

# ~ 21 Days of Thanks ~

## ~ Day 15 ~ Imaginarians ~

Sometimes I make up words, but I like to think you're still able to find the concept embraceable. I knew I wanted something like visionary, dreamer, prophet, inventor or futurist, but not something as far-fetched as fortune-teller or Magic Bean Buyer. I mostly wanted to find a term for those folks whose *modus operandi* leads with, and invites us to ask, "What if?"

I'll occasionally hear or read someone whose unusual or innovative ideas cause me to say, "I like the way they think." Perhaps it's just uniquely new, but it stretches me, even toying with and teasing to possibility and opportunity, and it lights me up, somehow.

So, I landed on *Imaginarians* as the all-encompassing single term for all the characteristics I sought to bring together, now perfectly packaged in one sweeping and joyously mysterious word. Or, not...

My higher education studies were centered most intentionally on theology and journalism, but my interests ventured far beyond those disciplines (to music/theater/psychology/black holes in space/the old, abandoned dairy farm just off campus), and so my time and energy often did, as well, but probably with less discipline. I didn't know the things nearly to the depth of the people who majored in the field, but I knew of them and was interested. You don't have to be great at science, for instance, to be fascinated by it. We can be, and should be, intrigued by physics, archeology, animal and plant species, medicine, languages, philosophical thought, meteorology and how a bill becomes a law... well, maybe not *that* one.

Imaginarians since the dawn of time and humanity did this for us, whether the ancient genius necessary to imagine and then create the pyramids or more modern advances like the artificial heart or the fax machine, then on to harnessing the power of the sun, desalinization, landing on an asteroid, not to mention the ability to find and listen to any type of music you want anytime at the touch of a button or talk to someone and see them on a screen in real time, even as they sit, sing, work, run or make breakfast across the world from you. *Meet George Jetson*.

In our Christian tradition and within our creeds and liturgy is the proclamation, "We believe in God, who has created and is creating, who came in the true man Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new..."

And we started our 21 Days of Thanks by talking about Breath and a God who speaks things into being.

So, I'm thinking, somewhere out there, a nine-year old girl is talking with her six-year old little brother about hoping to go and live on a planet at the other end of the Milky Way, where all plant life is edible, people can fly naturally, and the body requires less muscle and heals itself when parts break or falter. She'd be able to look back in our celestial direction and see the sun twinkling like a star in the night sky and know that earth is near there, somewhere in that mix of stardust where long ago life was breathed in.

I'm not one of them. But, I know they stretch us and make us consider ourselves and our life in this world in ways most of the rest of us wouldn't without them and their fantastic nudging.

God bless the Imaginarians. And, you know... Thanks!

*What is man that You are mindful of him and the son of man that You visit him?*

*-Psalm 8*

**A Thankfulness Question:** You've held something in your hand or, at least, witnessed something working and said to yourself, "Somebody had to imagine this and then make it work." How is your life made better by something you never imagined you would need or find helpful?

**A Prayer:** *God of unimaginable possibility, you know more than we could ever ask or think in our prayers but also of our ability to do wondrous things in this world. Thank you for the wonders, especially the human ones. -Amen*

~ Take some time both to journal and to recall encountering an Imaginarian, or maybe consider becoming one. ~

# ~ 21 Days of Thanks ~

## ~ Day 16 ~ Craftsmen & Builders ~

If we look at the artists, as we did a few days back, and offer thoughtful thanks for what they bring to our lives, then the crafts-people, builders, also artists in their own right, bless and grace our lives, as well. And today, they have my thanks.

A few years ago we did a revisioning of our living spaces at our house, renovations, painters, construction, carpentry, mantle building which required skills beyond my knowledge and ability. And over the number of weeks of the project, which seemed to grow in scope as the days passed, I developed a special appreciation for Frank, Leo and Anthony whose hands-on experience and skill recreated our space.

