

From the Pulpit

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215

Phone: 614.228.1741 • Fax: 614.461.1741

Email: home@first-church.org

Website: <http://www.first-church.org>

*“Imagine More... Stewardship
Like We Mean It”*

Isaiah 25:1-9; Philippians 4:1-9;

Matthew 22:1-14

October 12, 2014

By The Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens

Senior Minister

A sermon delivered by The Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, October 12, 2014, October 12, 2014, Pentecost 18, dedicated to Mark Williams who worked so hard to see that we built a playground for our children, to Samuel D. Gordon and his family and all the generations of children of First Church and our community who will play on the SDG playground and always to the glory of God!

*“Imagine More...Stewardship Like We Mean It”
Isaiah 25:1-9; Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14*

“Now to God who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine, to God be the glory in the church and in Jesus Christ to all generations, forever and ever, Amen.” Ephesians 3:20-21

++++
Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

++++

Imagination is a powerful tool accessible to anyone, anytime to overcome anything, anywhere. Perhaps the

greatest gift has given us in our ability to imagine! If you don't believe me, listen to a few people for whom imagination is everything. They are scientists and poets; artists, musicians, and authors.

"I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world."

- [Albert Einstein](#)

Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions."

- [Albert Einstein](#)

"I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of the Imagination."

- [John Keats](#)

If you had started doing anything two weeks ago, by today you would have been two weeks better at it."

- [John Mayer](#)

*"If you are a dreamer come in
If you are a dreamer a wisher a liar
A hoper a pray-er a magic-bean-buyer*

*If you're a pretender come sit by my fire
For we have some flax golden tales to spin*

Come in!

Come in!"

- [Shel Silverstein](#)

"If you can dream it, you can do it."

"I only hope that we don't lose sight of one thing - that it was all started by a mouse."

- [Walt Disney](#)-

Without a doubt, my favorite of all is this quote from
[Malala Yousafzai](#) -

"I thought that words and books and pens were more powerful than guns."

Malala Yousafzai – is a Muslim Pakistani teenager from Mingora, in the main city of Swat, a northern province of Pakistan – not far from Afghanistan. You may know her. Malala is now 17, author of a book telling the story of life; a spokeswoman for the education for all girls and all boys in Pakistan – and the whole world. Dressed in pink, this diminutive powerhouse has spoken to the General Assembly of The United Nations and two days ago this wisp of a

woman became the youngest person ever to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

This is a story beyond imagination... especially following the events of Tuesday, October 9, 2012. On that day, while riding home on a bus with all her female classmates following their exams, the bus was stopped and boarded by the Taliban. The terrorist demanded, “**Who is Malala?**” as he brandished a black pistol. No one said anything. But, several girls looked at Malala. She was the only girl with her face not covered. He lifted his Colt 45, pointed it at Malala’s forehead and fired three times. The first shot entered her left eye socket and went out under her left shoulder. The second and third shots missed – hitting her best friends with injuries they have survived.

After opening her book with the fateful day in October, Malala Yousafzai writes, “*Who is Malala? I am Malala and this is my story*” (**I am Malala**, Little Brown, NY, NY, October 2013, p. 9). Malala was shot because her father ran a school to educate young girls. She was shot because she spoke out at rallies for girls and their education. She was shot because she said that Allah believes in the sanctity and dignity of all children, that all children (not just male

children) should be educated and given opportunities to grow and flourish in life.

In Malala's words, *"All girls should read and write. As it says in the Quran, God wants us all to have knowledge. God wants us to know why the sky is blue and about the oceans and stars."* She continues, in a world where 57 million children don't even get a primary education – 32 million of them are girls – this must change. In her country of Pakistan, 5.1 million children don't even go to primary school even though their constitution says it is their right to do so. 50 million people in Pakistan are illiterate. 2/3rds of them are women – including Malala's own mother (although that is now changing).

In a few weeks, Malala will leave her high school in Birmingham, England and travel to Sweden where she will receive her Nobel Peace Prize. She will speak powerfully and clearly – once again – for all the children of the world who are voiceless and need a champion to hear their cause. She is such a woman!

