

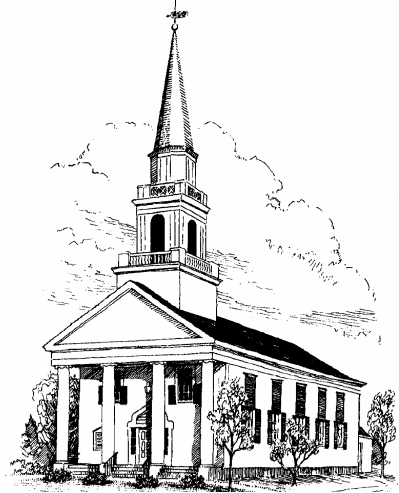
Mystic Congregational Church, UCC

Mystic, Connecticut

Sermon from April 25, 2010

Rev. Ann M. Aaberg
“Let’s Pretend”

Scriptures:
Romans 8:18-25
Revelations 21:1-6



For a time, we reserved a place for her at the dinner table. Whenever we went out in the car, we knew she was in the back seat, too. There were a few nights when I bent down and kissed her goodnight, too, right there in the bed next to my 4-year old daughter. She had distinct likes and dislikes. She lived with us for several months, although we couldn't really see her. Her name was Janel and she was my daughter's imaginary friend.

Lots of children have them – part of normal psychosocial development, if not taken too far or for too long. They're part of a wide spectrum of childhood imaginary play, many times referred to by children as “Let's pretend.”

Over the span of nearly 60 years, I have been both a participant and a witness to many pretend games and scenarios, beginning with the elaborate inventions of my own, joined by my sometimes unwilling baby brother; then observing my children at play; then hearing about the little members of my now adult daughter's preschool class.

In my coonskin cap I was Davy Crockett. My brother was a doctor, complete with a black plastic snap-shut bag containing the chunky plastic tools of the profession. We played house indoors and out; we were convinced that the airplanes carrying spies overhead could see our every move in the backyard; and we crouched down behind the sofa under enemy fire.

Blankets draped over tables created our forts. Cushions removed from the living room furniture and set up on end were walls separating our imaginary spaces. And if you hung upside down off your bed, you could stare at the ceiling and imagine a whole 'nother world.

Our sons took on the personas of the champions of the World Wrestling Federation. My daughter's bedroom was a drycleaners, complete with toy cash register and homemade receipts. The porch was a restaurant and beyond the neighbor's fence lay enemy territory, or a dark forest, or a dangerous jungle inhabited by their slow-moving cat.

Human imagination is a powerful force. Over the last several decades, medical research has discovered strong connections between the mind and the body and, more recently, the spirit, too. We hear about mind over matter and biofeedback and visualization techniques, and even prayer, having shrunk tumors, banished phobias, and relieved pain.

Imagination can make things real. Life coaches and career consultants advise their clients to imagine, to visualize, where they want to be in five years, or what the perfect job would be like, or how a perfect day would unfold. We are advised to imagine what we want, to visualize it first, and then take the necessary steps to make that vision real.

The Book of Revelation, from which we read this morning, is an utterly fantastic narrative and people have been fascinated by its contents for two millennia. It describes the end of the world and the second coming of Christ. It almost didn't make it into the Bible. In the 4th century it was listed as one of the disputed books of the Bible, and in one city during that time, its reading was forbidden. During the time of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther wasn't crazy about it either and only reluctantly included it in the New Testament. John Calvin ignored it, writing commentaries on the rest of the books in the Bible, but not on the Book of Revelation. Its contents do not pop up in our Lectionary very often, leading many present-day clergy to ignore it as well.

Author Marcus Borg suggests two very different ways of looking at it: (1) interpret it in a futuristic manner, much the way we've seen it done in the movies or in books or by people evangelizing others proclaiming that the end is near; or (2) interpret it using a past-historical approach as many scholars today do, using the history surrounding the narrative as context. This interpretation easily identifies the hope on the part of Christians and others for the demise of the oppressive Roman Empire from the point of view of its author John, an exiled, persecuted early Christian who knew the Hebrew Bible very well.

This author called John was thought by ancient authorities to be Jesus' disciple John, son of Zebedee, but more recent scholarship makes that identification questionable. Whoever he was, it is clear from his writings that he endured exile on the island of Patmos for his testimony of Jesus, and it was there that he had his visions which have been recorded in this book.

And whether we think those visions were night dreams or day dreams or hallucinations or true revelations by the Divine, in this morning's passage, called the "concluding vision", we are given something to hold on to that certainly jives with Jesus' words in the gospels. God's revelation to John of a good final ending matches the promises made by Jesus and revealed to us by his Resurrection.

Marcus Borg writes that John's concluding vision which we read this morning is not John's dream, but the dream of God, God's dream for humankind. God's imagination, God's visualization revealed to John. And the best part for us are the words spoken by the loud voice coming from the throne saying:

See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples,

And God himself will be with them;

He will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.

Imagine that! Because we are God's children and because we have been given free will, we are often called to be co-creators with God, to share God's imagination. To dream with God. And knowing that God's Holy Spirit is among us now, there is no reason why we can't only imagine a new heaven and a new earth, but we can visualize it to the point that we can begin to identify the steps to actually make it happen.

So let's pretend. Let's pretend that we share God's dream for humanity. Let's pretend that we're following Jesus and doing everything he told us to do. Let's pretend that we have reached the utmost heights of compassion and mercy and forgiveness, seeing the divine in each other and in our enemies. Let's pretend that by seeing the divine in every person, we would never want to make them suffer or cry or to inflict pain upon them. Let's pretend that we live right where God wants to come and live. Where peace is and harmony exists among all God's creatures. Let's pretend that we are not only cleaning up our earth, but we're cleaning up our act – from praying through our teeniest annoyance to wholeheartedly embracing reconciliation. Let's pretend God is here right now, in the pew beside us, in the passenger seat of our cars, at the dinner table, at work, at school, that God is the first person we address in the morning upon waking and the final person we address as we turn off the light at night and go to sleep.

Because God is. God is with us - at our tables at home and at this table, in the bread and in the wine, in the words we say, in the passing of this spiritual food to one another. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, God's dream lives. Let's pretend we share that dream and let's pretend that it's real. We just might be able to make it happen. Amen.