

Epiphany II  
Bob Hartung  
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### Got an Idea?

May your words help open our hearts and minds, our eyes and ears to what you, O Lord, have in store for us.  
Amen.

As we leap into a new decade, I thought it might be interesting to think about who we are, how we got here, and where we are going. As we leap into a new decade, I am blessed to have this opportunity to share some ideas that may help us, we the people of St. Peter's, to provoke questions, as we look and work into the future.

One day this past summer, I was in a bookstore. A book caught my eye. The title was intriguing, the illustrations were cool, I opened it, and 479 words later I was blown away. The book is titled "What Do You Do With an Idea?" by Kobi Yamada. Sit back and listen to my friend...

*One day, I had an idea.*

*"Where did it come from? Why is it here?" I wondered, "What do you do with an idea?"*

*At first, I didn't think much of it. It seemed kind of strange and fragile. I didn't know what to do with it.*

*So, I just walked away from it.*

*I acted like it didn't belong to me.*

*But it followed me.*

*I worried what others would think. What would people say about my idea?*

*I kept it to myself. I hid it away and didn't talk about it. I tried to act like everything was the same as it was before my idea showed up.*

*But there was something magical about my idea. I had to admit, I felt better and happier when it was around.*

*It wanted food. It wanted to play. Actually, it wanted a lot of attention.*

*It grew bigger. And we became friends.*

*I showed it to other people even though I was afraid of what they would say. I was afraid that if people saw it, they would laugh at it. I was afraid they would think it was silly.*

*And many of them did. They said it was no good. They said it was too weird. They said it was a waste of time and that it would never become anything.*

*And, at first, I believed them. I actually thought about giving up on my idea. I almost listened to them.*

We'll come back to our friend in a moment...

Ours is a story of an idea. The altar window tells that remarkable story. It tells a story of the past, the present, and the future. We have all seen the window, but I invite you to get up close and listen to it, as it sums up the life of the parish and our community. Beginning at the bottom left side and moving upward the artistry depicts the old St. Peter's church with a group planning for the new church; our church, this sacred place, under construction; Bishop Hart laying the cornerstone; people praying in the completed church; the Sacrament of Holy Communion being shared by the St. Peter's community.

Ours is a story of an idea, an idea rooted in the hearts and minds of our forbearers in the 1950's. An idea they did not give up on...An idea that changed the world and established a community...our community...for those who would stay but more importantly, for those who were to come after. It is miracle...this place this community was established for us before most of us got here.

We are here perhaps because of something in the window. Beginning with the upper right pane and descending, we see a compendium of our spiritual lives. Holy Baptism, a spiritual birth; children's choir in procession showing the youth in community among us; Confirmation, a spiritual commitment; Marriage, joining families; Burial of the Dead, a celebration of life. We all have a connection with this spiritual procession...a connection by, and through, and because of St. Peter's. The people of St. Peter's who walked before us planned, and built and established a community...

Back to the story as our friend realizes the need to care for the idea...

*But then I realized, what do they really know? This is MY idea, I thought. No one knows it like I do. And it's okay if it's different, and weird, and maybe a little crazy.*

*I decided to protect it, to care for it. I fed it good food. I worked with it, I played with it. But most of all, I gave it my attention.*

*My idea grew and grew. And so did my love for it.*

*I built it a new house, one with an open roof where it could look up at the stars – a place where it could be safe to dream.*

*I liked being with my idea it made me feel more alive, like I could do anything. It encouraged me to think big...and then, to think bigger.*

*It shared its secrets with me. It showed me how to walk on my hands. "Because," it said, "it is good to have the ability to see things differently."*

*I couldn't imagine my life without it.*

I am reminded of a story in John's Gospel...the early morning story when Jesus reveals himself to the disciples after their frustrating fishing expedition of the prior evening.

