

Along the track

Tis

Tis is the second book written by Frank McCourt, the author of the bestselling book, *Angela's Ashes*. Tis means 'it is', as in 'tis a fine day' and the like. The book 'Tis' is a memoir of McCourt's time learning how to live in New York City where he went after an impoverished childhood in Ireland.

It wasn't a great book and many didn't like it, especially the people of Limerick where he spent his childhood. They felt it portrayed them and their city in a bad light so, when Tis was published they put up posters and hung banners across the city with one word on them – Tisn't!

Sometimes we may be told that this is the way things always have been, this is the way things are. Just accept it. That is rarely the case. The world we live in, the neighbourhood in which we live often challenges us to realise 'tisn't'. This is not the way things ought to be. Imagine a better way. Imagine how things might be.

Imagination is not some flight from reality, a day dream, a phantasy. It is rather an expression of hope, a realisation that something is as yet unfulfilled and that I can do something about it. Imagine what might not have happened, what might not have been discovered, how our lives might not have been improved if scientists, doctors, researchers, politicians had not imagined another way.

The world Jesus entered was crying out for change. He lived in an occupied country. Be careful, he was told. Don't upset them. He came to a religion, too rigid, too patriarchal, with power in the hands of the few. Don't change anything. This is the way things are. He came to a religion out of step with the culture too much consumed with its own agenda. That's the way it is meant to be, he was told. These are the rules, the way it must be.

Jesus asked those who came to him to imagine, to think of a better way. His stories often begin with the word 'Imagine.' Imagine the sower going out to sow the seed. Imagine the person who has found a treasure in the field or imagine the person who has discovered a priceless pearl. He used stories and images so that we might be able to imagine what God is like, what the vision or reign of God might look like. Imagine God – God is like the Good Shepherd, God is like the father of the prodigal son who goes out to meet him, God is like the vine and we are like the

branches kept alive by that vine. In his sermon on the mount, and his story of the good Samaritan he calls us to imagine a fairer way, imagine a place where all people are welcome, where people feel loved and accepted. He was continually told, you can't say that, this is the way things are.

Isn't it interesting how children seem to be born with such creative imagination. It would appear that they can dream up just about anything, that there are no limits to imagination. But gradually life takes over and imagination diminishes. 'You can't say that', 'you can't be that', 'it's just the way things are'. Tisn't, though. Fear can stifle imagination. Fear of change, fear of getting hurt or being laughed at, fear of something new and different. Or just fear itself.

But this is a ripe time for imagining, to ask the question: 'What would happen if . . .?' Over centuries, that has given birth to inventions, to revolutions, to new social movements. It could do the same as we struggle to bring God's transforming love to our world so sorely in need of it.

It doesn't have to be this way, what would happen if...when we bring our imagination to the world around us, we can see other ways, we can shape and transform not only what lies outside us, but also our own selves. That takes courage. Imagination enables us to picture reality in a new way, to think about what might be and why. Imagination is having the courage to think about something new and having the courage to say it, to share it, to be open to how others see and imagine.

Imagination isn't an escape for reality but a creative way of engaging with it. It invites us to see the world as Jesus did, Jesus who called us to 'imagine'. The imagination invites us to grapple with what, with the help of God's grace, we can become.

Albert Einstein is reported to have said: "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle."

Regards
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