

MAY
07

PILGRIM · LANDSCAPES ·

REIMAGINE · STORIES

LIVING INTO NEW IMAGINATION BY MARK SCANDRETTE

Our local community is in a season of special focus on the thread of obedience in the life of Jesus. We recognize Jesus as our teacher and authority, and wrestle with how to surrender to the way of love in every detail of our lives. And we submit ourselves to one another in love and strive to keep our vows to God and our commitments to one another.

When Jesus announced, “The kingdom of God is near,” he invited a response, saying, “Repent.” The word repent has ominous undertones in the cultural vernacular of Americana. For me it conjures memories of barn roofs near highways in the rural South, often painted in blazing red with the word “REPENT!” in angry capital letters. The word literally means “rethink your thinking” or “reimagine” your life in view of new alternatives. The instruction to “repent” or “reimagine” is meant to shock and arrest, to incite us to rethink our goals and priorities, to call into question our previous ways and awaken us to new possibilities. We reimagine our lives by allowing the Creator to examine our thoughts,



attitudes, motives, and behavior. We see an ancient example of this in a song attributed to David, King of Israel:

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my
anxious thoughts.

See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm
139:23-24)

It takes courage and vulnerability to ask, “How am I out of rhythm with the way of love??” We are told to repent or reimagine our lives because there is a better way, as the Apostle Paul suggested: “God’s kindness leads you toward repentance” (Romans 2:4). Allowing the Maker to gently examine your character is an entrance into the kingdom dance.

Nearly everyone has some pattern of destructive habits that serve to sabotage relationships or frustrate personal goals. Sometimes we tenaciously hold on to these shadows. Our chronic shadow habits are often signs of deeper or more foundational soul sickness: fear, anger, jealousy, and so on. While “sin” is often viewed as an incident or episode of indiscretion, in actuality it is part of the total system of our thoughts, values, planning, and cultural assumptions. When

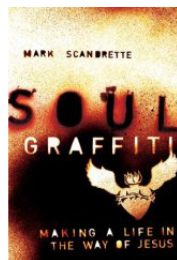
UPCOMING EVENTS:
SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY PROJECT
JUNE 12, 9-2PM

COMMUNITY LEARNING LAB
JUNE 3, 10, 17, 24

COMMUNITY RETREAT
JUNE 31 - JULY 1

EXCITING NEWS!!

We are celebrating the recent release of Mark Scandrette’s first solo book project, *SOUL GRAFFITI: Making a Life in the Way of Jesus*, published by Jossey-Bass Wiley. *SOUL GRAFFITI* is a narrative exploration into the life and teachings of Jesus along with stories, reflections and real life examples and exercises. The book is currently available in bookstores throughout the country and at amazon.com For more details and reader reviews see soulgraffitibook.com



What We’ve Been Up To:

- Hosting groups from Palo Alto and Santa Cruz
- Speaking Valley Christian Dublin
- Work w/ Page St Community Center
- Hosting College Students
- Facilitating Obedience Learning Lab
- Hosting Book Release Party
- Continuing Mentoring Relationships
- Expanding Board of Directors
- Facilitating weekly community gatherings
- Developing Team and Organizational Systems
- Hosting Cobalt Season Release Party



examined more holistically, we may come to recognize that any incident of “sin” is symptomatic of an entire pattern of life set up in opposition

to the way of love.

For example, a character named “Crabby Dad” makes occasional visits to our home. He is an anxious and demanding father figure who speaks harshly, gives orders, and lacks empathy. Needless to say, no one is happy when Crabby Dad makes an appearance. Fortunately his visits have become less frequent as I have begun to deal with anger and impatience as a pattern rather than an isolated incident. My anger and impatience are products of a total system of beliefs and practices: connected to overwork, fatigue, lack of rest or care for the body, an unhealthy drive to be validated through achievement, a sense of perfectionism, and a desire to control other people. I am wrong not only in my anger. I am also wrong in the total pattern of my reasoning, values, and life management. It has been helpful for me to ask, “Why do I become anxious?” and “When do I become angry?” and to make intentional changes in the entire pattern of my choices.

