

## Rev Rita Message July 4 2021

In the midst of the Old Testament, with the help of the prophet Joel, God promises the people of God: *"I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old ones shall dream dreams, and your young ones shall see visions."* - Joel 2:28-32

What does a community look like that is living out its call to be the "people of God?" During the month of July, our worship themes will explore answers to that question. Readings from the Epistles, letters to early Christian communities, will help us to imagine what it means to be a people of God who are committed to faith practices that create hope, healing, and help.

The words of the song, "Imagine The people of God..." point us to an innate gift we all share: the God-gift of imagination. Made in the image of God, we are endowed with the ability to create, to dream, to re-form and form a new and right way of being with each other.

Imagination makes possible empathy, the ability to assume the perspective of someone else. This allows us to "rejoice with those who rejoice," and to "weep with those who weep" ([Romans 12: 15](#)). Jesus is also calling for an imaginative act when he tells us "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" ([Matthew 22:39](#)).

In the mid-1800's, Henry Ward Beecher was an American Congregationalist Minister well known as a social reformer and speaker, his support for the abolition of slavery, and his emphasis on God's love. His sister Harriet wrote the abolitionist novel Uncle Tom's Cabin. One of my favorite quotes of his is, "the soul without imagination is what an observatory would be without a telescope." In other words, we can only achieve our God-given purpose in life if we regularly engage our imagination.

The Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw is remembered to first saying: "There are those that look at things the way they are, and ask why? I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?"

As people of God, I believe that we are called to first ask the question: *Why not? Why not a world where every child matters... why not a world where peace and justice are the norm and not the exception... why not a world where in the words we pray in the Lord's prayer: thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.... Why not?*

And then, I believe, that we are to continually answer that question with our imagination, our skills, our talents, and resources to build and re-build a world of love, justice, and beauty.

Thanks be to God. Amen.