilege and bias,
Of white savior complex and our Church's silence.
And all at once, it wasn't so easy.
I needed to learn. I needed to listen.
I needed to reframe my original vision.

I guess what I'm trying to say is
Life will throw first drafts our way.
The chance to dream,
To lead, to sing,
To love, and give.
To pray and be.
But in order to grow,
To follow God's lead,
We have to do the work –
Reimagining.

And despite our best efforts,
Love will fail.
Churches will close.
Justice will leave the vulnerable exposed.
And when that happens,
We must own our part,
Say we're sorry
And try to restart.

So write it all down.
And write it again.

A first draft,
A second,
An epilogue and then
Share it with me
And we will pray.
And the Spirit will move,
And maybe one day,
We can write this world
inside heaven's gate.

For I am
Starting to believe
That what matters in life
Will never be easy.
So we must imagine and imagine again.
We must dream and try, die and rise.
And in our rising, may we see
The next right reimagined thing
Until step by step we are home.

Love by another way. Amen