A Legacy of Shadows

The wounds of sin and our shadow selves are both individual and collective. Jesus once cautioned, “The things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come”(Luke 17:1). Our choices have a direct effect on other people, and our influence can set up chains of struggle and temptation for others. You may be conscious of the ways your parents or elders influenced the nature of your own shadows. And those of us with children may be well aware of the ways we have passed on our own issues and temptations. If we look out on our world and see problems, they are our problems because we have collectively chosen to stand aside in idle rebellion against the contagious dance of love. Together, in some measure, we are responsible for the conditions on our planet—slave trafficking, colonialism, sexism, sectarian violence, and war are examples that come quickly to mind. The disciple Peter described the death of Jesus as a means of delivering us from “the empty way of life handed down to [us] from [our] forefathers” (I Peter 1:18). We begin to reimagine

our lives by acknowledging that we have inherited and perpetuated empty ways of life that must be dismantled and replaced by new patterns of living.

We reimagine our lives by recognizing that the empires of this world stand in opposition to the kingdom of God. Government policies, economic systems, and prevailing social and cultural values constitute aspects of the kingdoms of this world that are critiqued by the melodious song of the kingdom of God. Part of repentance is examining how we have consciously or unconsciously participated in sustaining systems of power, greed, and oppression. In a global sense, the insidious nature of sin not only places a person “in danger of the fires of hell,” but can also make life on Earth a living hell. What this suggests is that repentance involves both personal piety and a commitment to becoming advocates for peace and justice. The prophet Micah summarized the goal of repentance when he wrote:

[God] has showed you, O [people], what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

SPACE IN THE SILENCE BY ADAM KLEIN



I remember back to my introduction to silence and meditation as a freshman in high school. At the start of class Father Allender would often have us sit, eyes closed, while he led us in a meditation. As the meditation came to a close we sat in silence for a few moments before opening our eyes. Most likely the exercise had a dual purpose,

EXERCISE: PAST/PRESENT/FUTURE SELF.

Many of our worries and anxieties come from a feeling of dissatisfaction with our current state in life. A helpful and sometimes difficult exercise is to tell our story as a good story. One where we see the goodness and care of God throughout our life. Reflect on your life to this point and look for the signs of God’s love and write your story as a good story.

Looking forward, what longings lie deep within your soul? What would you like to see happen in your future? Take some time envisioning your future self and write out what you see. How would you like to feel in 5 years? What would you look like? What steps are necessary to reach this goal? Write out the daily, weekly, monthly behaviors that are necessary to live into your future self.

to calm the storm of 30 riotous high schools boys, but also to introduce us to a spiritual practice. At the time it didn't really mean much to me other than our lectures would be inherently shorter; which as a freshman in high school was a huge bonus. Years later during my final year of undergraduate studies I remember reading the gospel accounts of Jesus constantly withdrawing to the mountainside for solitude and prayer and memories of those days in freshmen religion class came flooding back. I felt inspired and decided that I needed to get away, alone for 4 days. Finishing up school on a Thursday I packed up my car and drove up to the Sierras where I would spend the next 4 days alone in the woods, praying, reading, meditating, and being still before my Maker. I was forever changed after those 4 days and vowed that silence and solitude would become a regular practice in my life. Fast forward a few years and this discipline of practicing silence and solitude has become one of the vows of our community and as an organization we host an annual retreat inviting anyone that wishes to attend.



Fighting their way through traffic people began to trickle in Friday night from all over the Bay Area. As each person arrived I was reminded that it takes a decisive act of discipline to make time for stillness in our local culture of activity driven schedules. In our outcome based, progress driven society the question is often "What will this activity accomplish?" or "Will it allow me to check something off my 'to do' list?" and taking silent walks, meditating and journaling often don't measure up. I asked everyone to leave behind all distractions: electronic devices, books, and yes even Bibles. Aside from their personal items, they only needed to bring a journal and pen. It's easy for us to fill our minds with words and thoughts and to read without a purpose. All the guidance they needed would be contained in the movement of the Spirit and in a guide that we handed out which contained scripture to meditate on, journaling exercises, prayer exercises and guided meditations. The hope is to create space for God not merely fill it with more "meaningful" things.

