Series: I Can Only Imagine

Message: Imagine a Loving Father

Text: Matthew 3:11-17

Theme:

Date: April 29, 2018

Location: Christ Community EFC

**If you would please turn in your Bible to Matthew chapter 3.** (p. 808 in the pew Bible.)

How many of you have seen the movie “I Can Only Imagine”? (It is still playing in Ontario.)

The group Mercy Me released the song “I Can Only Imagine” back in 1999. It was written by the group’s lead vocalist Bart Millard.

(Give background for movie/series. Today’s message Imagine a Loving Father—difficulty for some given the father they had or the father who was not there. Share about when my father died and I was on board ship)

We actually live in a culture were children have never learned to use their imaginations.

When I was a kid, a stick for a riffle, and a hand full of pinecones for grenades, and my buddies and I could play Combat or Rate Patrol for hours.

But today, because kids are so over stimulated with a constant barrage of images and information their brains barely have time to process what they are seeing let alone given time for their imaginations to run wild.

There is a small art organization that goes into public schools in rough areas of cities and teaches art therapy, so that kids who have never been able to process their environment can do it through what they draw and create.

Each day as they enter the class, they begin by closing their eyes and entering into “imagination station”.

There, they have no limits to what they can do, nothing holding them back from their potential, and the same opportunities as every other person in the school.

It is their one time to imagine more and it is transforming the way they see the world.

Imagination is powerful because it invites us into a new story.

Imagination welcomes the impossible, and we serve the God who wants to do even more with us than we could ever ask or imagine.

Over the next four weeks we are going to see how Jesus, in his humanity, imagined more for the world around him and how that shaped a new legacy, a new story, and a new understanding of God with every person he met.

But before we can begin looking at what Jesus imagined for others - ourselves included - we have to look at what God imagined for Jesus, and that is where we find ourselves in Matthew chapter 3 at the baptism of Jesus.

There are a few things you need to know before we dive in.

Between the end of Matthew chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3, a lot has happened.

The end of Matthew 2 tells us that Joseph and Mary moved to a small village called Nazareth. Jesus was raised there and with the exception of a story about Jesus as a 12-year-old in the temple in Luke’s Gospel account.

We don’t hear any more of Jesus’ growing up years until we get to Matthew 3.

In Matthew 3, Jesus is now an adult and his cousin John the Baptist is obediently preparing the way for the time when Jesus will begin His public ministry to others.

John played a key role in preparing for Jesus’ ministry because John invited people to imagine one who would come to bring even more than repentance for sins, but one who would bring redemption (define) to all.

In Matthew 3, starting in verse 11 John the Baptist says to the crowds gathered: “**I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.**

**12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.**”

John the Baptist was developing a pretty big following even though he was out in the desert where very few lived. As people came to him, he continued to point to the one that was still to come.

As he preached a message of repentance, he continued to remind people that there was one even greater than he, one who had even more to offer than John ever could. That person was Jesus, and Jesus enters the scene in verse 13.

Let’s read on: Matthew 3:13 “**Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.**

**14 John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?**”

Matthew 3:15 “**But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented**.”

The Greek word translated righteousness here is incredibly important. It carries the idea of living right or obedient before God.

Throughout the Gospel of Matthew this word was used as a way to describe obedience to the Father.

We already know at this point that John was simply doing what the Lord had called him to by preparing the way.

So then, when Jesus said to John, “It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all **righteousness**, even if John didn’t fully understand why, he did it out of **righteousness** (obedience) to Jesus, just as Jesus did it out of **righteousness** (obedience) to God the Father.

Verses 16-17 say, “**And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17  and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”**

In verse 17, we see the first glimpse of how Jesus’ obedience to God revealed what God imagined for Jesus.

It is in this moment, as Jesus is obedient to baptism, that we hear three things about the Father’s heart for Jesus.

The first thing we learn is: **God Identifies with Jesus**

We read in the text that immediately after Jesus is baptized, the spirit of God descended on Him like a dove and a voice from heaven spoke out these words: “**This is my son.**”

We see God identify with Jesus and call Him his son.

Jesus’ obedience in baptism was a symbolic representation that He too identified with His Father.

It was out of Jesus’ understanding of whose He was that He could live confidently out of who He was.

As we talk over the next few weeks about stepping into and living out all that God imagines for us, we must first start here at the foundational point where Jesus models what it looks like to live as a child of God.

Not only does God identify with Jesus, God identifies with us through Jesus.

Galatians 3:26-29 says, “…**in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.**

**28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**

**29 And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise**.

That is an incredible promise to cling to. It doesn’t matter where you work, where you went to school, what you make at your job, or what you wear: God identifies with you, and He wants you to identify completely with Him.

Typically, when you work for a company, you are given certain privileges as a benefit of working at the company.

If you work in fast food, you may get some free food. If work in retail, you get discounts. If you work for a school you get tuition discounts and the list goes on and on.

It would be crazy to not accept the privileges that come with your job.

When you commit to following Jesus with your life, God calls you his child. He identifies with you, and calls you His.

Yet, some of you are not living out of the identity that God has given you. You are weighed down with anxiety, wrecked with fear, wrestling with purpose, and racing through life—barely holding on.

Rather than living out of the identity of God’s child, you are living as a slave to the things of this world.

At the time that Jesus came to John, John didn’t fully understand why Jesus wanted to be baptized by him.

But Jesus knew this action of baptism would validate all of John’s teaching and point to Jesus as the one who was even greater than John.

Jesus was the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit, but only if, in his humanity, he remained obedient to the Father’s will.

By submitting to baptism, Jesus acknowledged God’s claim on his life of obedience.

