

Week 3

Excerpt from forthcoming book, title unknown

by Serene Jones

In Chapter 1 you write that a challenge of this book is to explore how an imagination shaped by grace might meet and heal an imaginative world disordered by violence. Can you describe in your mind such an imagination shaped by grace today? What would that look like in terms of daily life? Can we do things to nurture such an imagination shaped by grace?

In terms of daily life practices, I'm exploring three or four things. First, yoga has been a miracle for me. One image that is used to describe trauma is that the normal flow of energy through our nervous system is through the system and then out. But in trauma it gets turned back in on itself, and so this violent energy circulates inside you. The ancient practice of yoga is so helpful because it opens up your body. I think we need to pay more attention to things we do that open us up. For some people that may be as simple as singing. Church singing does that. Running can do that. But there have to be ways of physically inhabiting the world that shift your patterns.

Second, prayer and meditation are an essential part of opening us up. In prayer I open myself up to experience the love of God to let that new love that I don't control come into me. As I watch my own thoughts in meditation, I've been made aware of those feedback loops of violence. They suddenly become an object to you that you can see you're stuck in. You need to give yourself enough time in space to meditate and watch your mind.

Third, I find that allowing yourself to write poetry or to write in ways that aren't contained by normal structures of thought helps nurture this imagination shaped by grace. Poetry is wonderful. It cracks open the imagination. I also think the arts do that. People who are poets and artists can give us that experience, but we can also do that in our own ordinary ways by painting, drawing, writing, so that those unconscious spaces of harm in us begin to surface and can be engaged and rearranged.

Finally, I think that people need people and you need to find a community for this new story to be told and you need to be able to tell the story in order to imagine a new way. You can't do it in isolation. Of course, as soon as you get into community, you get into the messes that communities are.

There are so many reasons why the church is in crisis, but one of those is that our expectations about how perfect communities should be is always going to fall short of what real communities actually are. Church communities, like any other type of community, are never going to be perfect, because they're made up of people. They will never be well ordered, nice spaces to be in. Of course, we have to get rid of the really awful things like white supremacy and misogyny that run rampant through these communities, but even in the best communities people are still messed up. And who wants a world where we all agree with each other anyway? That would not be a very creative, interesting world. But we can hope for a world where we stop destroying each other.

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