

Creating Possibility: Learning to Live "As If!"

"What's In Your Secret Heart!"

Rev. Karen S. Hagen

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalm 51:1-4a, 6-12

Richard Bruxvoort Colligan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8N-zihq9JM>

John 12:23-33

The Gospel of Thomas Saying #43

March 21 2021

Please bring to worship: 6 strips of paper and a container or clip in which to keep them throughout Lent and Easter.

On Feb 28, we began: So, the question is: Can we live creating possibility? Can we live "as if", "even though?" Will I live what I believe knowing I have everything already within me? ...do I even believe that?

It's a tough world out there. There are huge divides, false divisions and dichotomies. We live at time that pressures us into extremes which invite no self-reflection or nuance: democrat or republican, racist or anti-racist, teachers/families, socialism for the rich/socialism for the poor, child/adult.

What do I believe?

We don't and the world doesn't grow when our efforts center on convincing ourselves or others by being a logic bully...about faith or anything else, for that matter. Bullying doesn't convince...it denigrates through fear and intimidation. Rather, growth happens when we come alongside to understand

needs and motivations...our own and that of others and then reflect that back. ...like holding up a mirror so we can see our own thoughts or they theirs...more clearly.

And, you won't be successful if doing this as a way to manipulate to get the predetermined outcome you want. It must come from a genuine desire to understand motivations and deeply listening to help each other assess and appreciate intentions and goals...rather than change them...it's not a discussion. Maybe in so doing, a re-evaluating of a chosen means to chosen end/goal happens.

Start by focusing on yourself: Ask yourself how your preferred approach might work in practice vs as you assume. Play it out looking for complexities.

With others: Well, first you have to be with others...reminds me of Pat sharing about the Trump supporters that shoveled out a Democrat's driveway without expectation and left her confused and us asking, "Is this all it takes to begin something new?"

In coming along side someone in a caring, thoughtful way: Hear them into speech listening to understand rather than respond. Rather than try to convince them of anything or ask them why, ask them to play out their approach to demonstrate how that would work. Let them discover complexities or wrinkles in their thinking. Then, as they see for themselves, they may adjust those means to their desired end.

It comes down to putting on your oxygen mask first before helping others. Understanding yourself first, so you can live “as if.” So you can honestly say “Even though.... I believe... and so I choose to act according to my faith and not the circumstance.

It is not my job/role to change others, it's my job to look at myself and change, save me...putting things in the right order. I will live my life forward. I will live an ‘As If Life’ now!” For the new realm is here! I will create possibility.

It comes down to understanding myself. It comes down to understanding someone vs changing someone. The rest is up to them. And it necessitates m being humble...letting go of my own fear and guilt enough so...I can think.

So how to then how to bring possibility? Again, not by logic bullying disguised as discussion. Not by making someone feel bad about themselves or have to defend themselves. Not when what you are questioning is connected to the fabric of the other's identity, lodged in community, friendships, and faith. More on this next week...

On March 7, we added: Last week we said, you can't open up “possibility” (convince anyone of anything) by making them feel bad about themselves. ...by questioning the fabric of their identity which is lodged in culture, community, friendships, and faith. Think of it this way: it's like they're sitting atop this huge elephant of identity which doesn't change course easily. Each of us is a rider on an elephant of self-identity.

The rider part of you is your conscious verbal reasoning, logical thinking self of which we are often aware. The elephant represents all that has formed our identity (99% of which we are not aware). The elephant is powerful and a lot more formidable than the rider.

So, first of all, if we want to stay on the Way...live “as if” in the realm, we need to know our own elephants first...what is truly guiding our subconscious reactions and affecting how we think and where we will go and won't go!

And, to convince or persuade someone else, speak to their elephant, not the rider...for it is the elephant that has the power to control which direction its rider is going to go. If the elephant likes you, is beginning to hear and trust you, it is more likely it will move in your direction and persuade the rider to go along.