Awed by their precision and care in construction, I found myself moved as well at their ability to capture the vision, and even offer their own amid the work, to see what I was sketching and explaining to them and allowing that to resonate in their craftsmen minds.

Our home holds some favorite wood pieces, a grandfather clock and a coffee table that Dad handled with care and purpose, either building or repurposing, sanding, connecting, rubbing in oil and staining. And I wonder about how much Jesus and Joseph worked together with wood, whether they worked as craftsmen or were day laborers, and if they had opportunity to build something together, special doors, a chair or table.

Those of us whose childhood years took place long prior to the predawn of the days before Legos, grew up with Lincoln Logs, Tinker Toys and Erector Sets as our building blocks for construction.

We didn't have to have them, because outside we found ways of turning dirt piles and sandy beaches into construction projects where homes, castles and roads to connect them took shape from hands building on imagination and the materials before us.

The chances are high that Joseph and Jesus knew stones for building more than they knew wood, simply because there just wasn't much wood available, at all, much less for building things. Most houses, temples and palaces would have been constructed from stones cut from the available quarries in the region. Local trees were too small and soft for sound structures, more resembling the ruptured broom-handle trees of Texas' southern coastal plains than the cedars of Lebanon, which would have provided plenty of wood for building were the trees not so large and Lebanon not so far, too far, away.

Certainly, Jesus referenced stones and builders and foundations, cornerstones are set, wise people build their houses on rock foundations, not sand, stones cry out, and on this rock I will build community...

Thanks to those who create spaces, both in structures and within their hearts, where the spirit of God can move and even moves us.

*At the end of twenty years, during which Solomon built these two buildings—the temple of the LORD and the royal palace— King Solomon gave twenty towns in Galilee to Hiram king of Tyre, because Hiram had supplied him with all the cedar and juniper and gold he wanted.*

*-1 Kings 9: 10-11*

**A Thankfulness Question:** Some spaces just feel good. Have you had a favorite space to be in, a home, workplace, room, or other structure where you felt you could dwell for a long time and feel content?

**A Prayer:** *Dear God, we lift up the skilled hands and working minds of those who build, create both living and practical space for our working lives, our comfort and protection. -Amen*

~ Take some time both to journal and to consider the thoughtful spaces others have created. ~

# ~ 21 Days of Thanks ~

## ~ Day 17 ~ Teacher/Mentors ~

We had folks we could look up to, heroes even, who showed us something in the way they worked and taught, perhaps lived, and the ways they let us in to how they thought and why.

They weren't perfect, but we didn't know that yet. And it didn't really matter, because whether they were formal educators or just people we knew and appreciated, we saw them for the manner in which they inspired us, planting seeds in the minds and hearts of others to grow them.

And even if they never had the professional title, I'm thankful today for those who've served as teachers and mentors in our lives, those whose input and influence was borne out of their charity of constructive criticism and encouragement, who saw your gift, talent or skill and led you to polishing as well as digging deeper and reaching higher, who looked on you with a proud smile and said, "You've got something..."

They see aspects of our ability, and perhaps even character, which we may not even know yet, and tend the soil so growth can happen. Mr. Melton carried me from the church children's choir to a little theater playhouse audition, Miss D saw something beyond the high school sophomore silly cleverness of my writing, and my father handed me "The Wit and Wisdom of Abraham Lincoln" and brought home from work airplane models and posters of rockets launching astronauts into space. Some professor handed me Camus, another Bonhoeffer, countless others Twain, Kierkegaard and T.S Eliot.

Some of the influencers were not people I knew personally, but knew of and respected, sort of the celebrity who shapes and molds from a distance. Walter Cronkite leads me to Edward R. Murrow. Nelson Mandela and MLK lead me to St. Francis. And, if I read Jefferson, Teddy Roosevelt or Robert Kennedy, then I'm richer for it.

I don't know if I would have ever written a song if Roger Schustereit hadn't recommended I take the three poems I wrote for his freshman English composition class and set them to music, but I'm glad he did.