We shared a common meal of fresh vegetables, and shrimp in a white wine sauce over wheat pasta and gathered in a circle to go over the next 36 hours. Driven by the admonition in the Psalms, "Be still and know that I am God," Mark and I walked the group through the importance that silence can play in our lives. I explained that it really is entering into a new way of being, and there are some usual reactions when we first enter silence. Often we find ourselves

anxious, bored, questioning the point of trying to be still or wondering what it will accomplish. We begin to look for some emotional shift inside, or euphoric feeling telling us that "it's working." We can become desperate in wanting to feel something. In these moments, when we try to evaluate a new way of being based on old paradigms, we need to remind ourselves that this is a spiritual practice we enter to show our love and fidelity to the One that knit us together. God is the lover and cultivator of our soul and one of the most important things we can do is show up with the intention of being with God. As our loving parent God is pleased with our effort to be present. Entering silence creates space in our hearts, minds, and souls for the spirit of God to work and speak. "We are going to be living as contemplative monks," I explained, "and part of that entails we all participate in chores in order for food to be prepped, cooked and the kitchen cleaned." We don't leave out the practicalities of life when practicing silence, but rather the intention is to create that stillness within and bring it with us to our daily activities. We began to run

through the schedule for the next day and a half and as we did I pointed out our individual assignments for the weekend that would keep things running smoothly and without conversation. Being that there were no questions at this point, I (re)introduced the practice of contemplative prayer, popularized by Thomas Keating, and led us in 20 minutes of silent prayer. After which, Mark and I walked the group through exercises we had prepared that were available for use if people needed inspiration. We ended our gathering and as a collective group entered silence.

I slept outside that night. The stillness present in the crisp morning mountain air soothes the deeper parts of my soul and as I entered the kitchen I was greeted by a newly formed group of "monks" spending time with their Creator. Some were journaling, others sitting on the deck in silence, and still others enjoying the outdoors. Jennifer had just returned from a nature walk and brought with her pine cones and needles and created a mountain center piece for our table. As I watched people, I prayed that through the silence internal soul space would open up allowing the voice of the great Mystery to speak lovingly. As the day progressed, I sensed people settling more and more into the silence. The flurry of moving pens had slowed and more people were simply resting in the present moment. I imagine that their souls and minds grew still and they were able to begin to rest. It often takes a while for our minds to detox from the influx of information

and activity that we live into day in and day out. There is a noticeable difference between the first few hours of silence and silence after 8-10 hours. That night as I got ready for bed I sat on my mat and wrote this poem:

The ancient light flickers by my bed
I'm entranced by it's glow and warmth
It's history beyond my knowledge
the inconsistent flashed moves from side to side and
flow into my soul
I'm reminded of the light within
the kingdom seed planted in the depths of my soul
even through closed eyes the darkness is intruded upon
by it's presence
with each flash
I sink deeper into the presence of the great
I AM
Beheld by the Creators loving goodness my heart beats
like an open vessel
As I elongate my torso, opening chest
my breath grows deeper and fills my entire body
tingles begin at the crown of my head and disappear
into my ears
beneath my flowing breath I can hear the rhythmic bass
gently beating
I can feel peace enter my nostrils
caressingly moving down my nasal cavity
down the back of my sternum
I feel the whispering center calling me home
calling me to live out my birthright
and with each flash I'm reminded of the sacred space
that must remain secret
fwoooooof
As I enter complete darkness
the glow of the wick fades
I'm in the shadow
light within glowing

Waking the next morning we had breakfast and the morning exercise was to come up with a rule of life. A set of personal rhythms that will help in nurturing the soul and deepening our connection to God. We broke the silence with communion at lunch and reflected upon the experience as we ate together. Everyone I talked with, even the extreme extroverts, remarked how they enjoyed the silence and time to simply be. If you have never had an extended period in silence and/or solitude I would highly recommend penning it into your schedule. It helps remind us that God is more concerned with who we are becoming than what we accomplish.

OBEEDIENCE AND EMPIRE
BY DAMON SNYDER



As Mark and I got together to plan for the obedience learning lab this month we started to search the bible

for clues about what it means to be obedient to our creator. We searched for words like "obey", "duty", and "surrender". We pulled out 30 or more quotes from the Old Testament and the New. We also pulled out our favorite quotes from Romans about "offering your bodies as living sacrifices" (Romans 12) and using your bodies as "instruments of righteousness" (Romans 6.) We both noted how we love to spend time mining the bible for instruction and inspiration. After we pulled these quotes and phrases together we struggled with how to create tangible exercises that will help our community to obey the gospel. We realized that the world we live in is messy. Our lives are messy.