*Jesus said to them, Children, do you have any fish? No, they answered. He said, throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some. When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.*

Jesus instructs us to change our thinking, "cast the net to the right". The instruction was not to cast the net to the "other side" of the boat, but rather it specifies the "right side". Jesus' request was counterintuitive to the disciples, for one, they had not tried it, and two, they were, for crying out loud, professional fishers, and they knew full well the time-tested methods...that's why they never tried it! A casting to the right side of a boat was a ridiculous notion. Unlike modern watercraft that employ centerline runners, the steering apparatus, on 1<sup>st</sup> century vessels, was on the right side of the ship; because most sailors were right handed. 1<sup>st</sup> century fishermen would not have fished on the right side of the boat for fear of tangling their nets in the steering assembly and consequently losing their catch.

Jesus calls His followers to think outside-of-the-box, to the other side of the boat, and to trust in the everlasting promise of the Holy Spirit.

Bishop Gutierrez talks about living fearlessly through Christ. Let us move forward fearlessly, let us be innovative, loving and willing to lead.

I like to say, "we are where we came from." We are rooted in our formative years and experiences. So, I came from a conservative background and upbringing. [Now I know that word is cringe worthy but fear not I don't bite nor will I apologize]. One thing I have learned about myself is that I can find joy with past and choose to keep close those traditions dear to me while finding great joy with the prospects of the future and the changes to come. Some find joy in older institutions. It's natural to fear old ways being forgotten; scared of letting go.

But the new is constantly meeting the old. I can embrace my traditions along with my forward-looking vision. The past has brought us to this day and on this day we are at the threshold of tomorrow.

During our spring vestry retreat, we discussed an article by Jeffrey D. Jones, a pastor in the American Baptist Church, *New Questions for a New Day*. He writes, *“It’s time for the church to begin asking new questions. Nice answers to the same old questions about the church will not get us through the crazy times in which we live. This is a time for out-of-the box thinking. Old questions keep us in the box. New questions invite us to move outside.”*

Bp. Gutiérrez has written about the diocese, *“In a world of increasing secularism and separation, our time is now. We can no longer plan for a church suited to 1950; our ministry is to prepare for 2050 and beyond. The world needs us, and we need to be part of the world”*. The world needs St. Peter’s and we need to be part of the world...now and beyond.

It’s not that the old questions have no place in church today. Rather, the new questions, if they form our approach to ministry, will lead us to new insights and new learning.

Pastor Jones continues, *“When congregations focus on strategic planning they ask, ‘What’s our vision and how do we implement it?’ What would happen if they instead asked, ‘What’s God up to and how do we get on board?’ and*

*In these days of changing roles and responsibilities many wonder, ‘What should the priest do?’ But a more important question for congregations today is ‘What is our shared ministry?’”*

There are no “right” answers to these questions. However, by asking new questions we may discover that they take us down a road to some other alternative that we have not even thought of before. Asking new questions will bring us closer to discovering what God is seeking from us in this time. I also believe asking these new questions will help ensure that whatever the future holds for us we will be more faithful in the work we are about right now. And that is a pretty wondrous thing!

Today, we heard Paul’s words to the people in Corinth, *There are a variety of gifts, and there are a variety of services, but the same Spirit. To each of us is given gifts of that Spirit for the common good. We have been given wisdom and knowledge, gifts of healing, discernment and interpretation. Each is enabled by the one Spirit who allots to us individually.*

We have been enriched and endowed by the Holy Spirit...we are not lacking in any gift.

Ideas are known and unknown to us. The ideas of the past spawn works of tomorrow. The plan for this space and this community, the idea of casting nets in a different way, the idea of shared ministry, the idea of the Joining, the idea of living fearlessly through Christ, YOUR IDEA...Paul tells us we are empowered to use our gifts and ideas through Jesus. Take a chance...try your idea at St. Peter’s, help someone who has an idea.

Our ideas and our mutual ministry today will ensure St. Peter’s will be here for us, our children, their children, the stranger looking for the warmth and comfort of Christ in our midst.

We don’t know what tomorrow will bring, but we have what we need to bring to tomorrow.

So as the story draws to a close, our friend is amazed...

*Then, one day, something amazing happened. My idea changed right before my very eyes. It's spread its wings, took flight, and burst into the sky.*

*I don't know how to describe it, but it went from being here to being everywhere. It wasn't just part of me anymore...it was now part of everything.*

*And then, I realized what you do with an idea...*

*You change the world.*

Amen