And, all that's before I can even begin to form the list of those who, their lives and instruction, led me to, through and beyond what scripture tells us about Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, Messiah.

Jesus cautions his disciples, and us, about lifting up others to be exalted, but those who have guided and directed me, influenced and encouraged, were also those who, because I held them with respect, could also challenge me in ways I might not have heard and heeded as well from someone else.

The teachers and mentors, and friends, who've played this role in my life never lacked for humility or pounded their chest out of their sense of earned title or self-importance. They planted seeds, tended the soil, and moved on, or sent me to move on... and I like to think I grew better for it.

Thanks to those who make themselves available to us, who see us, nudge us, stretch us, and offer us a view to the possibility of forward.

*You are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers.*

*-Matthew 23:8*

*Why do you call me good, for no one is good but the Father.*

*-Mark 10:18*

**A Thankfulness Question:** Who in your life helped uncover or helped you discover the person you would become?  
What did they bring that mattered?

**A Prayer:** *Holy God, you have placed along our path those who manage to lead, guide and direct us in positive ways which build confidence and help us find ourselves. For their gifts to us, we offer thanks to you. -Amen*

~ Take some time to journal and recall the gratefulness teachers and mentors have enabled you to feel. ~

# ~ 21 Days of Thanks ~

## ~ Day 18 ~ Planet & Universe ~

Not many things in the known world hold more fascination for me than the formula for time and distance related to seeing a faraway object in the night sky and understanding how far away it is and what that means about how long it's been since it looked like what you're seeing.

The speed of light just lights me up... every time. Light travels at 186,282 miles per second. And before you determine I have a small grasp on the big picture, bear with me for a second.

Saturn is approximately 960 million miles from us. As the Cassini spacecraft travelled far enough to get up close and personal with Saturn, some of the images transmitted back showed a small spot of light visible between two sets of its rings as if someone had typed a period at the end of the sentence between the rings. That dot was us.

Jupiter is a smidge closer at 511 million, or 35 light minutes from earth. The sun is about 8 light minutes away from us here. Pluto is about 4.5 light hours from us, so if we could see it, we would actually be seeing what it looked like 500 minutes ago. Our fastest spacecraft *New Horizons* flew past Pluto five years ago, 10 years from its earthly launch, traveling in excess of 30,000 mph.

Another bit of perspective (yes, give us more examples, because we don't get it, yet), NASA's X-43A scramjet, the world's fastest manned aircraft, travels at speeds around 7,000 mph. Just stop for a second and try to imagine that speed. Then, pause to realize that's still 1,000 times slower than the speed of light.

Time, distance... measured in years, and that's within our own little solar system.

One of the farthest stars near what we believe to be the edge of the galaxy is about 890,000 light-years from Earth in the constellation Pisces—33 times farther from the Milky Way's center than we are.

So, when probes with incredible telescopes capture images from deep space as they enter the wider galaxy and universe, DUE TO THE SPEED OF LIGHT the images we receive give us a glimpse today of a time very near the beginning... the second the universe began.

From a Beginning-of-Everything standpoint, it really doesn't matter to me whether or where and how there once was a dust cloud and then a Big Bang, how chaos became order, sea and sky took their respective place, and dinosaurs lived and then died an unfortunate death. It's not so important to me how long all that took until, eventually, humans became part of the landscape, a little dull at first, but eventually learning to reason and figure out what it was like to learn to live in relationship with God. (Joni Mitchell was right. "We've got to get ourselves back to the garden.")

It's all incredibly fascinating, but I don't place the age of the universe and light speed formula on a chart next to the Genesis story to compare and contrast (and then complain) that one of these narratives is really wrong.

To be so "fearfully and wonderfully made," as the psalmist wrote, we are certainly a tiny and insignificant spec of stuff living on a relatively miniscule grain of rock when compared with even the amount of universe we speculate exists.