We live in a complicated post-everything (postmodern, postchristian, postcolonial, postnational, postprogress, posttechnology etc) world. The assumptions and stories that have guided our lives are being critiqued and deconstructed. The myths of our culture are being exposed and called out. As followers of Jesus, we are questioning the American Dream. We are struggling with the consequences and false promises of infinite progress and consumerism. We doubt that technology can save us and solve the problems we have created for ourselves. In the messiness and uncertainty of life we struggle with how to connect obedience to Jesus with our every day lives. What steps can we take to be obedient in our story, in our daily life?

Some would suggest that obedience is really a struggle for our imagination. That these myths about progress, technology, and the American Dream capture our imaginations and undermine the message of the kingdom of God. In our struggle to create tangible exercises that will help our community to be more intentional about obeying the gospel, we want to subvert the man-made-myths of our culture and move together onto the pages of a different story. We want to inspire our imaginations to dream of a different reality that is motivated by the life and teaching of Jesus.

To this end, we came with two exercises. The first exercise is work together to alleviate debt through a zero interest loan to someone in our community. Realizing that the prevalence of debt is a symptom of our captivity to these myths we decided that this could be an exercise to inspire a new way of freedom, generosity, and simplicity (Matthew 6:19-34.) This process will also involve mentoring (something we value) and some of the habits we have developed from our SEVEN simplicity vows.

We recognize that energy consumption is fueling the myth of infinite progress and consumerism and damages the planet our creator commanded us to take

care of (Genesis 2:15.) For the second exercise we are getting informed about how the energy consumption of our homes, our travel, and our stuff pollutes the environment and contributes to the empire we live in. We plan to document what we discover and together commit to making substantive changes in our energy consumption.

As we doubt the myths of progress and technology, we know that there is a story that is trustworthy and good. We enter that story by being obedient to the life and teaching of Jesus. We hope that these exercises will stir our imaginations and challenge our commitments to the myths of our culture.

CULTIVATING NEW IMAGINATION BY NATE MILLHEIM



For over a year we have flirted with calling ourselves an “apostolic team.” I am excited yet humbled by such a phrase. We find inspiration in the accounts of the Apostle Paul working with Barnabas, Mark, Timothy and others - stories of teams of people called to be advocates for the Gospel.

We are in awe of the boldness and determination Paul demonstrated in his letters to fellow followers of “The Way.” He reminds them of Jesus and His accomplishments on the cross, and the call to live a life worthy of the gospel. He explains what it means to be obedient to the Messiah in the details of life, what it means to obey with our relationships, time, money, etc. Toward the end of his letter to the community in Ephesus he wrote, “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” He taught them a life of obedience fueled by the life and death of Jesus, informed by the teachings of Jesus.

As we seek to follow God’s calling for our team, we are constantly encouraging and training people to be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, to live a life of love. We live into this calling in the context of SEVEN in San Francisco. We also meet with emerging leaders to help some begin new communities of active Jesus followers and others to invigorate established communities. Some desire mentoring and training, while others simply desire friendship on the journey.

We enjoy hosting groups of all ages to teach a life of discipleship to Jesus within a diverse culture. During the month of March we hosted a variety of groups in San Francisco including children, families, teenagers and young adults. With Spring in the air and sun rays

The Cobalt Season Album Release!!



Ryan Sharp, a musician who is part of our community, recently released a new album “In Search of A Unified Theory.” He is a contemporary example of one who bravely wrestles with the larger questions about God and humanity in a way that is soulful, honest and articulate. Less angry and more constructive than his previous Cobalt Season albums birthed out of an era of deconstruction, “In Search of a Unified Theory” is a coming of age album for Ryan, in which he settles into a more mature voice musically and spiritually. The addition of Dan Dixon’s Eno-esque arrangements and instrumentation add sonic complexity, nuance and added intrigue to Ryan’s singer-song writing and near tearful croonings. It is also more of a piano album than previous releases with banjo and chimes added by Dixon. “In Search of a Unified Theory” is a hopeful audio companion for anyone striving to live with greater intentionality, conscience courage within the ambiguities of human frailty.

touching green grass and concrete sidewalks alike, we were reminded to dream big dreams and believe in the unlimited potential of the Spirit of God in our lives. We yearn to inspire people to love and let their Creator give them new dreams for how they follow Jesus in their daily lives. We hope these experiences teach people to integrate the teachings of Jesus into their own lives, contexts and cultures.