Although John felt inferior to Jesus, he did not need to feel embarrassed by the fact that Jesus wanted to do what God asked of Him.

In the same way, you do not need to be embarrassed by living obediently out of your identity as a child of God.

How many of you have seen a child wobble toward an electrical outlet and begin to work their tiny fingers into the hole?

Often times, what keeps them from getting electrocuted is the parent that is close by to protect and guide them.

It is not for years later typically, that children actually understand why they were being cautioned away from certain things, such as electrical outlets.

[Do not do this at home! Share how I played with outlet as a child, liken to us as adults wanting to see how close we can get to sin without getting burned]

This is similar to what happens in our adult lives now; as God guides us away from the dangers of this world even when we do not understand why He is doing so at the time. It often is not until much later that we realize why God steered us away from certain situations.

Why do we feel the need to constantly question God’s Word when He rebukes us, cautions us, or directs us closer to the father’s heart?

I’ve heard it said before that so often we are okay with a Savior, but we would rather not have a Lord. We want the salvation, but we don’t want what it may cost us.

We want to live in a Genesis 3 world where know good and evil, in other words, we want to say what is good and what is not good.

In Matthew 16:24 Jesus said to his disciples, “**If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me**.”

In Galatians 2:20 Paul writes, **“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.**

**And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”**

If we are going to identify with the Father, we must submit to Him.

We must be willing to give up our old ways of living, thinking, and doing and be obedient to the things that God’s heart values.

(Working as a waiter-declaring tips, taking candy from work, growing number of seniors living together, sluffing off at work, etc.)

But the good news is, God doesn’t just call you a child out of your obedience, He also calls you a child out of His love for you.

So, when we blow it, He still loves us and will forgive us when we turn to Him.

The second thing we learn about the Father’s heart for Jesus is this: **God Loves Jesus. “This is my beloved Son.”**

Now this may seem like a simple statement. But after God speaks into Jesus identity as His Son, He couples it this statement of His love for him.

Not only does God assure Jesus once- you are mine; He assures it a second time - you are loved by me. You are my son, whom I love.

Jesus’ identity is rested in the Word of God spoken over Him as God’s son who is loved by God the Father.

This is the reminder God gives Jesus, and it is also the reminder He gives us.

1 John 3:1 says, “**See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God!**”

The identity that God has given you as a child of His is made strong in His great love. When we let this love shape our lives, it does more than we could ever imagine.

There was a story about a missionary that went to a village to share the love of Jesus.

As was custom, in order to have permission to live with the villagers, you had to marry into the village.

The missionary knew this and when he came to the chief of the village, the chief offered his most beautiful daughter.

However, the missionary asked if the chief had any other daughters that were without a husband.

Confused, the chief said, “Well, yes I do.” He presented his other daughter, who many in the village thought would never marry because she lacked the outer beauty that would draw you to her.

The missionary took the less beautiful daughter as his wife and they traveled for several years, sharing the gospel of Jesus with surrounding villages of the same tribe.

Eventually, they found themselves back at his wife’s home village, but nobody recognized her.

She was so stunningly beautiful and had grown so confident, because her husband had spoken love and truth to her every day of their marriage.

She was so radiant and rested in who she was.

You could clearly see that she was loved well by her husband, because her husband was loved well by Jesus.

The identity that was once spoken into her had changed once she married the missionary.

She eventually learned about the love of God, and that love shaped the way she lived her life. Love shaped her life, and it transformed her spiritually and physically.

The fact that Jesus was God’s loved son is crucial, because it is that identity that allows Jesus to begin his ministry.

It is also out of that identity as a loved child that you can live the life that God designed specifically for you.

Romans 8:35-39 NLT says, “**Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love?**

**Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death?**

**36(As the Scriptures say, “For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.”)**

**37No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.**

**38And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+8%3A35-39&version=NLT" \l "fen-NLT-28116b" \o "See footnote b)] neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love.**

**39No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.**”

Nothing can separate you from God’s love. Life may be crumbling around you, but He still wants to build His kingdom through you.

I should add, nothing can separate you, but you can walk away from it.

But know this. You are not too far gone to know the love of God.

Your friends are not too far gone to know the love of God. Your spouse is not too far gone to know the love of God.

There is no place He would not go so that you could experience His love. Jesus was the best model of God’s love we have ever known because Jesus let the love of God shape his life.

In the same way, God invites us to know His love, so that we can invite others to know His love as well.

The last thing we see about the Father’s heart for Jesus is this: **God is Pleased with Jesus**

The last words God chooses to say is, “**with him I am well pleased.**”

I don’t want you to miss that Jesus has not even begun his ministry and yet God says that He is well pleased with him.

The word “well pleased”, has the implications of God saying, “I am amazed by Him” or “I delight in Him”.

So, it should not be read as though Jesus had to earn God’s love or favor, rather it was out of the fact that Jesus took the step of baptism in obedience that delighted the Father’s heart - He was overjoyed by his faithfulness.

Some of you grew up in families where you had to earn the favor of your parents so they would love you.

God loves you as you are, but He is overjoyed when you walk in obedience into who He sees you becoming, because He knows what is best for you.

Because Jesus lived out of his identity as a loved son of God, he walked in obedience toward the person God made him.

Since Jesus did that, we now have good news to receive and share with others.

Don’t miss this: **Our Identity as God’s Children will Propel Us Into His Purpose.**

Throughout this series, we will see just how Jesus’ identity as a loved son shaped how He saw those around him, and propelled Him into a ministry that continues to shape the world more than we could ever imagine.

In Christ, you are God’s son, God’s daughter.

In Christ, you are loved.

In Christ, the Father is well pleased with you.

Let’s pray.

**Benediction**

**“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” (Num. 6:24-26)**