

Imagine Together – Stewardship sermon
Matthew 6:25-34
Sept. 29, 2024
Rev. Kory Wilcoxson

I don't know how much you follow sports, but a momentous game took place this past week. On Thursday, the Oakland A's played their last game in their hometown, as they prepare to move to Las Vegas to become the Las Vegas Sinners...I think that's a working title for now. After 57 years playing in the Oakland Coliseum, the team that featured such players as Reggie Jackson, Mark McGwire, and Jose Canseco will cease to exist.

But there's one legacy the Oakland A's leave the realm of live sports that can never be taken away from them. In 1981, the New York Yankees and the Oakland A's were battling to see which team would advance in the playoffs. The As had a lot of good players that year, but you could make an argument that the team MVP was Krazy George Henderson.

Krazy George was not a player, but legend has it that Krazy George was the most rabid A's fan. (Some say he was even a bit delulu, if you know what I mean). He would show up at games fully decked out in his team's gear and carrying a drum, which he would beat into submission to encourage the A's to do the same to the opposition. With his wild eyes and Einstein-like hair, Krazy George looked like an elderly cheerleader who had just been struck by lightning. (He was anything but very cute, very mindful, very demure). But his fanaticism for the team was contagious.

On this particular night, the A's weren't doing so well, and Krazy George was frantically trying to rally the crowd to cheer on the home team. Using his drum to sound a call to arms, he encouraged the section where he was to all stand at once and raise their arms in the air as a show of support. They did, and when the section next to them saw this, they did the same, a few seconds after the first one. And then the section next to them did it, and the section next to them, until each section in the stadium stood and raised their arms in succession.

You know what Krazy George Henderson created that night in the Oakland Coliseum? It was the Wave. Journalist Dev Seidman wrote this about the phenomenon: "The wave is an extraordinary act. All those people spread out over a vast stadium, with limited ability to connect and communicate, somehow come together in a giant cooperative act inspired by a common goal: to help the home team win. It transcends gender, income, and societal status. It is the pure expression of collective passion released."

I love that last line! "The pure expression of collective passion released." That story got me to thinking: "What could we at Crestwood do to be the pure expression of collective passion released?" After all, we have a lot of similarities with a stadium doing the Wave. We are diverse group of people who, outside of this place, collectively communicate and connect only in a limited way. We are all gathered here for a common purpose: not to help the home team win, but to praise our Head Coach and learn how follow the Playbook. And our gathering transcends gender, income, and societal status. If a stadium full of fans can join together in a common endeavor as powerful as the Wave, what can we as a church accomplish when we unite our minds, our hearts, and our resources toward a common goal?

That's what this year's Stewardship Campaign is all about. It's called "Imagine Together." After a challenging few years coming out of a global pandemic, I believe we are on the cusp of something incredibly exciting here at Crestwood. All the signs are pointing toward God using us in amazing and humbling ways. We've had 55 new members since last fall. We

have a Children's Wing that is bursting at the seams with kids. Our buildings are being used every day of the week from groups ranging from Alcoholics Anonymous to the Boy Scouts to the Parkinson's support group. Our youth groups are giving teens a place to belong. Our commitment to outreach is touching countless lives. I believe God's Spirit is stirring up something here at Crestwood, and I want to encourage you to imagine what that might be.

Imagining is a crucial step for us to know where God is calling us to be. If we just sit back and wait for it to happen, it may never happen. But when we dare to imagine the ways God might work through us, we are paving the way for the Holy Spirit to guide us into our future. In 1774, the leader of an upstart group of rebels declared, "Someday, I see a union of 13 states, a new nation, independent from the Parliament and the King of England." In 1963, a black preacher boldly proclaimed his dream about racial equality and people being judged by the content of their character. Both John Adams and Rev. Martin Luther King were imagining what they could not yet see but believed to be true. As Christians, we are called to look forward and see where God is out ahead of us, beckoning us forward to join God in the future. Our job is to open the eyes of our imagination wide enough to see it.

