

More than We Can Ask or Imagine

Ephesians 3: 14-21

First United Church of Christ, Northfield, MN

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May God still speak through these words of scripture and sermon.

For a few months now we have been singing this scripture- particularly the phrase “more than we can ask or imagine.” In our prayer time and in the scripture, there is affirmation that God will accomplish in our partnership more than we can ask or imagine.

There is power in imagination. When I googled that phrase 9 million results came up. The top hit was “21 inspirational quotes on the power of imagination.” Quotes are one thing, but stories are another.

Let me introduce you to Sheena Collier. As a Harvard graduate student Collier moved to the Boston area in 2004 and quickly found that a sense of belonging felt beyond her reach. Having grown up in Albany, N.Y., and attending Spelman College — the oldest historically Black college for women in America — Collier was used to a support system. When she didn’t find one in the Boston area, she built one. Collier’s story ¹is chronicled in A Boston Globe series entitled, “A Beautiful Resistance”² by writer Jeneé Osterheldt. The series celebrates black joy and black lives.

Collier built a system of support with dinner parties, book clubs, and movie nights. She did it with the city, in her former role as director of economic growth for the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, where she curated the [Fierce Urgency of Now](#), a City Awake festival celebrating young professionals of color in Boston. As founder of The Collier Connection, she specializes in the intersection of corporate culture and community living. And a year ago, in the thick of the pandemic, she launched [Boston While Black](#), a membership network for Boston-based Black professionals and students seeking community.

“I envision a day when someone moves here and within their first month they are part of Boston While Black,” Collier said a year ahead of the launch. “I want them to be able to attend a workshop, meet Black elected leaders, go to a welcome dinner, log in online and say, ‘Hey, can someone go to church with me or try a restaurant?’ and they do that their first month. I want people to live here and feel that sense of belonging.”

¹ Jeneé Osterheldt, [Boston While Black](#), Boston Globe, July 25, 2021.

² Jeneé Osterheldt, [A Beautiful Resistance](#), Boston Globe Series.

On the [Collier Connection](#) website she describes herself this way - Sheena Collier is a superconnector, convener, and strategic planner. I would add- Sheena Collier leverages the power of imagination.

Another story. Kenyan runner Abel Mutai was only a few meters from the finish line but got confused with the advertising signs lining the track and stopped, thinking he had finished the race. Buenos Aires runner, Ivan Fernandez, was right behind him and, realizing what was going on, started shouting to the Kenyan to keep running. Mutai did not know Spanish and did not understand. Realizing what was going on, Fernandez pushed Mutai to victory.

A reporter asked Ivan, "Why did you do this?" Ivan replied, "My dream is that one day we can have some sort of community life where we push ourselves and also others to win." The reporter insisted "But why did you let the Kenyan win?" Ivan replied, "I didn't let him win, he was going to win. The race was his." The reporter insisted and asked again, "But you could have won!" Ivan looked at him and replied: "But what would be the merit of my victory? What would be the honor of this medal? What would my mother think of it?" Ivan Fernandez imagined a world where the runner up helps the winner win, where ingrained values of fairness and encouragement rather than cheating and selfishness rule the day.

The apostle Paul imagined a world where everyone is rooted and grounded in the love of God. The thirteen verses ahead of our reading for today make the argument that God's love is for everyone. Can you say that to your neighbor- look them in the eye – or write it in the Chat and say- God's love is for everyone. No exceptions! God's love is even for the Gentiles Paul writes. God's love is even for the – you fill in the blank. If that truth does not provoke our imagination as a community founded in the extravagant welcome and love of Jesus, then we might as well fold up our tent and go home.

The power of imagination has impact on individuals, but the Apostle Paul is writing to a community and asking us to exercise God's imagination for us in collective action for love. Scholar Scott Shauf³³ points out that the word "love" (this is *agape* or unconditional love) is used twenty times in Ephesians, ten times as a verb and ten times as a noun. For such a short letter it is an impressive frequency." Love should be the subject of our imagination and how to spread it extravagantly.

Here at First UCC we have come to a growing understanding of practicing the courageous love and justice of Jesus. Moment by moment, situation by situation living into such a vision will demand imagination. Sometimes it will be imagining what is courageous. Other times it will be imagining what is just. Much of the time it will be imagining Jesus at all. This is who God is calling this community to be

³³ Scott Shauf, [Working Preacher Commentary](#), July 29, 2018.

in this time and era and I praise God for that calling. I can't wait to see how it unfolds for you! There is so much evidence that our world needs more practitioners of the courageous love and justice of Jesus – Amen?

If this sounds like a “if you build it, they will come” kind of message- you would be partially right. It might be more a message of “if you imagine it, it will happen.” Would that be so terrible? Could our optimism overcoming our pessimism be a gift to the world? Could our imagination rooted and grounded in love spurring us to mindful action be a treasure in the sight of God?

If you build a platform of belonging, they will come. If you invest in a vision of people crossing the finish line ahead of you even if it costs you the race, they will be grateful. If you build a vision of practicing the courageous love and justice of Jesus it will happen. God willing, may it be so. Amen.