

**Sermon for the Seventh Sunday of Easter, May 13, 2018**  
**Church of Reconciliation, San Antonio**  
**The Rev. Judith L. Rhodes, Associate Rector**

***Living in the Space In-Between***

First of all... Mother's Day blessings to each of the mothers here and to the women who perhaps have not physically given birth but who, over your lives, have been midwives for other's hopes and dreams!

And with hearts full of gratitude we celebrate Reconciliation's own, Most Honored Women, Stella Brown, Dru Dunn, Janet Flohr, Lilas Harvey, Betty Storrs, Carol Ann McElligott and Mary Helen Tassos... sources of inspiration and models of deep and abiding faith in Jesus Christ! You bless us with your presence!

Today the Church gathers around the world in the space between: just a few days ago, the Church celebrated the feast of the Ascension and today the church finds itself on the threshold of something new. It isn't quite here yet. We are invited on the Seventh Sunday of Easter to enter a period of waiting once more. But this period of waiting is a bit different; it's the pause between the hope of the past and the hope for the future. It is sometimes hard to hold this space because we are so eager to move on and find new direction. Or, as my grandmother would say, "Pull yourself up by the bootstraps and get going!" And so, it is possible for us to rush past the wisdom and the challenge of the gospel and just keep on keeping on. And that, my friends, I consider an impoverished and all too limited choice. Instead, let's not rush past the dis-ease of this text. As one commentator wrote: "It is possible to treat this text, this day, as a preemptive Pentecost, but to do so misses one of the most important lessons of life. It is the in-between that invites us to find depth and to hold the anxiety and fears of the future at bay and embrace this one moment." So, let's stay with the text and stay with the challenge.

If you have ever stood at the threshold of a significant change in your life, a change prompted by a decision freely made by you, or of a decision, a diagnosis, a change not in your control, and you find yourself anxious, even terrified, overwhelmed and under duress, as you long for an answer, or a direction in which to go, or you find yourself drowning in the details of a decision you have made and are moving toward its completion, then you have experienced what psychologists and anthropologists call *liminal space*. Richard Rohr describes liminal space this way: *"It is when you have left the tried and true, but have not yet been able to replace it with anything else. It is when you are between your old comfort zone and any possible new answer. If you are not trained in how to hold anxiety, how live with ambiguity, how to entrust and wait, you will run... anything to flee this terrible cloud of unknowing."*

And if, my friends, you are anything like me, this space called liminal, I have often called “hell.” Uncertainty for some can feel like hell. I know. It’s a very natural response to the uncertainty and ambiguity of this liminal space. One finds oneself longing for the comfort of the old way of being, the old way of knowing, the old way of seeing, the old way of believing... but that is escape. That way of living is not living at all. The spiritual author and Roman Catholic sister, Joan Chittister, writes: “We struggle to maintain a dead past in the name of peace and refuse the new life that running water brings everything. We confuse “stagnant” with “calm” and call it holiness. We miss the power of the paradox that peace is not passivity and that a living death is neither death nor life.”

A Roman Catholic priest and mentor of mine, used to preach about the “living faith of the dead and the dead faith of the living...” which is not so different from what Joan Chittister is referencing either. Yes, we can choose a stagnant faith, a “comfortable” life and confuse it with peace or we can face into the challenges of the in-betweenness that life offers us and learn the wisdom that life truly offers us even in those in-between seasons of our lives.

In the uncertainty, Jesus doesn’t run away from the liminal space between his ministry and his crucifixion. Instead, he enters into that space and he reflects with his friends, on the power of this particular moment as they gather around the table of the last supper.

It would be easier for us to listen to this text from John’s gospel if we placed it *after* the resurrection. It would be easier for us to consider this Jesus to be the now resurrected Christ speaking these words. It would allow us to intellectualize and sanitize the text, and spare Jesus the excruciating liminal space he occupies, this in-between time of life and death by crucifixion.

As I told the staff on Tuesday, I have always loved this prayer of Jesus, this prayer that comes from his very human heart. This intercessory prayer prayed on behalf of those he loved the most on this earth. I have wept with this gospel text as I can “hear” the quivering voice of Jesus calling up all the courage and strength he has in this moment, to bear his soul and to beseech his own Father, to continue the work of sanctifying those given to him to fulfill his mission, even in the face of the evil that would claim his own life, the very next day.

*I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.* There is a part of me that wants to remind Jesus of the multiple times these disciples have done anything but kept God’s word... doubting, misunderstanding, even soon, betraying Jesus... and in this prayer, Jesus teaches us about self-emptying love, boundless mercy, and infinite compassion.

*I am asking on their behalf; ... for they are yours... All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.* Might this be the very human Jesus who also needs to

remember, and be re-remembered even as he faces his own death- that he, too, belongs to the One from whom he was sent. His God, and our God.

*While I was with them, I protected them in your name... I guarded them...* This human heart of Jesus remembering his own mission nearly fulfilled as if to screw up the sheer force of will and courage to face his executioners and to walk the way of the cross. This prayer of Jesus offers up consolation in the very midst of the desolation that makes its way into our own lives, unexpected, willy-nilly, and upends our fragile existences. Even in the midst of circumstances beyond our control, or circumstances that threaten our well-ordered lives, we can and must lean into the love, the protection, and the guidance that is ours in Jesus Christ.

*I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ...Sanctify them in the truth, your word is truth.* This is Jesus speaking truth, the truth that life is full of pain, suffering, injustice, and even death. And this is Jesus on the night before he suffered, remembering that it is not by escaping pain or suffering, or even death are we redeemed, it is by living into the very life and living Word of God in Jesus Christ that true life, everlasting life, resurrection life is promised and fulfilled.

*As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes, I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified.* So we are commissioned to go into the world, not leave it behind. We are called to love the world, cherish and care for it, honor and restore all creation. This is not a condemnation of the world. This is not some dualistic either/or, holy/profane kind of prayer. This is Jesus commending the beauty, the goodness, the grace, and the gift of all of life, all of creation to the glory of God, the Creator.

This very human Jesus stands with us, as One of us. This very human Jesus offers this prayer on behalf of us all, each called by name, into the very service of God's mission. This is the prayer of Jesus, human and Divine, calling us to our mission, now, to be his hands and his heart in this broken and suffering world. To be the lovers and the reconcilers we are called to be.

If you find yourself in a particularly difficult liminal space, a space in-between, a space in which your heart is troubled, and your spirit shaken, take heart from Jesus' own prayer spoken on your behalf. Hear his voice speaking your name. Listen to him now...

*Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. ... I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. ... Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."*

My brothers and sisters in Christ... this is Jesus' prayer for you. Rest in his peace. Surrender the anxieties of in-between time. Rest in his peace.  
*Amen.*