That makes me think of two things: First, an Eagles song lyric, "This is not the center of the universe, and that's alright with me," and second, for anyone who ever commented on their first apartment or home as a no-longer-dependent, "It's not much, but it's home."

Our little rock on our sliver of the universe is perfect for our survival, which is precisely why we're here and made the way we are. And, I won't get into an Earth Day, clean air, clean water rant, but when I see resources depleting and species with them, I grow a bit concerned that the next most habitable planet to us is about 28 million years away. And that's if we're flying at 30,000 mph, ignoring school zones, and not counting changing time zones. I worry just a bit that this gift of a living environment we have is exactly where we ought to be and that there is no Planet B.

So, today, I'm thankful for this amazing planet which fits us just fine and for the immenseness of the universe which also exists for some purpose unbeknownst to me, and probably for some reason more important than just to get me ridiculously excited about light speed.

*Before the mountains were brought forth and ever you have formed the earth and the world from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*  
-Psalm 90

**A Thankfulness Question:** What most amazes you about life on this planet in this universe and our place in it?

**A Prayer:** *Creator God, may we never lose sight of our single human place amid the wide, vast, expansive hugeness of this spread of galaxies, of planets and stars, and never cease to be thankful for its massive and awesome beauty.* -Amen

~ Take some time both to journal and to consider us, our planet home, and our place in the universe. ~

~ 21 Days of Thanks ~

## ~ Day 19 ~ The Silent, Praying & Contemplative ~

As you read these words right now, somewhere in a place of near-silence, a remote chapel, a convent, abbey, monastery, or underneath a tree by a brook, on their knees at an altar with eyes closed, prostrate with face next to the earth, or sitting alone in a small room where the light of one candle serves to spark remembrance of the presence of Christ, wherever the specific location, someone is praying.

Today, well every day, but today as we consider our thanks for things often overlooked, I am thankful for those who pray as their life's work.

As a young man, I recall holding an initial skepticism if not some questions of sanity concerning those cloistered and monastic, some adopting vows of silence, shutting out the rest of the world, reading only the words of scripture or the hymn sung, the psalms and corporate prayers of the liturgy and observing sacraments, who left behind all the rest of the life we know, all that is secular and commercial, male and female as Dominicans, Benedictine or Franciscans, some with added vows of poverty to accompany their lives of celibacy and silence.

I may have questioned, on first reading of St. Francis, as anti-social, not a little bit crazy, and in some measure a waste of good time and ability to set one's self aside for this separate purpose, alone.

But life, the gentle solace of quiet times apart from times of socializing, communication and laughter, and the realization the world has many skilled people in many arenas, and a few more folks devoting their time and energy to pray for a broken world, brought me to thinking this might be a good thing.

Make me an instrument of thy peace, Francis prayed. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light, and where there is sadness, joy. Oh, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood, as to understand, to be loved, as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Well, okay, little conversing-with-creatures Francesco had a way with how we should pray and order our lives, so I feel better about his mental and spiritual acuity than I did when I was 22 years old and knew everything.

Still, the other piece most embracing about the contemplatives, especially, is that while we're living our lives in the world, driving around, challenging authority or laying low trying not to be noticed, or getting wrapped around the axle about a host of side issues over which we have no control, the quiet and cloistered are praying for us and all our preoccupations.

The apostle Paul's notation that a hand is not a foot, an ear is not a heart, a brain is not a kidney is the reminder that we all have a function and a "purpose under heaven." Yours is not mine is not Paul's is not Francis', but all are needed to make the body work.

There's something supremely sacred and satisfying to consider that this is what the silent, praying and contemplative do, that it is who they are. They are the guarantee even in those times, and you know you've had them, when the words won't come and all we can muster is a sigh too deep for words, that someone, somewhere has decided it is their job to offer words up on your behalf to the God who hears us better than we are able to speak.

