

Imagine – Montreat 2017

Imagine, if you will, a large room, a cavernous room, with a high ceiling and ceiling fans as big as helicopter propellers. A room constructed with rocks hewn from the mountains that surround this sacred space. Imagine the songs and hymns and spiritual song, the deep and earnest prayers, the thousands of words of scripture read and the proclamation of hundreds and hundreds of preachers that find their way into the rock and mortar – the very air, the soul, the spirit of the place.

Now imagine that for 6 weeks each summer all roads lead to this place, this mountain retreat, from all over the country. All of the hiways and byways and interstates merge onto I-40 and then NC route number 9. And imagine cars and vans and busses on those roads filled with young pilgrims who make their way with great solemnity and in awe of the place gathering for a rare chance to spend a week on this mountain and many hours in this great room.

Now imagine spilling from those varied vehicles a thousand and more eager ones, freshmen to graduates, excited and excitable, fresh and focused, dazzling and dazed, preening and proud, timid and

talented, sweet and surly, sure and unsure, seekers of a good time, seekers of some truth, seekers of some challenge, seekers of some hope that the world that is their world is relevant in THE world.

Imagine in this particular summer season of silence and shouting, of tranquility and turbulence, of upheaval and upset, of trial and terror, of fire and baseball shooting, that these young ones are challenged with the theme of, the hope of, the longing for, a glimpse of, the possibility of, the promise of the purpose of, the chance for, an understanding of – peace. Peace with a missing peace which begins in them and leaves in them a question? How do we smooth the rough edges of our existence? How do we get a handle on what's happening? How do we get some of that peace?

Imagine that this is a kind of quest that 5 keynote presentations and 9 small group sessions and most vitally 5 worship services presents. Find the missing peace. Find the illusive peace, Find the definition of peace. Find the hope for some peace. Find the possibility of some peace, where? In the world *na,na,na,na, na,na,na*, not so easy. In us? Somehow, some way, in us? Ah there's the place.

Imagine a different room and a much smaller group of the first followers of Jesus, and if you can imagine not a whole lot older than these and maybe one or two of them still teens, which means they, like these, are seekers. Imagine Jesus whom you've followed all of the part of your life you've been awake and really alive, those three years, like these faithful gathered who have followed Jesus, some of them since they were born, all of them of late in that dynamic tension between, "ooh we love us some Jesus and you really want me to go to church?" Between "What would Jesus do?" and "are you kidding, you believe in that stuff?" Imagine disciples in that moment alive and in person hearing Jesus voice, and these youth in the present moment alive and in person, hearing Jesus say in the person of a powerful preacher, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." Imagine trying to wrap your brain around that.

Imagine that most of what the world means by peace is a) the absence of war and conflict, b) some kind of economic security for me and mine; and c) peace is you acquiescing to me and my way of life; which means that when these youth are asked to imagine a Jesus kind

of peace that discover that there will be peace only when you take me into yourself and learn to love and forgive without so much as a thought to what I get out of it. That Jesus peace doesn't necessarily mean that the whole world doesn't long for Isaiah's vision of the wolf and the lamb yet dwelling together, but that the only way it ever will be, it will ever happen, creation will be at peace only when the peace that passes all human understanding fills us.

Imagine it. Imagine loving everybody like Jesus loves everybody. Imagine saying 'father forgive them' instead seeking retribution, instead of building yet more weapons of mass destruction, more weapons for personal defense that so impersonally kill the ones we're supposed to forgive and love. Imagine if the great prophets words 'what does the lord require of you but to do justice and love kindness and walk humbly with your God' were more than just words on a poster or bumper sticker but words, actual words written on our hearts and translated into action?!

Imagine that kind of challenge. A daunting challenge. A pretty grown up challenge. Imagine the faces, minds, brains and hormone driven hearts of 12 hundred teenagers whose life is absolutely

wrapped up in “ME” being told that if there’s a chance to have peace, conceive of piece, know peace, propose peace, produce peace, do peace, **they** have to be like – Jesus, Jesus Christ.

Imagine with me the possibility, imagine the hope, imagine the spirit driven prospect that one of them, or two of them or a hundred of them or by God – or by some Holy Spirit breath filling miracle that all of them **get it == get it and discover that the illusive missing peace – is them. Is us.**

Imagine a house up in those hills where these we have reared and raised, have baptized and confirmed, have blessed and commissioned and sent on their way to join the fray up on that mountain... imagine that without even knowing it that by the simple act of coexisting, of getting along most of the time, of being the church out there in the world they are helping to usher in God’s kingdom of peace.

Which means we have to do our best to use our imagination and imagine a world in which the powerful raise up the impoverished, imagine a world in which the weak find a helping hand in the strong, imagine a world in which those displaced into the status of immigrant find welcome instead of derision in the Christian nations of the world,

imagine a world in which swords and guns and drones and tanks and battle ships and jet fighters are transformed into implements that build up and that those we employ to use them may find themselves doing the far more natural tasks of nurturing, of sheltering, of supporting, of growing, of protecting; imagine a world in which dread diagnoses no longer confound, confuse and cause fear amongst God's people because they know that God is in control. Imagine a world in which the self imposed divisions we create, the lines we draw in the sand of our differences in race, or religion or gender, or person orientation, or age, or ability, or brain power are erased and the value of a human being lies only in the commonality of our being children of God. Imagine a world in which dividing walls and border fences are seen as antithetical to the will of almighty God who sends his son to declare that in him we are to be one. Imagine. Imaging more being about less than more. And if we begin to imagine.. maybe we'll catch a glimpse of what's missing – peace – true peace – Christ's peace.

This week I and Laura and Rebecca and Ricky were able to witness some crystal clear moments that portend the hope for and the possibility of peace being found. In the worship and in the word and

around the table and in the loud exuberance of youth, and in the quiet contemplation of young hearts who really want this thing... this missing thing.... This missing peace. And in those glimpses, in those shimmering moments peace was there in the laughter and in the hugs and in the help and in the tears. Peace was there.

Imagine. (Music)

Imagine you're in Montreat
It's easy if you try
There we're all together
We know the reason why

*Imagine all these people living in one house

Imagine there's three bathrooms
Just one kitchen too
*No time to sit or lie down
Way too much to do

*Imagine all these people living life in peace, you

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope some day you'll join us
In Montreat and we'll have fun

*Imagine 6 who are graduates
I wonder if they know
Just how much we will miss them
And hate to see them go

*Imagine that we'll give the peace of God to you!

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope some day come back
to Montreat and we'll have fun

*Imagine all the rest of them
Sophmores, juniors grew
And a certain senior
Who's an elder too

*And oh my my there are the others
Seven newbies woouoo
Kind of wanderin' round
Wonderin' what to do

*Imagine all these people praying about peace, -- woouoooo

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
*I hope some day you'll join us
In Montreat and we'll have fun

Prayer

Hymn Put Peace into each others hands