

Reimagine
Sunday, September 19, 2021, 11:15 a.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Mike Kinman

(Jason Lockett sings "Reimagine")

Reimagine and begin.
Reimagine now is when.

Welcome home, everybody.
It's been a long time.

Before you sit down, just take a moment and turn around and look at each other. Y'all are looking at me and I want you to see what I see. Keith, can you pan the congregation so those participating online can see.

We are here. We have made it to this point in time.

We have been challenged and changed
... and we are still being challenged and changed.

And ... we are still here.
And ... we are beautiful
And ...we are together.

Wherever we are ... we are still together.

So, welcome home.
Now you can be seated.

Reimagine and begin.
Reimagine now is when.

In this morning's Gospel, Jesus says:

"Very truly, I tell you all that you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you all will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth, she has pain because her time has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the tribulation because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. So you all have pain now; but I will see you all again, and your hearts will rejoice and, no one will take your joy from you."

I gotta tell you, our God is an on-time God, and these words are right on time for us right now.

You all have pain now
and ... I will see you all again
and... your hearts will rejoice
and ... no one will take your joy from you.

I need these words. And ... I've gotta tell you, I almost got sidetracked in this Gospel before we got to them.

Because before we got there, Jesus did something that made me say, dude, you gotta check yourself. And I just want to get that out of the way, because someone needed to take him aside and say, Jesus ... what are you doing talking about the pain of childbirth? Nothing like a man talking to a bunch of other men about something none of us know anything about. There's a little snapshot into how the church got to where we are today.

Jesus, talk about smacking your thumb with a hammer and the pain being worth it when the final project is built ... but leave the pain of childbirth talk – what you remember and what you don't -- to the experts.

And ... that said ... there is a word here for us this morning that is arriving right on time.

First is that there is pain.
 And that pain is real.
 And we can't hide from it.
 We need to name it
 ... and feel it
 ... and own it.
 And ... the pain, the loss ... it is hard, it is messy, it is scary.

Sometimes we want to run away from it.

Sometimes it is so strong we have to be reminded to breathe.

That's why we need each other.

That's why part of God's promise is not that there won't be pain but that we will not be alone in our pain.

That God is with us in our pain and that God means for us to be with each other in our pain.

That here ... here is where we bring our pain.

Where we don't have to hide our wounds.

Where we stop answering that ridiculous question "how are you doing?" with "fine" ... 'cause we're all some degree of a mess and we are so tired of trying to pretend.

Yes, the pain is real.

And the other part is ... the pain is not the end.

The pain, the grief, the loss ... it changes us. It becomes part of who we are.

We learn from it.

We grow from it.

We find strength we never knew we had, and we discover those limits where we just can't go any further and all we can do is collapse in each other's arms ... and we learn that those arms are there.

The pain is not the end.

That's a promise, too.

There is healing.

There is transformation.

There is new life in the midst of the pain, and there is new life that comes out of the pain.

Not only can our mourning turn to dancing, as the psalmist says, we can mourn and dance at the same time.

We dance because dancing heals us. That's why Alice Walker said, "hard times require furious dancing."

Dancing, singing, drumming, acting, painting, sculpting, creating remind us that we are at our hearts, creators, made in the image of the divine creator.

We dance because that is how new worlds come into being.

And we did not go through everything we have been through these past 18 months – that we are still going through -- to have this world be the same ... to have us be the same ... as we were before this all started.

As if it ever could!

As if we ever could!

We have been challenged and we have been changed ... and we are still being challenged and we are still being changed ... and there is a gift amidst the pain and it is the gift of the opportunity

... to reimagine.

To reimagine where we're strong.

Reimagine right and wrong.

Reimagine what is just

Reimagine in whom and what we trust.

To reimagine and begin.

To reimagine NOW is when.

That is the opportunity before us as we come home to this home that is the same and yet forever changed

We can reimagine our whole lives.

Ask the question we never dared ask.

Try on the thing we never thought we could.

Challenge the assumptions that have kept us in place, even for generations.

Reimagine NOW is when ...we can reimagine and begin ... again.

Now I *imagine* ... that fills some of us with excitement, some with dread and some of us with exhaustion just in thinking about it.

I *imagine* some of us are saying, "It's about time .. let's shake things up around here."

And some of us are saying, "Oh my God, what is he about to do?"

And some of us are saying, "Oh please, I am so tired. Please, can't we just leave things the same ... I can't take any more loss and change!"

And some of us are saying all those things at once and even more. We are all over the map ... and that is OK. In fact, it is more than OK ... it is good, and feeling all these feels is right where we are supposed to be. We are right on time.

I was talking with Sally Howard this week, and she shared with me that trauma actually impedes our capacity to imagine. And we have all been through and are still going through trauma. And we are built to handle that for a while ... but not for this long.

So, if you have had more escape fantasies than usual ... if you have started to freeze and shutdown ... if not just names but nouns and verbs have begun to elude you in the middle of conversation ... you are not alone. This is where we are right now. We are right on time.

And that means in the very moment where we are being invited to reimagine and begin ... our capacity for imagination is way down here.

And ... that's OK. Because that means we can't ignore the trauma. We've got to deal with the trauma. And that's what we're going to do. That's what we are doing. And Jesus is the great healer, so we've got some pretty good company.

And so, we're going to take this slow. In fact, part of what we need to reimagine is the pace at which we push ourselves and allow ourselves to be pushed ... so taking it slow is kind of its own form of reimagining in itself.

We're going to take it slow, and we're going to do it with love.