So, they do that. And, I'm thankful.

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

-Mark 4:39

**A Thankfulness Question:** What do you think about a group of individuals who have made it their calling to devote their lives to praying for the rest of us?

**A Prayer:** *Dear God, as your apostle instructed us to pray unceasingly and reminded us we are each called to his or her own best work and fitting skill set, may we serve you in our best way and be ever thankful for those who pray. -Amen*

~ Take some time both to journal and to consider that someone you don't even know is always praying with and for YOU. ~

# ~ 21 Days of Thanks ~

## ~ Day 20 ~ Life & Community ~

Pete's heart was equal parts heavy and broken.

"I don't know what people do who don't have a community," he said.

As he shared the story of his grandson, Clay, who had worked in a convenience store along the causeway until one solo-overnight was confronted at knifepoint for the cash, less than \$50, in his drawer, was stabbed and left for dead, it was all Pete could do to remain standing before us and talking, reliving and losing, while trying to continue the once-more and never-any-less-painful telling.

Pete had church, community, this tonight sanctuary and always a town full of folks who knew him, worked side-by-side with, went to school with, shared in Bible studies with, served on boards with, such that the weaving of relationships had so much texture and tinsel strength as to hold them close and hold them up, as communities do when they're at their best and most alive.

And, here, for this stable, caring teacher, father and church leader, we, the church, were able to be the loving arms, the smiling, knowing and caring faces, and the carriers of the balm brought to soothe and heal hearts both heavy and broken.

I don't know what people do who don't have community... who don't have a group of friends they can gather with over coffee around a table or on a patio, in a small prayer group, clearing trees or building wheelchair ramps for someone in need, or just a handful of someones who check in, for a pulse, or a hurt, or a need.

Don't be confused; neither Simon nor Garfunkel were rocks or islands, and neither are we. We are wired to be social animals, even if some do that with more ease than others.

Because the apostle Paul could not be present with the growing number of Christ followers in Corinth, Rome, Ephesus or Thessalonika, he wrote to them encouraging letters about how they would grow in faith and strength by also depending on one another. Even, and especially, for the faithful, there was power in numbers, especially as they stood together.

In his book *Life Together* Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks to our individual need to be part of a collection of others and of how the community is bread for all who are hungry for the real life of Christian fellowship. Certainly, Bonhoeffer knew this already but experienced its ultimate importance as he found himself in unique fellowship in an underground seminary during the reign of the Nazi years in Germany.

Pete may not have cared that evening in that sanctuary that he echoed Bonhoeffer's premise for Christian living as he stood before us and told the story of his family's loss and anguish, but we all understood that he spoke the truth about how we need one another, are better together, and make one another stronger... and, not least, help one another survive.

God calls us together into community to tell the ancient stories and to remember that we belong, that we matter, that our lives have meaning and purpose.

There's a servant song that says, "We are pilgrims on a journey, brothers on the road, here to help each other walk the miles and bear the load."

Thanks to those who live, work, or even fall apart sometimes in a community, a church or help organization that sustains the caring and sharing necessary to lean on and build up so that we are stronger and better equipped to love, help and serve others. Pilgrims on a shared journey, we all are, and not even Jesus recommended going it alone.

We need us. And, today, I'm also thankful for us.

*Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

*-1 Thessalonians 5:11*

**A Thankfulness Question:** Fill in the blanks in this statement. Community helps me \_\_\_\_\_.

**A Prayer:** *Holy and Healing God, we thank You today for the web of friends, cloud of witnesses, the network, the sounding board, safety net of people who bear us up, hold us close, show us love, and in so doing, show us You. -Amen*

~ Take some time both to journal and capture what is best about life found in community. ~

# ~ 21 Days of Thanks ~

## ~ Day 21 ~ Father, Son & Holy Spirit ~

Today is both thankful and confessional, as we offer our thanks for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, even if we couldn't explain if cross-examined in Theology Court precisely where one ends and the other begins. Such is the nature, well, umm, messy nature of the God who is three and one.

