

July 31, 2022

Based on Youth Mission Trip to “The Center” in Baltimore, MD

Christa Joyce, Youth Leader

Good morning friends. Today I’m going to ask you to consider boundaries. What do you think of when I say the word *Boundary*? Perhaps you think right away of geographical points—imaginary lines that separate states and other places, or not so imaginary boundaries from one location to another such as a bridge, a river, an ocean. Maybe you see the boundaries that delineate points in the roads. You may envision the banks of the river enclosing the water within. Perhaps you imagine the personal boundaries you create to keep yourself safe. Maybe it’s the constraints that metaphorical boundaries around your time, your money, your energy create. Or boundaries of economical status, of race, of gender. I wonder if you might then ask yourself who creates these boundaries and from where or whom they originate. I wonder, too, if you would know that the definition of *Boundary* is “a line that marks the limits of an area; a dividing line.” And knowing that, what you might say about the boundaries around your mind. If a boundary marks the limits of an area and divides, what are the boundaries of your own imagination? How is your mind, and heart, divided by what you are and are not willing to see, where you’re willing to go, what you’re willing to come in close to, what you’re willing to risk? How are these boundaries keeping you safe, and what are they costing you?

So now I’ll ask you to consider a story that perhaps you know of a woman who, after hemorrhaging for 12 years and consulting physicians to no avail, found herself pushing through a crowd of people to touch the hem of Jesus’ robe. Consider the boundaries she crosses to do so—the boundary between the two genders; between Jesus the rabbi and a person with no status. The boundary of people around Jesus. The boundary between sickness and health, between fear and faith, between death and salvation. Consider what it likely cost her to cross these and what she gains, as she is called by Jesus ‘daughter’ and finally experiences healing.

The youth, chaperones, and I were asked to consider these very things as we walked and drove and worked throughout the city of Baltimore on our five-day summer missions trip. We were asked to consider what we saw as we crossed from one created boundary line to the next—boundaries fixed in history by redlining districts in the 1930’s, and the economic and wellness disparity from street to street that has been perpetuated into the present. Neighborhoods that were labeled “hazardous” based on the race and ethnicity of the people living there were marked by the boundary lines of a street or in some cases a wall to section off neighborhoods that were worthy of a bank’s investment.

So consider this—what do you see when you imagine a street or a neighborhood that’s long been told it’s worth an investment? What about a street or neighborhood that is told it isn’t? I wonder if you see a disparity in the amount and size of trees, in windows lined with flowers or lined with trash, in building livability? And who do you see in each space—what do the people look like and where do you see them? This was part of the work we were asked to do on our recent trip—to witness, to look closely, to consider the costs of these dividing lines, what limits they’ve placed on the earth and people around which they’re drawn.

Yet, there’s more. So much more than the challenges. Cross these boundaries in your mind and you might see, as we did, healing, faith, resurrection from death into life. You might see people doing work for which they’ll

only ever see the smallest of rewards in their own lifetime. You might see boundaries crossed that your human imagination can't even comprehend.

Nature is a great teacher, a show-er of the redemptive quality of imagination. Nature reveals the ways we can't even begin to imagine, the possibilities that lie outside the boundaries of our imagined worlds. Adrienne Maree Brown, author and founder of the Emergent Strategy Ideation Institute, says in her recent interview with Krista Tippett, that in so many ways we are living inside the world we were told to imagine, inside the imaginations that someone else told us were true. And so she poses the questions, "what does it look like to imagine beyond the constructs? What does it look like to imagine a future where we all get to be there, not causing harm to each other, and experiencing abundance?" The work that happens in the garden spaces in which we worked in Baltimore might seem like they're doing very little to rebalance the deeply tipping scales of systemic racism or for drug addiction. Yet, nature has something important to teach us about imagining beyond the boundaries of what we can see right now. And about the power of very small things.

I grew up hearing about resurrection, but it is a different thing entirely to *feel* resurrection, and to stand and witness it. It is an incredible thing to have my own imagination blown away by the imaginative power of another's vision, by the power of death to life. And an even more incredible thing to be led past the boundaries of my mind into radical imagination for a future that might be more just, more whole, more alive not just for some but for all.

So, another story. This is one of the greatest stories I've witnessed in my lifetime and it's about a woman who reached out to touch the hem of Jesus' robe in the form of a garden she was told would and could never be. You've likely heard us tell of a beloved woman named Precious and the Glenwood Life Recovery Center. I've been touched by Precious and the work she initiated ever since I met her, but this was the first time I've experienced the power of having my own limited imagination blown open. In the days before we went back to the Glenwood life Recovery Garden, we were in a different garden in the back of a very special Lutheran church where children played not so far from a section of the space where we discovered the remains of people's drug and alcohol use. To the side of Amazing Grace Lutheran church's garden, was a section of land covered in needles, tunics, broken liquor bottles, dirty clothes, and other refuse. It was hard on my heart and literally hard for my eyes to see, but the youth wouldn't let me walk away. Slowly we moved through the area so they could guide me to clean it all up. Two days later, we returned to Glenwood Life where we witnessed a garden space in full bloom. Multiple raised beds bursting with vegetables and herbs. A whole section of flowering and abundant native plants making up a peace garden. In all the years I've gone to this space this was the first time I've been at a time of year when I was able to witness the plants alive and thriving. And it was beautiful. But remembering back to Amazing Grace's garden space I realized how much more than beautiful it is. Once upon a time, Glenwood life, with its abundant plants, beauty and life far beyond the scope of my imagination, was filled with an even greater amount of the very same sorts of trash that we'd cleaned just days before. The Glenwood Life space now pulsates with life, with love, with beauty. There is no more trash. The people from the Center and the neighborhood come out into the space to talk to us as we work, to thank us, to gaze out at its beauty. The power of nature, and of a woman who refused to be limited by the boundaries of all she'd been told were confining her, whose imagination went far beyond the constructs of what she could literally see, has meant that a very small thing is making a very big difference in the bodies and spirits of the people who come to witness, live, and work here. Will everyone get off drugs or will systemic racism shift

because of gardens? I don't know, but I do believe working toward the peaceable kingdom starts by envisioning outside the domain of the possible and in reminding people and the earth that they're loved by a wildly imaginative, life-giving, resurrection making God. And gardens might be as good a place to start showing this as any.

