

## October 4, 2020 Sermon – Moving Through the Unimaginable

When we're young, we're constantly told to "use our imaginations." From our parents and grandparents to our teachers, advisors, and more, we're encouraged to look beyond ourselves, to stretch our minds and envision things not within our immediate reach. Some of the world's most memorable inventions came from people using their imaginations, concepts such as the "horseless carriage," the internet, and the wheel. One of my favorite stories from when my sister-in-law was working at a museum in Midland came from a co-worker of hers who used to work at Dow Chemical. He used to get a glimmer in his eye and telling visiting children that he was so old, he was older than Saran Wrap, because he remembered when it was invented.

As we get older, our minds delve more into facts and figures, embracing the science behind the world while still clinging to the imaginative dreams we had as children. What happens, then, when something happens that goes so far past anything we could have conceived of and we find ourselves living in what can only be deemed the unimaginable?

When I started thinking about it, I was able to come up with three categories of events that could be titled unimaginable. The first is unimaginable joy. Ask any new parents in the moments immediately following childbirth, and they'll most likely tell you that they had no idea how quickly and how much they'd fall in love with their new baby. The concept is awe inspiring and like none other in the world.

The second category of unimaginable deals with an opposite emotion and one that, like unimaginable joy, most people feel at some point in their lifetimes. I'm speaking of unimaginable grief and pain. I once heard a quote that "pain makes us real," and while that is entirely true, there are life events that can make us feel as if we're living in an alternate universe where nothing is real. Losing a partner in life or a child or a best friend. These are all examples of events that our normal, everyday brains don't put into our heads because the idea of dealing with this level of grief is beyond anything we can rationalize. We find ourselves wandering aimlessly because nothing makes sense. In many cases, those grieving will travel somewhere, anywhere, just to be surrounded by something different and in order to escape. It's during this

unimaginable pain that we find ourselves yearning for the imaginable we once felt as children.

If one level of unimaginable is joy and a second is pain, what could the third possibly be? For the answer to this question, let's look at our two scripture passages today. We first heard about the familiar story of Moses parting the Red Sea. To us, who have grown up with images of this story artistically drawn into almost every children's Bible we've ever seen as well as a blockbuster movie starring Charlton Heston, we can easily picture it. However, think about how this must have looked to those who experienced this miracle, watching this massive body of water separate into a pathway of safety. Similarly, in our second passage today, we heard about Thomas, unable to believe that his friend Jesus was back after his extremely public and gruesome execution. Yes, he knew his rabbi was capable of great miracles, but this was different. What they had witnessed that crucifixion day was surely irreversible.

You might have figured out by now that our third level of unimaginable is the abstract, that which we cannot see. Think about how the story of Moses parting the Red Sea might have sounded to those hearing it one hundred years later. Think about Thomas not wanting to believe. Why would he? True, his friends were telling me about it, but if I had to guess, I'd say that every single one of those disciples, at some point during the days after the crucifixion, had had a daydream and/or a nightdream that what they had witnessed hadn't actually happened, that their friend and leader would join them again. Anyone who has gone through the sudden loss of a loved one has said or heard the sentence, "but he or she was just here." This is precisely what Thomas was going through. Having finally wrapped his head around the fact that Jesus was gone, his mind must have thought that the disciples had been dreaming. This idea of not believing in something you can't see is not only one of the most common; it's completely normal.

Think about this in perspective of how a society develops. The more time passes, the more we wonder if stories we've heard are actually real. While time heals, it can also blur the edges of our memories. Imagine how the story of Jesus' life would have been perceived if no one had ever compiled it. I can only imagine the questions people might have asked. He turned water into what? How many people ate bread and

fish? The water he walked on was frozen, right? Granted, there are discrepancies when you compare the versions and Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, but by talking to witnesses and recording the historical life of a powerful man, they shaped entire societies and pieced together one of the world's greatest biographies.

Throughout our lives, we're faced with things we can't see and with concepts that are beyond our belief. How could so many people suffer while others have so much? How did the storm hit so many houses and completely spare others? How could society shun entire ethnicities of people simply because of how they were born? John Lennon actually wrote an entire song revolving around this concept, *Imagine*. "Imagine no possessions." "Imagine there's no countries." "Imagine all the people sharing all the world." Both then and now, these ideas are beyond comprehension because, like Thomas wanting to see Jesus in the flesh, they're not things we can see. Like the void of losing someone in our lives, we reach out, hoping to find comfort, and while we don't always find what we're looking for in these unimaginable moments, there is something that can give us comfort: faith.

Faith allows us to believe in the unbelievable. In our most vulnerable moments, faith that things can get better allows us to accept the comfort others lend us. It allows us to believe. To quote the classic *Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street*, "Faith is believing in something when common sense tells you not to." In moments when life doesn't feel like life, it allows us to begin living again. It allows us to transition from unimaginable grief to unimaginable healing. It allows us to make connections with people who have had similar experiences.

I'll never forget the first time I visited El Salvador after I'd had Ian. Throughout my difficult pregnancy, our church in Mt. Pleasant updated our sister village of Miramar, where I'd made so many connections, about everything Aaron and I went through, from losing our daughter to trying to hold onto her twin and eventually his time in the hospital before coming home. Upon visiting them again, I showed them several pictures which they loved, but none of those moments was as special as a conversation I had with Don Francisco, the president of the village. He explained that before they were finally able to have their children, he and his wife had lost a child and that knowing there were places in the world where a premature child could survive gave him hope. Along with

his faith, it made him believe in a better world. Francisco insisted that I take a picture of the two of them with a picture of Ian, and the smile on his face could have lit a room. It's still one of my favorite pictures.

No matter what, we're most likely going to have unimaginable moments in our lives, possibly covering all three of the categories described: joy, grief, and abstract disbelief. What I encourage us all to remember is that while these times will challenge us like no others, we can prevail. We can use our faith to help us believe again. As I once heard said, "Sometimes, seeing isn't believing; believing is seeing," and faith, combined with believing, can help us move through the unimaginable to the imaginable once again.