Alas, our confessional isn't one of shame. We simply wrestle, especially if we overthink it, how the Holy Trinity actually works. And, even better, we wrestle in good company with God-thinkers through the ages.

We sing and recite in hymns and creeds of a Trinity so neat and simple like solid, liquid, and gas or ice, water, steam, three natures of one entity. If it was a Three Musketeers bar, the wrapper would read ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR THREE.

Franciscan Richard Rohr has termed the nature of Trinity as it relates to us as God For, God Along, and God Within. Most of us land on something more akin to Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, and it's mostly because we can't think of Father without picturing a person.

St. Augustine eventually got to Initiator, Mediator and Unifier. Some have suggested Augustine spent so much time and energy on placing the Trinity at the center of his theology, because he believed man is utterly useless without God, lost and wandering, and he didn't want to be, you know, *that*.

Fr. Rohr offers his prayers in the Many Names of God, because, well, there are a lot of names for God.

We recite it in our creeds like we know what we're talking about. But the truth is, if we have to explain it in our own words, we'd find it's incredibly easy... to tie ourselves in knots.

Some have suggested we simply do not have the equipment, the mental capacity, necessary to understand something so utterly beyond us... but that has never stopped us from trying.

One guy in our suite at college believed if, at the end of your prayer, you didn't say the words "in Jesus name" then God never heard it. I've said a lot of things in my life that I regret. So, maybe since I didn't say those things in Jesus name, God didn't hear.

I can't tell you why Jesus prays to his Father if they're the same person. I can't tell you if Jesus knew all God knew, because that kind of complicates His Garden of Gethsemane prayer request. I get his needing to empty himself of all Divine power so that we could see Him and He could serve us and show us how to live, mostly so we can leave those spiritual brain teasers for another time, or another life.

So, we enter into the paradox and embrace the mystery, because otherwise, we're too overwhelmed by how much we can't make it fit with what we do know and understand. And, that's so far afield from the most important thing about God, isn't it?

God loves a good story and loves to have it retold. So, we should keep doing that, telling of Abraham, Moses, David, all trying to do their own thing and God's thing at the same time. God was with them. I Am, the God of the children of Israel, was with them.

The disciples, and those who were around to witness or benefit from his presence, had Jesus... with them.

When the walking, talking, healing, teaching, dying, rising Jesus was done doing all those things using his two feet on a dusty road, he passed the baton.

And the disciples receive Holy Spirit, the other counselor. Then Peter preached, and thousands experienced the barrier-breaking power of the Holy Spirit... with them.

It's not our job to fully understand God. Really, it's not. It's mostly our job to *experience* God with us, in all His forms, with all His names, and in whatever way He comes to us.

The story of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is about love and relationships that started at the beginning and last forever, even if we've spent over 2000 years trying to nail that down.

Know on this Twenty-First day of our Thanks that this mystery may mean we can't entirely know God. But if the 20 days prior to this one have shown us one thing, it's that we CAN know something about God...

in Breath, Daily Bread, the Senses, Nature, Art, those who Mentor, those blessed Silent, Cloistered and Praying folks, or in a Community of like-minded, like-broken and like-loved.

We see and experience God in all those things, in all these 21 days and more, and with all our Thanks.

*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.*

*-Matthew 28:19*

**A Thankfulness Question:** Which of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit natures of God do you connect with best or most often?

**A Prayer:** *Holy God, we give You names to express and explain your power, ability, fullness, presence, comfort and abiding love, mostly to help us picture You better and provide us with an image we can see. But, today, we are most thankful for all the reasons we have **to be** thankful, in these days and all our days. We offer You thanks, using all the many names we have for God. -Amen*

~ Take some time both to journal and be thoughtful about these three natures of God among us, and all the other ways we experience Him for which we have no entirely appropriate and all-encompassing name. ~