

If I Had A Hammer

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Nearly a decade and a half ago Malcolm Gladwell published his groundbreaking book *The Tipping Point*. *The Tipping Point* seeks to explain the phenomenon that repeatedly occurs in history when a certain idea or a trend or a particular social behavior reaches a certain threshold in the collective human consciousness that it all of a sudden it tips in its acceptance or popularity. It tips from being just a moment or just a local phenomenon or just a curious little behavior – to becoming a movement, a force, almost an epidemic. In the book Gladwell studies the progression of things like fashion trends or the popularity of a new product or even the rise and fall of crime rates – and he tries to explain the primary factors that go into the tipping moment. The tipping point. Much of it has to do with the type of people who are involved and the type of connections they have to other people. But another factor that Gladwell point to the stickiness of an idea. The stickiness of an idea. There are just some ideas or practices or trends that stick – simply because of their compelling nature. And once an idea sticks – it fast reaches its tipping point – and once it reaches its tipping point there isn't much you can do about it. Victor Hugo, a hundred years earlier, put it this way – “No army can stop an idea whose time has come.”

Take for example the social network Facebook. Something created after Gladwell's book.

Ten short years ago Facebook did not exist.

It was an idea that came to a Harvard undergraduate to create personal pages on the computer with an ability for people to share information with other people and to have conversation in real time. It was an idea that was intended only for the campus of Harvard University. But no army can stop an idea whose time has come. So then it spread to other college campuses with the idea that it would be contained only among college students – no parents and other adults allowed. But no army can stop an idea whose time has come. And before you knew it within months Facebook became a global phenomenon. And in a few short years Facebook has become one of the largest and most highly valued companies in the world. All from the confines of a college dorm room. The idea stuck. And when an idea sticks what will soon follow is the tipping point.

So speaking of tipping points it would appear that this is where we are in our creed this morning. We have been taking the journey through the historic creed of our faith – the Apostles' Creed – beginning with our belief in God the Father – the Creator of Heaven and Earth. We have looked around at the created order and imagined that there must be a creative and personal force behind all that is – that there was someone behind the wonder and beauty of all that exists.

And then we drew our attention to the person of Jesus Christ and we declared in faith that this first century Palestinian rabbi Jesus was the incarnation of God – conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate and was crucified, dead and buried and descended into hell. And by saying all this we have said that God in his love sees the wonderful world that God has created, having fallen into disarray and chaos and disorder – and God in Jesus Christ enters the world – and by entering the world endures the brokenness of our world and of our lives and takes upon himself the sin of the world. He atones for our sin on the cross. He accomplished redemption. He finishes the necessary work of sacrificial love. And then comes the word – the word of today that says – that instead of this being just another one of those tragic hero stories where the good guy dies a good death in his effort to save the town – a story as old as time. Instead what the word of today says – is that on the third day he rose again from the dead – (in other words, he came alive again) he

came alive again from the dead, he ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father, Almighty. This One who suffered and died in love – is the One who reigns with the Father in heaven. This One whose hand and feet were nailed to the tree – is the One whose kingdom has begun. This is the new kingdom. The kingdom of the crucified and risen Savior. Something has happened here. Something historic has happened here. A new reality, a new idea has been introduced. That this sacrificial life and love of Jesus has been shown to be the new order. The new reality. The new idea. Human and cosmic history has now all of a sudden tipped. We have reached the tipping point. The idea has stuck.

And what the tipping point says – is that the way of the cross – the sacrificial love of the crucified one – the shame and embarrassment of the death – the sharp pain of the nail – all these things have been transformed into instruments of the new creation. Taking the old things that we may have once used for ourselves and for selfish gain and for power and for hurt and for harm and turning them into instruments of love and grace. If you can take a cross – the cruel and unusual punishment of a long ago empire – if you can take an instrument of torture and a slow and painful death and somehow make it into a symbol of life and love that people now wear as religious jewelry – then most certainly you have reached a tipping point. When the crucified Savior rises, ascends and sits at the right hand of the Father – well then that means everything in this world can be turned into a redemptive purpose. The talent we possess, the money we make, the time we spend – all of it can be turned into a redemptive purpose.

It is, I suppose, what the prophet had in mind when he spoke of that day when the nations shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. That there would someday come a tipping point when it would make sense for people to take the old tools of power and gain and hurt and harm and beat them into instruments that bring life and blessing and joy and sustenance. That there would be this new idea – this new fashion – this new way of life that people would lay hold of --or better yet, that would lay hold of people because they finally got the point that

the crucified One is the One who sits at the right hand of the Father. There is a new sheriff in town – a new administration – a new kingdom, the kingdom of the crucified and risen Lord.

You see it, don't you, taking hold in the lives of those first disciples who somehow, somehow have been taken hold of, and one by one they start turning into new people. No longer the doubting, denying, betraying, fleeing ex-associates of Jesus – but on that day of Pentecost they are speaking new languages and showing new courage and inviting new people into the life of sacrificial love. Something has happened here. There has been a tipping point.