Writing this made me think of a poem that gets me every time I read it. It's called...

On Another Panel About Climate, They Ask Me To Sell the Future and All I've Got Is a Love Poem, by Ayisha Siddiqa

What if the future is soft and revolution is so kind that there is no end to us in sight.

Whole cities breathe and bad luck is bested by a promise to the leaves.

To withstand your own end is difficult.

The future frolics about, promised to no one, as is her right.

Rage against injustice makes the voice grow harsher yet.

If the future leaves without us, the silence that will follow will be an unspeakable nothing.

What if we convince her to stay?

How rare and beautiful it is that we exist.

What if we stun existence one more time?

When I wake up, get out of bed, my seven year old cousin

with her ruptured belly tags along.

*Then follows my grandmother, aunts, my other cousins
and the violent shape of their drinking water.*

*The earth remembers everything,
our bodies are the color of the earth and we
are nobodies.*

Been born from so many apocalypses, what's one more?

Love is still the only revenge. It grows each time the earth is set on fire.

*But for what it's worth, I'd do this again.
Gamble on humanity one hundred times over*

Commit to life unto life, as the trees fall and take us with them.

I'd follow love into extinction.

So friends, I would ask you—as you imagine boundaries, can you also imagine walking past them into life and love? This generation of youth has a GPS system that is guiding them far beyond the boundaries the world has told them they should mind. I can't help but feel hopeful then that if I listen and follow them, I might get to work toward the same.

Jillian Dillow, Youth

"God didn't create fences for us or boundaries to contain our nationalities. Man did. God didn't draw up religious barriers to separate us from each other. Man did," says Suzy Kassem, a writer and activist. On the youth's mission trip to Baltimore, we discussed to great length the use of boundaries. We focused on how boundaries can be helpful in many situations, but at the same time, they can restrict us from seeing the truth that we might want to ignore or push aside, and how the only way to create relationships is by crossing those boundaries.

Going on the mission trip for me was crossing a giant boundary. For some reason, I decided to spend half a week with several people who knew each other well from past trips, and as someone who isn't around other people all that much, it was intimidating. I also knew we would be in places I had never been before, doing things I had never done before, and that, too, was scary. But I found that what we learned over the evening meetings with the people who run the center proved true. Taking those steps to go over my boundaries definitely helped me form friendships with the other youth, who, I learned, can be a bit crazy sometimes, but they are all wonderful people. It was truly a joy to spend time and learn with them.

One of the most meaningful boundaries I crossed during the mission trip was on the last day, when we were getting ready to leave Glenwood Life Recovery Garden. Across the street is the Glenwood Life Counseling Center. Earlier that day, someone who worked there, Octavia, had come over to the garden to meet us. When she went back to the Center, she brought some produce that had been harvested from the garden. While we were packing up, we realized that we had forgotten to give her the last bag of food, so William and I carried it across the street. I was slightly nervous going into the Center, as I didn't completely know how we were supposed to find Octavia, but we walked into this building where everyone was wearing masks and being extremely Covid safe, and there was a physical barrier separating people walking in from the person at the desk. It was an intimidating space to be in, but we found Octavia, and her excitement upon seeing the rest of the food more than made up for any uncomfortableness I had from going in that place. I crossed a boundary, and because of it, I can still remember how happy she was when she saw the cucumbers, and it stuck with me as William and I left.

So, sometimes boundaries are there for reasons, but, as I learned on the mission trip, questioning why those boundaries are in place and crossing the ones that keep you separate from people can have truly amazing results.

Sophia Tuzzio, Youth

This was my second mission trip.

I liked my first mission but that was only a two or three day thing and I was a little scared that my second week long trip would be a little too long for me. It turned out that I enjoyed it a lot more.

We did lots of garden work all around Baltimore and met many people. We also had another church do the work with us.

On the first full day we went to church at the place we were going to work the next day. There was a lady who was around 102 years old! And she had collected the offering. That afternoon we went on a justice tour around the city and saw a stuffed animal attached to a pole. We learned that it was a memorial for someone who had died.

The next day we went back to that church and helped plant flowers. While we were there some people from our group found lots of needles and one of my friends was counting up the amount of caps we found and how much it would cost. Seeing that really put it into perspective for me because if there were that many needles in this one place, imagine how many there were in the whole city.

The next day we went to a beautiful garden where we got to harvest some crops and a few of us got to kill some beetles that were harming the plants. I think this was my favorite activity we did during the week because after working while eating lunch we got to hear about the man we had been working with and also more about Baltimore.

The final day we went to the Glenwood life recovery center. It was super hot but I got to jump on a plank of wood to make it fit in its place. I loved doing the work and learning about Baltimore but I also enjoyed hanging out with the youth group. We were able to play a bunch of games and have fun conversation. I also learned that the two other girls in our group knew all the words to American pie.

Over all the trip was super fun and a great learning experience. I am looking forward to the next trip.