To do this, you need to come close enough to the other riders to know their elephants...by their first names so to speak. But...no discussion, no logic bullying ...listening. Ride alongside. Let our elephants kiss and discover nuances and

ramifications and play things out differently in their minds and so, maybe affecting their end destinations! To help do this, maybe try speaking “as if” the world and our God were listening to each word you speak to those elephants.
Ah...the art of persuasion.

Let’s listen this week to the first half of this video on the art of persuasion (**3:41**):
<https://youtu.be/24adApYhoyc>

So focus a moment on your own elephant...

What is the mouse...that frightens your elephant? ...so then, the elephant runs away with you? Stampedes? Is your mouse: immigration, voting rights, poverty? Are these the mice that cause your elephant to stampede over your ability to listen to yourself or anyone else?

Remember: our mice are formed by, have a diet of our fears, guilt, and past experience

BTW, You know, if we ride our elephants all the way to Jerusalem, nose to nose, with a, our elephants gets smaller and the cross you carry gets lighter on the Way....you heart opens wide. (And, I’d rather be trampled by turtles than elephants. That’s a music joke!)

On March 14, we added: Last week we used a metaphor: Elephants, riders...and mice! Today let’s explore more about those elephants of the subconscious which our logical selves sit atop.

We’ll continue to listen to Jon Haidt as he speaks about “morality markers”...we might name that differently for our purposes. He uses these markers to speak of the divisions of republicans, democrats, and libertarians. An example helpful to us as this is a key topic of conversation right now. But I invite you to think in broader terms.

Jonathan Haidt - Listen to video starting on **3:53**. <https://youtu.be/24adApYhoyc>

Here are the markers that shape how we become who we are...form the elephant on which our rational minds ride: Care, Fairness, Loyalty, Authority, Sanctity, and Liberty.

He says Libertarians have strong system thinking capabilities but weak on empathy. So, they have a harder time relating to others but are extremely good thinkers on problems. We need them...their elephants in our herd. ...each other’s herds.

So how do you persuade them...someone to come alongside?

First, acknowledge them just the way they are...see their elephants as real.

And be aware of how you approach that elephant!

Are you in combat mode or discovery mode or relationship mode.

If our thing is to get into a discussion, that's usually combat mode, bullying with logic. And so, the other goes into defensive mode.

But when we come alongside in curious mode or relationship mode, others tend to open up. MLK said, "It's hard to hate someone when you know their stories."

When you come alongside to listen instead of convince, the elephants are more likely to move toward each other.

But ultimately, the most important aspect of coming alongside, elephant to elephant, is for their riders to embrace humility (get the right size).

...allowing ourselves to revisit our thinking to examine any faulty thinking, acknowledging that we *can* understand certain points made or have had a shared experience, modeling in ourselves what we would like to see in them ie. Self-doubt, a willingness to rethink.

Ultimately more humility is key is in connecting. No one of us has it "right." Together we are so much more "wise." ...as in wisdom circles!

Key to initiating a cognitive reframing of issues...humble listening, curious to understand, a sharing of experiences, building relationship.

Another way to say this is: be compassionate.

"No one cares how much you know till they know how much you care." Teddy Roosevelt.

Sara shared it this way this week...the ability to show compassion for another is represented in the difference between these two approaches when your partner forgets your birthday.

My partner forgot my birthday. They don't love me. VS
Someone I love forgot my birthday.

Can you hear the difference...feel it in yourself?

No one wants their elephant to stampede...mice or not!
We all want to caravan.

This week, we add:

Living as if is one step beyond reimagining.

Elephants, riders, mice, snakes...alrighty then.

No discussions, no being logic bullies. Humility is key.

Modeling that which we hope to see in the other...let me think about that, tell me more.

Staying in curious mode.

We do sorta' get it. How to live in such a divisive world...how to live as if even though.

We get it in our brains but how do we get it into our bones?

First, you have to imagine the world you want to live in...what it is you are hoping for?

Have to imagine how the realm of God looks in daily life and take one step beyond imagining.

What are the little things and what are the big things around which our choices either build up the realm or tear it down?

