

IMAGINE

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Crossroads/La Paz, Mexico/Pastor Joyce Anderson-Reed

Author Terry Brooks shares about something he learned one afternoon while playing with his grandson Hunter. Hunter loved to play pirates with all his Playmobile & Lego sets. Hunter had books and books on pirates and he liked to watch pirate movies, so he pretty much knew what pirates do. They sailed in search of treasure, often stopping by desert islands to dig up chests of gold. They engaged in sea battles in which all casualties were immediately revived following the fight. Prisoners were transported now and then to Pirate Island where they were chained in a cave, or they were set adrift on rafts and menaced by sharks.

But in Hunter's world, pirates had a more colorful and diverse life than those we are familiar with from the history books. Hunter's pirates went on picnics, complete with tables and folding chairs, grills and cooking implements, and a family dog. They had a country home, which they visited regularly. At the country home, they had a dolphin pen and a spa. They also had a 4-wheel drive vehicle, which they took for rides, frequently encountering Godzilla. Sometimes they had sleepovers with medical personnel from the nearby hospital, who brought along an ambulance in case of emergencies.

On this particular day, says Terry, they were going to the zoo, which Hunter had constructed from building blocks. The zoo consisted of a series of pens containing the various species of animals. There was a pen for the big cats, one for the grass eaters, one for the primates, another for birds, and one more for the alligators and hippos. The pirates walked along the top of the blocks and looked down at the animals. They had a group of children along, which they had agreed to shepherd on a school outing. There was an entry gate and a ticket booth.

Halfway through the zoo visit, Hunter decided to open the gate between the big cats and the grass eaters and let them visit. His grandfather Terry was quick to tell him that he couldn't do that; the big cats would eat the grass eaters. And he shut the gate firmly. Hunter looked at his grandpa for a moment without comment, then went back to playing.

A little while later, he opened the gate again.

"No," Terry told him at once, closing it anew. "The cats will eat the antelope and the zebras. You can't put them in the same pen."

“But papa, they’re nice,” said Hunter, referring to the big cats.

Terry says that he then launched into a ridiculous attempt to explain animal behavior, which failed miserably. Hunter had no idea what he was talking about. Nevertheless, the gate stayed shut.

Until, only moments later, Hunter opened it yet again and began to move the big cats through. Terry was befuddled and irritated. “Hunter, you can’t do that! Haven’t you been listening to me?”

Hunter, equally frustrated, put his hands on his hips, squared himself around and shouted, “Papa! We’re pretending!”

Oh. Sorry, I forgot.

Terry Brooks says, “Later I realized that I was telling Hunter that he shouldn’t do things if they weren’t already accepted as feasible. I was closing off the faucet of his imagination so that he would conform to what everybody else believes. . . . But change doesn’t happen without imagination. Progress occurs not because we remain satisfied with what is, but because we hunger for what might be. We are always looking to take that next step. But the next step begins with looking beyond the possible to the impossible—because what seems impossible to us today becomes common place tomorrow. (Brooks, Terry. *Sometimes the Magic Works*. Pages 150-153, New York: Ballantine Books, 2003)

Imagination leads to possibilities, and possibilities to change. We shake up the status quo.

We see options where before there were only dead-ends.
We see an array of color where before there was only black and white.
We hear new solutions where before there was only old, tired suggestions.
We hear fresh answers where before there was only stagnant whining.
We taste vibrant, home-made goodness where before there was only stale, moldy bits of crust.
We taste tangy sweetness where before there was only rank bitterness.

Imagine.

Imagine equals different. Imagine equals second chances. Imagine equals a way when there seems to be no way.

Imagine.

In Genesis 1:27 we're told that human beings were created in the image of God. If we have the ability to imagine, to spend time in the art of imagination, then it is a direct reflection of our Creator. We are the offspring of a very imaginative God!

Creation is certainly one way where we see the rich variety and texture of God's imagination. But have you ever thought about God's imagination, God's creativity when it came to redeeming humankind?

Because of sin, we broke relationship with God. And certainly God tried a myriad of ways to draw us back. He chased us with the promise of a rainbow. He freed us from slavery, led us across the desert to the Promised Land. He delivered us from battle after battle. He sent us prophet after prophet to tell us how to repent and thus be restored back to relationship with himself.

But we're a rebellious people. We keep trying to do it our way, over and over again. And so, God decided to send himself. To live among us himself.

Can you imagine the conversation in heaven that day? God announces that he is going to send his Son Jesus, a member of the triune Godhead, to earth in order to redeem humankind, to restore the brokenness in our relationship by shedding his own blood.

Stunned, the angels mutter, "Is his out of his holy, glorious, magnificent mind?! You can't mix heavenly beings with earthly beings! It just isn't done!"

But that's exactly what God did. He sent his son into the world to die for our sins so that we might find forgiveness and restoration with God. And if we choose to believe, what is the result?

2 Corinthians 5:17 says that we become new creatures in Christ. Colossians 1:27b says "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Imagine. We become new. We become the hope of glory. You. Me. Us. Messed up human beings. All our problems. All our unsolvable dilemmas. All the places where we feel boxed in, trapped, in despair. God comes to us, as Jesus, and tells us that we can become new. Not a make-over. Not plastic surgery. Not a clone. NEW.