Do you see what imagination can do?

Can you feel the power of Imagination – which is a powerful gift from God!

In Ephesians 3:20-21, Paul writes, *“Now to God who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than we can ask or imagine, to God be the glory in the church and in Jesus Christ to all generations, forever and ever, Amen.”*

We come here today because the Imagination of God is able to “accomplish abundantly more than we can ask or imagine!” Someone – or in each of our life stories – two “someones” imagined that we would come into this world. They believed us into being. Each of us is created through the blessing of imagination!

For 15 years, I have spoken to you about Stewardship. This year, under the excellent and able leadership of Rev. Dan Clark and a great team of lay people, the Stewardship Committee has given each of us a powerful gift. They have given us the power of imagination. They are inviting each of us **to imagine more**. (What a great theme – why didn’t we “imagine” it before now?)

Based on Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we all being called to imagine more.

Imagine More “what?” I hear from you all the time about what it is that drives the passion of your life – here at First Church and beyond. Some of you imagine more babies, more children, more Teens, more young adults, more members, more programming, more weddings, more pets at the pet blessing (at least more cats!), more congregational care, more people engaged in mission and Social Justice and BREAD, more Endowment gifts, more art, more people on your fellowship teams, more worshippers in church, more people in the choirs of the church.... MORE.

You imagine more all the time! It is part of what drives you to get up every morning.

The Stewardship Committee is calling us to **imagine more giving**. This should come as no surprise to you. Last month, the Resource Task Force, under the fantastic leadership of Joe Baszinski and Francille Firebaugh, had worked diligently through the summer months to gather many people's ideas and reflect how we could generate more

resources to run the church. I must say, their 13 page report is impressive.

In the introduction it clearly says, “**We begin with stewardship.**” We need everyone to step up as stewards. We have the capacity to joyfully and adequately run the church budget, if all of us would step up in stewardship in 2014. It is that simple.

On Tuesday, most of us will be receiving letters in the mail. Please read it carefully. The committee has the beautiful and audacious imaginative goal of \$770,000 stewardship dollars. If we achieved this goal, then the staff, which has had no raises since 2007, would have more, too. While you might point out that raises have been frozen while we seek and attain median income for our eight staff members, I might point out that – while we have reached median – we are stuck at a median number that was the median three years ago.

While we are grateful being paid and especially at median income compared to our colleagues in ministry, I can tell you that a seven year freeze is a long one for every member of staff. As our church has grown in responsibilities and job expectations, for seven years, our pay

has been the same. Using our Biblical imagination, I believe, like the story in Genesis of Joseph, our seven lean years are ending. Our next seven will be our best!

Now, we are looking to imagine more. To this end, Susan and I will step up in our giving. We are imagining more from our income to support the church. I hope and pray that you and yours are too.

In closing, as we imagine more, I return to something I wrote just a few weeks ago. ***I want each one of you to have the imagination of Samuel D. Gordon!** He came to church each week in his wheelchair. He came to church every Sunday though rain, snow, and cold. He showed up and he imagined more love and more possibilities for the church family he loved. When I met him during the Capital Campaign, he said, “Rev. Tim, you know I love you and First Church. I would like to do more to help the church.” I would love to have a conversation with everyone which ends like that.*

Imagine what we can do if each one of us steps up and gives with great love and imagination for 2015’s Stewardship Campaign.

Or be like the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Malala. She imagined she would to be tall – like her father. She always prayed for a few extra inches. But, Malala realized that God had more important plans for her life. Instead of a few inches (in her words) - “*God raised me to heights as tall as the sky*” (Ibid, p. 313).

You don't need to be Einstein, Silverstein, Mayer, Keats, Disney, Malala, Gordon, or Paul. You only have to be yourself – to imagine more in your life.

So, IMAGINE MORE! And in your imagination, step forward and make a difference. Amen.

Copyright 2014, First Congregational Church, UCC