Or to see the apostle Paul – back when they called him Saul of Tarsus – who made it his mission to put to rest the rumor of resurrection - to mount the armies to squelch the new idea. That such a thing could occur – that a misguided rabbi dead on a cross – could somehow be raised. Silly idea, Saul said. Bad idea, Saul said. But then came the day when the resurrected One appeared on the road – the ascended One, the One sitting at the right hand of the Father – he appeared on the road – and now all of a sudden the one who murdered apostles is turned into an apostle himself. He had been laid hold of. The tipping point had arrived. And now the one who once tore down lives, was now beginning to build up lives. The swords have been beat into ploughshares. Spears into pruning hooks.

It's the same man who wrote that for those who have been called – for those who have been grabbed by the new idea – for those who have been laid hold of by the Spirit – for those who have been called according to such purposes – why all things can be turned into good through the love of the crucified and risen One. The new reality is that once you've been captured by the new idea – why there is nothing in this world that cannot be redeemed.

Two extraordinary musicians died in this past month or so. Alice Sommer died last week. You remember reading about her. The longest living survivor of the Holocaust. She died at the age of 110. There are a thousand different reasons for why and how a woman who spent years in a concentration camp can live to a 110 – but Alice Sommer said was that the reason she was alive was

because of the music. She had been a great student of music before Hitler had come to power – and in particular a student of Chopin. She imbedded the beautiful music of Chopin into her mind and soul. It laid hold of her. It stuck. She said that is what saved her in the camps – she could play this beautiful music from deep within. They wanted her for her beautiful music. And when she was released and learned that most of her family had been murdered -- all the hurt and pain and bitterness that was want to follow her into the rest of her life – it was sent away from her by the music. She had been laid hold of by the music. It was her tipping point. It was what kept me alive, she said. And it is what keeps me alive. Even with two crippled fingers, she simply learned to play with 8 fingers. It kept her alive. All the way to 110.

There are these things, you see, that get deep into our soul – that stick to our souls – and they forever change the way we view the world. That instead of the world being a place where we harbor our stuff, harbor our anger, harbor our money, harbor our resentments – sometimes something sticks to our souls and makes us see that everything in this world can be redeemed.

On the third day, we say – the crucified One came alive again – ascended into heaven and now sits at the right hand of the Father – it is the new order of things. The new composer. The music that takes hold. The tipping point of history. Allowing us to take the stuff of this world, even the forces of evil and selfishness and harm and hurt and make them into instruments of life and blessing and joy and sustenance. Work your way through the New Testament and you'll find person after person Jesus inviting to take the stuff of their life and to turn it into redemption. For the rich man it was his money – could his money be redeemed? For the tax collectors, it was their tax collecting – could their work be redeemed? For Peter it was his relationships. How many times must I forgive? he asked Jesus. 7 times? And Jesus said 70 times 7. For Barnabas it was his parcel of land – could his land be redeemed? For the centurion it was his sword and armor – could his weapon be redeemed?

And for us?

That would be our hope. It would be our hope that somehow we might be claimed again by the new idea. The new creation. The new music. That the power and love of the Crucified One would take hold of us again and make us into new creations. And so we put before us, as we do each year, this season of Lent. This journey again to the cross. This pilgrimage to see again the nails. The nails of those Romans. Weapons of the old order – that they thought were enough to put down the new idea. To put down the advancing love. To put down the sacrificial Savior. But they didn't know that the point was tipping. The time had come when even their nails would be redeemed. That the Savior himself would turn them from the symbol of death and torture into the symbol of new life and forgiveness and the building up of new things. This is what we lay claim to in Lent – the nails of a new order. The building material of the new kingdom. Tools not to destroy or tear down, but the tools to build and make possible a new hope. Beating the swords into ploughshare and the spears into pruning hooks.

We began just this past Wednesday to make available to each and every one of you a symbolic nail of the new order. The symbol of the love of the Savior who takes upon himself the sins of the world ... and the symbol of the love of the Savior whose mission it is to make all things new. To build up the new kingdom.

On your way out the door you will be offered a nail of the new order to take with you. It is attached to a card that invites you to wonder what might be built up in your life. Perhaps you are called to build community in and around you. Or build comprehension of the life in Jesus Christ. Or build compassion for God's people. Or build commitment through the generosity of your time and your talent and your treasure. In other words to take the stuff of the world and redeem it. Make it into something new. So we invite you to take the nail off the card and let it be for you a reminder of what God might be calling you to build. And when you have a sense of what purposes you are being called to – sometime over the weeks of Lent note it on the card and bring the card to the courtyard under the tree and you'll find there a cross and on the cross is where you can put your

card to show that for you the tipping point has arrived. No more hammers and nails of the old order. It's the new order for me. The new creation. The new kingdom.

I said a minute ago that two great musicians died within the last few weeks. The second was Pete Seeger. Pete Seeger wrote the great folk song: "If I Had a Hammer" wherein he wondered what might you do if you had a hammer. Is it the nail of the old order or the nail of the new order? And Pete Seeger answered it this way:

If I had a hammer,
I'd hammer in the morning,
I'd hammer in the evening,
All over this land,
I'd hammer out danger,
I'd hammer out a warning,
I'd hammer out love between,
My brothers and my sisters,
All over this land.