We're going to sing and dance.

We are going to scream and cry.

We are going to share our stories and sit in silence.

We are going to wonder what went wrong and we are going to begin to dream of what might be.

We're going to take it slow and we're going to do what we have always done.

We're going to come together.

One of the hardest parts of this pandemic is that in the very moments where we needed each other so desperately, where we ached for each other's presence and touch, we were told that coming together was the one thing we could not do.

And so, we reimagined new ways to come together. And ... even what we are doing today – coming together in worship and community – is a radical step after we've been told for 18 months that love looks like staying away from each other.

So, the first thing we are going to do is just do what we are doing right now. We are going to come together. In person and online ... we are going to come together.

We are going to come together to heal
 We are going to come together to learn.
 We are going to come together to be transformed

To Heal.
 To Learn.
 To Be Transformed.

These aren't linear stages where we leave one behind and enter another. I wish it were that simple. We are never going to be done with any of them, and we will continue to bounce back and forth among them and do them all at once.

And ... this is how we emerge from this time as a people for whom life is changed, not ended.

First, we are coming together to heal.

We have suffered huge losses.

It is so good to see all of you here.

And there are others who are not here.

Others who were with us 18 months ago but in the time since we last gathered like this on a Sunday morning have died.

Goodbyes that we weren't ready to say
 ... but sometimes goodbyes don't work that way.

Their names ... some of them ... and we've left room for so many more because there are so many more ... their names are written on this frontal. Names like Margaret Sedenquist. Mark Edwards. Jo Drummond. Lacreata Scott. George Regas ... and so on, and so on, and so on.

And yet our loss is even more than that.

Our way of life has been disrupted. We have lost jobs, missed entire school years together, been unable to sing together.

We can't just pick up as if nothing has happened. We need to come together and grieve ... and we need to come together and celebrate. All of these things are part of our healing as individuals, as a church, as a community and as the world.

So, in this next year, we are going to come together and let the most powerful force of healing in the universe – love lived out in community – heal us and through us begin to heal our community and the world. We are going to continue to grow our small group ministries, pray and sing together, learn to be around each other again without fear.

We are going to come together and share, grieve and rejoice ... because that is how healing happens.

We are going to take it slow. And remember to breathe. And trust that Love. Heals. Every. Body.

And ... we are going to come together to learn.

For healing to become transformation there has to be learning. We have a unique opportunity to slow down and take that breath ... to reflect on our past and look around at our present, even as it is still coming into focus.

So, in this next year, we are going to come together, reflect and learn. We are going to ask ourselves what lessons this pandemic is teaching us and look deeply at the world that is emerging from it.

We are going to engage in a congregation-wide strategic direction process and continue the visioning work of PACES for the redevelopment of our physical plant.

We are going to begin to Tell The Whole Story of our stained glass windows and the land on which we reside.

Our vestry and program staff are embarking on an in-depth learning journey on dismantling White Supremacy Culture and becoming actively anti-racist as a church and we are all going to be learning along with them.

We are reaching out to the wider Pasadena-San Gabriel Valley community and learning from them about who they dream for All Saints to be.

Most of all, we are going to listen and learn from each other ... and listen and learn from God in prayer and study. We are going to come together and listen and learn.

And ... we are going to come together and be transformed.

Because now is when... we can reimagine and begin.

Because the God in whom we trust not only loves us just as we are, she never leaves us that way. Walking with the revolutionary Jesus is always about becoming – it's something those among us of trans

experience know so well and have the opportunity to lead the rest of us in that holy work of being whole and yet unfinished. Of always becoming.

We are already being transformed by healing and learning from our experience of this pandemic. We are already being transformed by and are transforming the wider community by the presence of Safe Haven in our midst ... and by our online presence turning us into a truly global community.

And so, this year we are going to come together and continue to be transformed. We will develop new forms of community and worship by and with the Spanish-speaking members of our community, and incorporate Spanish and Chinese language and culture more into our life and liturgy.

And yes, now is when we will reimagine and begin. We will reimagine the structural pieces. Together, we will re-imagine the Forum, Jazz Vespers, children and youth ministry, and other important parts of our common life. We will continue to reimagine our organizational structure into the Circles model. We will reimagine how we show up in the world for justice and peace.

Most of all, now is when we will reimagine who we are and who God is imagining us to be as a people of radical inclusion, courageous justice, joyful spirituality and ethical stewardship. We will be transformed in ways we cannot even imagine by the work of healing and learning that is before us.

Reimagine and begin.
Reimagine now is when.

Welcome home, everybody.
It's been a long time.

And ... we are still here.
And ... we are beautiful.
And ...we are together.

And we are healing.
And we are learning.
And we are being transformed.

And we don't need to run from the pain, because here is where we bring it.

And we don't need to pretend that everything is just fine, because none of us are.
And we don't need to listen to those voices that say we aren't good enough ... or that we shouldn't sing so loud or dance where people can see us ... because this is the place, this is the community where the artist in you gets to come alive,

where there are no mistakes just different choices,

where we can dance and sing and cry and wail all at the same time because God is strong enough and we are strong enough to hold each other and hold it all.

Because that's the power of love.

Jason, help us sing that part again, will you? Can you teach that again to us. The word is love?

Love

I know that you dream about it.

Love

No one can live without it.

(try it a couple times ... then once it feels like the congregation has it just finish the rest of the song.)

*When it was new you knew
Everything changed*

*Reimagine and begin
Reimagine now is when...*

Amen.