What is the message of hope you are looking for today?

Imagine hope.

How would you need "to be" more than need "to do"... in order to live into the realm you imagine?

Here are some rules of thumb "to be you" in the new realm...a new diet for your elephant and a new way to think about things as rider... some skills to go beyond imagining:

1. Beware of seeing villains, victims, or angels in a system. It generally means you're "hooked." If anyone is always wrong or right, you are probably not seeing them clearly.
2. Systems resist change. Remember that you must plan your change, predict the system's reaction and plan for it, and respond to the system's reaction.
3. Running head on into resistance will probably intensify it.
4. Never attack, never defend. When you feel the need to do either of these, you are "hooked."
5. There is no point taking an I-Position or talking loci to a system in emotional turmoil.
6. Humor may be the best way to detoxify a tense issue.

7. Plan your timing, your context, and your strategy for change and keep your own counsel.
8. Distinguish between planned and reactive distance. The first gives you perspective, while the second is likely to interfere with your progress.
9. Let go of stubbornly held issues. Reversing your long-held stance may teach you something about the inflexibilities of your system.
10. Use the intensity of your reactions (anger or hurt) as signals that important issues are at stake.
11. Silence doesn't fool an emotional system. Your silence may be interpreted in a variety of ways: as consent, disagreement, loyalty, or rebellion. Not communicating is also a communication.
12. Do not be discouraged by backsliding. Under enough stress we all revert to old patterns. Hopefully we don't stay in them as long.
13. When you find yourself too ready to work on anyone else's relationships (e.g. your spouse's family), look at what you may be avoiding in your own.
14. Never remain with your family or any conversation longer than you can afford to be generous.
15. Lower your expectations for other people changing too, and you'll probably be pleasantly surprised.
16. Make your responses unpredictable, which is different from being unreliable.
17. If no family members are available, try making a relationship with our worst enemy.
18. Beware of believing any rule of thumb too strongly.

Prompting:

The psalmist says: Put a new and right spirit within me. Sustain me in a willing spirit.
What is *your* spirit willing to sustain?

What might your spirit get “right” and be enabled to sustain,
if you explored your secret heart...
your deepest desires and fears...with God?

...if you let God meet you in your secret heart
with truth and wisdom...
about your real inner and outer life?

How might your inner and outer lives meld into oneness?

Jesus revealed his secret heart to God.
He was in some good trouble...

his actions of telling the truth in kindness and the inclusion of all people was getting
him in some good trouble.

He did not hide his troubled heart from God,
but went right to God with it...revealing His secret heart so His spirit would be
sustained. The trouble didn't change, but He did.

He models this...speaks it out loud so we will also know how to take care of ourselves as
well.

So...in *your* secret heart, what *might you* hear God saying to you
...if you reveal the truth of your inward being?

It is hardest to hear God...to live as if...when our souls are troubled and our lives are in
crisis...hear God's wisdom in divisive times.

We avert, divert, shut down, avoid. Ourselves. Others.

It's *easier* “to be faithful” when things are going well...

When things are blooming vs. when they're looming.

What is the heart of the matter here?

How do you long to live as if even though...

What are you hoping for?

What's in your heart *matters* and shapes who you are

and how you respond to your world differently....
affects your health, your healing, your well-being.

Not what's in your wallet...that comes and goes anyways, right?

What's in your heart...that's what matters!

Jesus asks: Like the seed...are you willing to die to your old ways and live in new ways
which will bear much fruit?

Would you be willing to lose your way of life to gain a better life
for you and others? That's a bit troubling!

Are you willing to listen instead of convince...
love the tree and the fruit?

And, we know our hearts affect how you see others...
distorts them or brings clarity about them.
No wonder we get hooked into arguing rather than listening!

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Today's psalm is written by King David who lost his head as he lost his heart (over  
Bathsheba) and so he starts confessing to God...

At first, his self-talk is really on the verge of a pity party as he owns what his choices  
have brought.