In particular, during our time with college students from Wheaton College and Westmont College, I was reminded that we are doing something good. These young people came with a beautiful perspective, that of humble servants, eager to be trained. They are yearning to see communities of faith that will inspire them. I am reminded of young adults I have known throughout my life, needing to find people to remind them that faith can be real. They need to see that Christianity can be lived out in real life with a community of friends, and that in community we can be formed as apprentices of Jesus. They need to see people taking risks in obedience. They need to see sacrifice. They need to see love in action. To see their eyes light up and minds race as we discussed our work with ReIMAGINE and SEVEN was life giving. As we worked together in our neighborhood we quickly felt a sense of solidarity with one another. They worked with us. They cooked and ate with us. They played with our children. For a short moment in time we invited them to live life with our community.

Somehow God was able to use us to inspire these young leaders, and we were so grateful for the opportunity.

We yearn to see these students become the people they were made to be, to hear the voice of God and give their lives away to this calling. May they give up their lives for the Gospel and in the course experience the abundant life that Jesus said he came to give us. May their Creator use them to change the world, to be agents of His love.

I am reminded that the work we are doing is truly helpful. I am reminded to continue to let the Spirit give us more boldness, courage and determination. May our humble efforts as an apostolic team be used by the Creator of the Universe to bring about healing, restoration and new life. May we learn to obey as dearly loved children, living into a life of love.

OBEDIENTLY BECOMING BY AMY ROSS



I've been having conversations with friends lately about small matters such as life, purpose and calling. You know, easy conversations. Sitting on the bus or an airplane, I've overheard other people wrestling with these same topics. It's really quite the buzz. And rightfully so - for we want to live well. I hear from my friends such a longing to go out into the world and bring goodness and restoration - such dreams of healing, righting injustices, and rebuilding from the ashes. Their hearts remind me of the innate goodness that lies within people.

It seems to me that many of us are on a quest to finding our true selves, to finding where it is our heart beats most true. I hear from these conversations that we all want to make a difference. We want to bring beauty and healing to the world. We want our lives to count. And we want it to make sense. Now. This is no easy task. I also hear another cord running through all these conversations - and it is a damaging one. It is impatience with our progress, and this has the ability to cover up all that we have accomplished.

As we all push forward in our longing to bring goodness to the world, I think that sometimes we jump ahead of ourselves. In our eagerness to share the good news we have found, we want to go out from whence we came and communicate to everyone that which we so deeply feel to be true. We want to DO these great acts that will produce great results. Or so the logic goes. In our haste, I wonder if we often pass over the time that is needed to grow and

nurture our own selves into becoming more of the person we were created to be. This is our incubation time, for perhaps we cannot completely fulfill our call in the world if we ourselves are not fully formed. And this forming is a process.

Jesus gave us an invitation into a new way of life. A life of love, reconciliation, and hope. This kind of living is no easy task. It requires discipline, a sense of humor, and a lot of grace. It also requires obedience - living in obedience to that which the Teacher asks of us. I have found that I am a slow learner when it comes to this kind of living. Yet, I want to push on, for I believe in the process. It is my process of becoming.

Living in obedience to the Teacher begins in the small things. It begins in the choices we make about how we spend our time, how we care for the Earth and our bodies, how we treat our family and neighbors, if we do our work with integrity and honesty. I believe that our Creator is interested in our whole beings, and is concerned with who we are as much as with what we do. And who we are is reflected in these intricate details of the story of our lives. These details inform our every step, and all serve as opportunities to live in obedience to the Teacher. Living this way moves us closer to who we were created to be. I think we are smiled upon when we move closer to this path of actualization - of actually becoming who we are meant to be in every area of our life. Living well in the small things moves us closer to the bigger dream, and in living well we are contributing to bringing goodness to the world.

Life looks different for each of us, and makes sense in a different way to each of us. We are a diverse creation, humanity, and the ways that we may choose to live our lives are just as diverse. Yet, when we are moving closer toward synching up our lives to match who we are with what the Teacher called us to, we are being obedient and true - to ourselves and to God. As we embody the ways of the Teacher in every dimension and cultural context of our lives, I believe that we will bring to greater completion the Kingdom of God that can already be found in our midst. We can only be who we were made to be, and we must be obedient to this. In doing so, we discover our true selves, and in this discovery, find God.

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