Imagine.

But God didn't stop there. Jesus tells us that as his disciples, we are charged to help other people become new too. Don't keep this Good News to yourself! Show others how to become new. Form communities to worship God, to grow in your faith. I will send the Holy Spirit to empower you.

Imagine the conversation in heaven *that* day. The angels mutter again. "Like father, like son. Jesus is going to trust this group of misfits, this band of simpleton believers to further the Kingdom of God? He actually believes they can change the world?!"

When Jesus' own disciples expressed their disbelief, Jesus replied, in John 14:12, "You will do greater things than me."

Imagine.

Greater things. Greater things than heal the sick, make the blind see, the lame walk, the dead rise again? Greater things than multiply 5 loaves and 2 fish to feed 5000? Greater things than bring hope to the lost, joy to the depressed, love to the wounded? You will do greater things than me.

Imagine.

In John 17:20-23, Jesus prayed a prayer that not only included his 12 disciples, but also included you and me. Listen to this . . .

"My prayer is not for them alone, I pray also for those who *will believe* in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one. I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

Jesus' prayer is that we may be unified as he and the Father are one. And when we live out unity, we reflect God's love and glory in a way that points others to seek God as well.

Imagine.

When I seek unity with you, it reflects the unity of God. When you seek unity with me, it reflects the unity of God. The world will tell us that it's impossible. That Mexicans, and Americans, and Canadians cannot live together, worship together, find peace together in one place. That our differences will drive us apart before our similarities will keep us together. But these nay-sayers forget one thing. Jesus has imparted his glory to us so that we may be one as he and the Father are one. We do this not through our power, but through Christ in us, the hope of glory.

Isaiah 11:1-9 is a prophecy about the coming Messiah, the coming of Jesus. Listen to these amazing words:

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of Knowledge and of the fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

He will not judge by what he sees with his own eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt, and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

The wolf will lie down with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Imagine.

Let's read that last part together again: The wolf will lie down with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Imagine.

The big cats in the same pen as the grass eaters. We grown ups say it can't be done. But Hunter imagined it could. A human child created in the image of God reflecting God's imagination. Creative possibilities at work.

Imagine.

With all the divisions in our world, the raping of our environment, the distress of the hungry and the poor, the horror of countless wars and corrupted governments, it is sometime difficult to imagine that the big cats and the grass eaters can co-exist in the same pen. Yet that is God's promise to us in these verses from Isaiah.

In Ephesians 2:14 we also hear this: For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.

In Christ, the impossible becomes possible.

Imagine.

Last October about 1000 Protestants and Catholics gathered together to pray over the city of La Paz. Many people not only said it wouldn't happen, but they also said that it shouldn't happen. They were happy with the status quo. They were content to stay behind the dividing wall of hostility. But there were those of us who imagined a different outcome. Who believed that we are new creatures in Christ. That we will do greater things. That the lion will lay down with the lamb. So we gathered. And we prayed. For peace. God's peace. A desire to reflect God's glory as we unified together. For several hours we managed to break down the dividing wall of hostility.

Imagine.

Some people don't believe that ecumenical faith communities can work. That Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Assembly of God, and a host of independent church backgrounds could ever come together as one body of believers. Yet here we sit, every week, disproving that impossible thought. Is it us? Are we just some unique group of believers that managed to beat the odds? I don't think so! No, it is Christ in us, making all things new, drawing us closer to each other and to himself so that we might reflect God's glory.

Imagine.

Where are you stuck in your life? Where has someone told you it can't happen, that something is impossible? It's impossible to save your marriage. It's impossible for you to overcome that addiction. You'll always be depressed, it runs in your family. You'll never get a job, you have no skills. You have cancer—how much time to you have left? Someone picked you and your situation up with a pair of tweezers, dropped you in a box, sealed the lid, and stuck a label on the outside. Hopeless. Don't even try. No future here.

It's dark in that box. It's lonely. There is fear, and anxiety, and grief. There is anger, and bitterness, and shame. It's so dark that you can even see your own hand in front of your face.

But then . . . imagine . . . as you sit there, huddled in a corner, your head resting on your bent knees, that the lid slowly cracks open. And Jesus peers over the lip of the box, a swath of light cutting across the inky blackness, straight to your heart.

“Pssst,” he says. “Wanna get out of here? Wanna be somebody new?”

You hesitate. It sounds too good to be true. “I don't know,” you whisper. “I'm so tired.”

Jesus smiles. A thousand watt smile that begins to melt the ice you've been encased in for what seems like centuries. “Let me give you a great verse from the book of Philippians . . . I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me . . . let me be your strength.”

Your eyes lock with his eyes. The truth you see mirrored in his shatters all your misgivings. You reach up a hand. Jesus grabs it in his own, and he pulls you out of that box. Once you're free, he kicks it off the shelf.

“Won't be needing that anymore,” he says cheerfully. “Let's get started.”

“Where are we going?” you ask with a bit of trepidation.

“To the zoo. Let's pretend to be pirates. We'll have a picnic, and then we'll put the big cats in the same pen with the grass-eaters.”

“But isn't that—“

“Totally possible!” Jesus laughs.

And pulling you along, he starts running.

Imagine.

“For nothing is impossible with God.” (Luke 1:37)

Let’s pray . . .