

Possibility Scanning

Luke 24:36-48

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Remember [this television advertisement](#)?

Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do.

The title of that ad was "Think Different." Go home and Google it after church. The ad included images of Picasso, Einstein, Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Amelia Earhart, and others. The ad was for Apple computers, and it caused an incredible sensation.

Apple has changed our lives, by revolutionizing not only personal computers but also how we listen to music, how we interact with the devices that we still call phones, and overall how we interact with most digital information. They've also awakened desires we didn't even know we had.

Now, many of you think I'm something of a techie, and I must confess that I actually am not. I'm a late-adopter and a curmudgeon. I refused to get a cell phone, for instance, until 2005. But the biggest sign that I'm not on the leading edge of technology in my generation is that I have never owned an Apple device of any kind. Hopefully that confession doesn't mean I've lost a huge segment of potential church members, as Apple people are really, really loyal to their brand.

But even if we don't own Apple devices, their innovation has affected all of the devices we use and how we consume information and media. They have also made design a central element of contemporary existence. No longer are people satisfied with a difficult interface, an inefficient process, or an unwieldy physical object. Everything must be sleek, elegant, and intuitive. The surprise the first time you picked up an iPad, for instance, was that without any instruction you immediately knew how to use it.

Walter Isaacson's biography of Steve Jobs, Apple's founder and driving genius, was a recent bestseller. I read the book for insights into leadership, innovation, and design, wondering if I could apply any lessons to my job. This week while working on the sermon, I've carried the book around and a handful of you have said, "Oh, have you read that?" It has sparked some interesting conversations.

When Steve Jobs died last year, he was treated as something of a spiritual guru. I read lots of blog posts and articles on his personal spirituality or how his ideas could be incorporated into spiritual practice. Very little of that appears in the biography. The two basic things you learn about Steve Jobs is that he was a genius and that he was also a real jerk. Actually, that word is too mild. The only words to describe that side of his personality are probably ones not appropriate to use from the pulpit. Basically, he was an arrogant, entitled, difficult human being with explosive anger who was not nice to people. He lived within what his compatriots called a “reality distortion field.” This was also part of the secret of his success, in that he didn’t accept the world the way it was, knowing that it could be better.

So, in my opinion, Steve Jobs is not a moral or personal example for us to follow, but there are some of the things I took away from the book: beautiful and efficient design is important at every level of an experience, even the parts people don’t see should be beautiful; that discipline, even in the details, is important; that people will succeed when they believe they are part of an exalted mission; that deep collaboration is important; that you must bring together and empower creative people; that ideas must be allowed to generate and develop. And, as Bill Atkinson, one of the early designers on the Mac said, “I got a feeling for the empowering aspect of naïveté. Because I didn’t know it couldn’t be done, I was enabled to do it.”

This Apple ethos is summed up in the “Think Different” television ad, and its proclamation “Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do.”

Today’s contemporary reading came from a commentary on the Gospel story. It strikes a similar note. The “something new” of Jesus’ resurrection was not “contained or comprehended by current modes of thinking.” Instead the resurrection is the rejection of “systems of thought that limit the vision of the future to the shape of what seems probable according to current conceptions.” Professor Cooper writes, “Possibility beyond the probable is the nature of religious hope.”

The resurrection stories of Jesus are their own “Think Different” advertisement. The Jesus of the Gospels can be described as “misfit, rebel, troublemaker,” the one “who sees things differently.” And many did think he was a crazy person. Others thought he was dangerous, out to change the world, and so they killed him.

But that violent, horrible execution was *not* the end of the story. The change Jesus began would not be limited by his death, or by the attempts of the authorities to strike fear into Jesus’ followers. No, the revolution that Jesus began would continue despite the crucifixion, maybe even because of the crucifixion.

And it would catch fire, changing the world, because it was not limited to the status quo. It dreamed new possibilities and had the courage to make them happen.

Jesus appears in this story from the Gospel of Luke and empowers his followers to become witnesses to that change. He invites them to become those who will have the courage to think and act differently. And because they were faithful to that call, the world did change and the good news of that change spread, and over time more and more people benefited from a faith that imagined that this world could be better.

This Easter we experience the call of Jesus. Jesus is inviting us to become witnesses of the good news that the world can be better. But, what does following this call require of us?

One thing it requires is that we become those who think differently. That we, the church, together become creators and innovators. We are not bound by the status quo, by this troubled, anxious, violent, and fear-filled world. We can imagine a different future and then act creatively and boldly to engage others in making that future a reality. That's really what it means to share our faith, to evangelize, to share the good news. It means recruiting others to collaborate with us in the effort of thinking and living differently.

This week the Collegium of Officers of the United Church of Christ released a vision plan. We are all tired of reading about the decline of mainline Protestant churches, and all the analysis of why that has happened and what individual churches can do to remain vital. One of the keys to being a vital church is staying focused on the mission of God. Ben Guess, the executive minister of Local Church Ministries, who will keynote the annual meeting of the Nebraska Conference this June, said this week, "The United Church of Christ is emerging, not dying. We have the best opportunity now to become the church that we first dared to be in 1957." Linda Jaramillo, of the Justice and Witness Ministries, said that we must become "bold, effective and responsive servant[s]" of the mission of God.

W. Mark Clark, the associate general minister, proclaimed that we must let go "of such 'old church questions' as 'How do I make my church grow?' or 'How do we attract new members' to embrace new questions: 'What is God doing in my neighborhood, in my community, in the world?' 'How can I — and my congregation — join God in that 'doing'?"

What are some of the skills required now and in the future for congregational vitality? Our cultural and religious environment will grow ever more pluralistic and complex. We must learn to thrive in that complexity. We must strengthen our theological and biblical understanding, as these will empower us to engage more effectively in a world of searchers and skeptics. We must train leaders to think and act boldly. We must be radically welcoming. And throughout we must maintain the high-level perspective of the mission of God.

And one skill we'll need is what video game designer Jane McGonigal calls "possibility scanning," which she describes as "always remaining open and alert to unplanned opportunities and surprising insights."

Fortunately, that should be easy for us Christians, because our core story includes the resurrection, the event that exploded the status quo and taught us to imagine new possibilities and to think and act differently.

In your worship bulletins you'll find two post-it notes. Post-it notes are ubiquitous in the design world, as a way to brainstorm ideas. We are going to use those post-it notes to spark and share ideas.

Mark Clark said that the church should ask, "What is God doing in my neighborhood, in my community, in the world?" So, on one post-it, I want you to answer that question. What is something you see God doing in your neighborhood, in this community, or this world? If you do have an idea today, I'm going to ask you to write it down on one of those post-its and then put it on one of the easels either in the parlor or the narthex. You'll see them. They say, "Post your

ideas here.”

On the second post-it note I want you to write some way that you can be God’s witness in the world. And think “outside the box.” Then, I want you to take it home and put it someplace you’ll see it. I want it to be a reminder to you to think differently in how you personally participate in God’s mission.

This week, as I look over the ones you’ll leave here, I’m going to do a little possibility scanning, staying “open and alert to unplanned opportunities and surprising insights” that you will share.

Friends, Jesus comes to us, now, in 2012, and tells us not to fear. Instead, he shares with us the power of God. Then he calls us to proclaim the good news of forgiveness, love, and compassion. The news of a new, better, more beautiful and more peaceful world. “You are my witnesses,” he says.

Let us respond, so that it might be said of us by all who come to know us:

They are the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They’re not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can’t do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do.