All process/progress begins with self-awareness,  
hearing the voices within.  
Awareness of our secret hearts.  
Awareness of rider and elephant.

Just like David, when things go wrong or we make a mistake in our judgment, we also  
often do a woe-is-me...

oh...I was born this way, or I'm fatally flawed...  
there's no hope for me!

Sometimes we get stuck right there.  
It gets us off the hook for having to do something about the life!

*But David goes on...*

he turns toward God and gets a holy consciousness about his own actions and their  
consequence.

He comes down off that cross and flirts with grace offered.



He hates his life and wants to lose it and gain true life...  
creating a new heart with a right spirit and right relationships...

**God's new covenant now internal...an inward movement that moves us out  
into the world differently.**

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Again: what matters to your heart right now?

Is there something going on in your life that gives you pause?

Do you have regret or deep seeded confusion?
...pain because of denying it?

Are you stuck in whoa-is-me self-talk...or,
are you willing to turn toward God and begin again to live...
live as if even though...trouble and all...like Jesus?

Hear this deeply:

David begins his new life not with some big grand gesture or stroke of insight as to how
to right his wrong.

He simply says to God,
I know you desire truth in my inward being...
God, You want me to be honest with myself.

This is where David begins and this is the only place
any of us can ever begin.

And it is enough and we can trust it will bring us forward.
It has no judgement or self-incrimination.
It holds possibility.

And, hear this:

David goes on to ask God to give him wisdom in his secret heart...within, quietly. He
starts small and quietly.

He asks to be made clean...I would say to be renewed, for a do-over.

This seems a pretty reasonable way to start over...
small and wise...within himself.

Letting go of end results or convincing anyone of anything!

And to help him remember what matters most to him,
he then asks that in the living of his day he may be where he can hear joy and gladness.

Imagine how your mood would change...
your energy be renewed...
and how you might feel differently about your life
if you were living your day within earshot
of joy and gladness?

Imagine what wisdom you might find in your secret heart
if your frame of mind was recognizing gladness and joy around you instead of
negativity?

You went with the positive, saw possibilities, stayed curious, elephant to elephant.

David asks God to help him find a willing spirit.

What are you willing to do differently in order to have
your right spirit to put things in the right order?

Aahh...here's where Jeremiah comes in.

You see, initially you just may not be able to even see yourself clearly, let alone want a
right spirit,

be willing to do anything differently to mend your heart
or create a new, clean one!

But the heart of the matter is this....
it's not all about you or up to you!

God has extended to us a new covenant.

It is no longer a two way set-up marked by rainbows or stars or generations...not even
about laws on tablets.

It can't be taught or figured out, only felt!

A wisdom further revealed to us in Jesus.

The heart of the matter is this: **God loves you. Love is who you are!** Go with
it...flow with it...follow your better angels!

Whatever has happened to you,
whatever you have done with your life thus far,

God is holding on to a new life for you...your new heart...

won't allow any of your suffering to be wasted!

No deals or exceptions...everyone gets a new heart!

Everyone...yep, even them, gets a new heart
as God sees clearly everyone's

authentic self and doesn't waste anyone's suffering!

**No matter how long it takes us to reach out to God
...self-aware and troubled spirit secretly known,
God is already reaching in to us.**

We don't have to start out with some big grand rearranging of the furniture of our lives in order to begin to live as if!

You get to start small...quietly...inwardly changing...
until you feel safe enough in this new self...new spirit...
to let your light shine on a new life.

Start in the easiest place, with the easiest person,
in the right timing.

It's easy. It's hard. It's safe. It's scary.

But the heart of the matter is that you matter!
You are important to God!

You are the tree and the fruit.

Everything on the way to heaven...is heaven.

The realm is everywhere you look!

God is with you and if you can't feel God with you...
you can see us with you!

In the church, this narrative is basic: Jesus loves us...loves you.

So, on one of your pieces of paper please fill in this question:
Even though....., I believe..... .

On the other side, please finish this intention:
I choose to live as if..... . Know where you are going to...take in: fortitude.