Sounds good on Sunday morning, right? But then we read the news or listen to a podcast or get on social media, and immediately our imagination is suffocated by something far insidious: worry. It's all good and well to imagine what God might do through us, but then a hurricane hits or another missile is launched or a politician does what politicians do, and that dream we were imagining goes right out the window. To quote the esteemed theologian Mike Tyson, "Everyone has a game plan until they get punched in the face."

And, if we're honest, sometimes we feel punched in the face by life, which is why we worry. It's so easy to fall into the mindset of worry about the future, about our health, about our safety, about our well-being. We may be like the man who walks into an optometrist's office. His hair is frazzled, his eyes are wild, his legs are shaking. He says to the doctor, "Doc, I'd like to see things a little LESS clearly." This world is really scary right now and we're doing our best dodging and weaving the challenges to avoid getting punched in the face.

That's why imagining sometimes feels like a waste of time. Why daydream about the future when we can barely figure out the present? We may associate imagination with fairy tales, but it's actually a deeply theological word. It's defined as "the faculty of forming mental images or concepts of what is not actually present to the senses," which reminds me of another definition, found in Hebrews 11: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Having an imagination requires the faith to see what could be, even if it is not congruent with what is. Imagination is the fertile soil in which the seeds of hope grow.

Being willing to open ourselves to the future and imagine who God is calling us to be can be exhilarating, but it can also be scary. At my last church, our administrative board was reviewing a long-range plan that we had just completed. There was general consensus that the plan was good, but one person spoke up and said, "I'll say it if nobody else will. The Long-Range Planning Team has put a lot of work into this, and I only see one problem – it's crazy! This is impossible!" Now, I've seen what our ministry teams want to do next year. I've seen how they want to change lives and make a difference at Crestwood, in Lexington, and beyond. And I would offer the same critique – the plans are not just ambitious, they are crazy!

We're going to spend a lot of time next year imagining together as a congregation. We'll be entering into a strategic planning process, which will engage the whole congregation and let everyone have a voice. We're not going to lock a few people in a room and tell them they can't come out until they've got a plan for us. We're going to give each one of you the chance to

imagine what Crestwood will look like in the future. The result of this process will be a clearer picture of who Crestwood is and who God is calling us to be. My prayer for us is that, through this work, we will become the pure expression of collective passion released.

Now, the moment in the stewardship sermon you've all been waiting for: it's going to take money to do this. Of course it is! We're all investing in God's work through Crestwood, and in order to reach out and claim the future God has for us, we have to each commit to funding that work. This is an incredibly generous church, and the ministers and staff are blessed to see examples of that all the time. Yes, the imaginations of our ministry teams have been working overtime, and the things they have dreamed about are amazing. But we won't be able to accomplish even one of those things without your prayers, your participation, and your pledges.

A lot of time, the concept of stewardship is individually focused. "You need to give because it's what you are supposed to do as a Christian and God loves a cheerful giver." And that's true, for sure. But here's what excites me most when I think about what I am going to pledge to Crestwood. I am participating in something that's so much bigger than me, joining together with each one of you to take all our dreams about this church and make them a reality. I imagine the lives that we are going to change together, I imagine the ways that God will work through us, I imagine the difference we can make in the life of a kid who comes to VBS or a person who comes to an Al-Anon meeting or a guest in worship who's wondering if God really loves her and if there's a place for her at Crestwood. And the coolest thing is that no matter what you or I imagine, God has something even bigger planned! It starts now, as we offer up our pledges to do God's work in this world. How can God use your gift? How many lives will it impact? How will the pledge you make become the pure expression of collective passion released? Can we really do that? It sounds crazy! It is crazy, but it's also incredibly exciting. Will you join me in committing to Crestwood in 2025? It takes each and every one of us. What can we accomplish when we work together for God's kingdom? Just imagine!