

Up, Up & Away

2 Kings 2:7b-11 & Acts 1:3-14

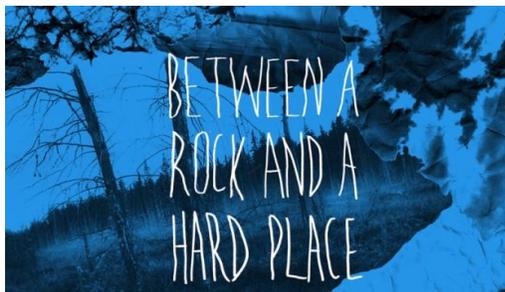
May 17, 2015 ~ The Ascension ~ Rev. Jo Ramsey

If you asked 100 people what Christians believe happened on Easter Sunday, at least 75% would say we believe Jesus was raised from the dead. But, you could ask those same people what happened to Jesus after he was raised, and most everyone would say, 'uh...' and scratch their heads. Unfortunately, that goes for Christians too. We know Jesus was resurrected, and we know he isn't here now...but what happened in between?

In between is where we spend most of our lives. In between seasons. In between holidays. In between parents. In between relationships. In between jobs or semesters. We spend a lot of our lives waiting for the next thing to begin. Fiona is waiting for the new American Girl catalog to arrive. Ben is waiting for summer vacation. James and I spent last week waiting for the results from my latest round of biopsies – which I'm glad to say are all benign! Our family knows all about waiting, and I know you do too. Take a minute and think---What are you waiting for? What are you in-between right now? No matter how young or old we are, most of us are living in-between---waiting for what's next.

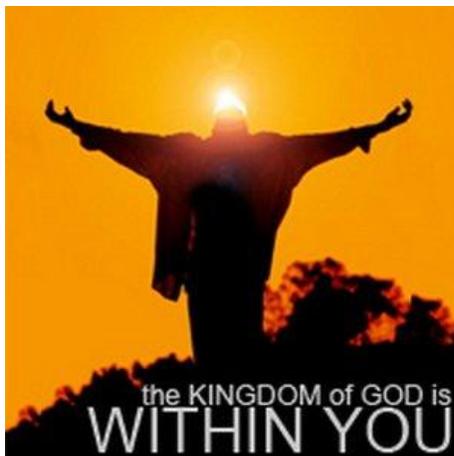


This week Pastor James visited four of older members who live in the Concordia complex in Saxonburg--LeAnna Kennedy, Marie Williams, Marian Miller and Nellie McGary. As they sat at lunch, chatting and visiting about life at Concordia and how much they like it, Nellie said, "I kind of think of this place as my in-between place. It's the place between the life I've lived here on earth, and my life to come in heaven. I'm so lucky to have such a wonderful place to live in-between." What a blessing for Nellie---first of all, that she has accepted this stage of her life, and second, that she can appreciate and enjoy all the good things that it offers.



For some people, life in-between doesn't feel like a wonderful place. It is frustrating and scary. Usually, we don't know what's coming. We can't see around the bend. We don't like feeling out of control. It's disorienting and we may feel lost.

I think that's just how the disciples felt after the resurrection. It had been a bit of a roller coaster. Jesus rides into Jerusalem like a king! Jesus is crucified. Jesus is resurrected! Finally, the disciples thought they understood the plan, but now they aren't sure. Anxiously, they ask Jesus... "Now, Jesus? Is it now? Are you going to restore the kingdom of Israel now?" You'd think at this point, they would have figured out that Jesus didn't come to re-establish Israel as a political force. But as we so often do when we're waiting, the disciples go back to what they believed and hoped for all along. They ask the same old questions, and make the same old assumptions.



I would imagine Jesus is a bit concerned, maybe even frustrated. But he is patient. He shifts their attention back to two things – 1. What he has promised to give them—the very Spirit of God, and 2. What he has called them to do—to take the gospel to the very ends of the earth. Jesus wants them to turn away from their old expectations about what the kingdom of God is, and when and how it will be established. Instead, he wants them to focus on the kingdom of God that is at hand – the kingdom that they will spread and build through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

Then, at that very moment, Jesus is lifted up, up and away. He rides no beautiful balloon, no chariot of fire. But, a cloud comes and he is gone. Suddenly two men in white are there, two men who question the disciples. "Why are you looking up?" Jesus has gone away. These men give the disciples another promise. "Jesus will return, but you best not wait around staring up until then."

I like these two guys in white and so does Luke. Anybody remember where we've seen them before? How about the



two men in white who greet Mary on Easter morning? These two are also full of questions. “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, he is risen. Remember, what he promised?”



We meet two more men in white at the Transfiguration. Another day filled with clouds and glory and heavenly things. In this case, it's Moses and Elijah who come to speak with Jesus about his departure. Remember what happens? Peter wants to build three little dwellings for them. But, suddenly a cloud comes and covers them and the men are gone.

These men in white are “in-between guys.” God sends them during times of transition. They show up to help people, to shift their focus, remind them of God's promises and point them in the right direction. They show us that these times in between are just as important as what comes before and what follows. God uses them to prepare us, to equip us and to give us time to get ready.

God provides for us during in between times. He may not send you two guys dressed in white. But, if you're waiting, facing a time of uncertainty, look around. God may provide you with a guide, just like Pastor James said a few weeks ago. Remember the Ethiopian eunuch? He was traveling on the road in between Jerusalem to Gaza. God sent Philip to share the good news of Christ's saving love and the Ethiopian was baptized him right there along the way, in transit between here and there. God provides for us when we're in-between.

The disciples are in between too. What should they do now that Jesus is gone, really gone? They do what they know to do. They gather in an upper room to pray and worship. I imagine they also share a certain meal together. What a great model for us – what to do during times of uncertainty and transition – when we're afraid and we don't know what to expect. Gather with supportive friends and family. Remind yourself of who you are and what you believe, and enter into God presence. That is just what the disciples did that day—they waited patiently for God to guide them during a confusing and scary time.





It's no coincidence that this passage about waiting and living through in-between times mentions 40 days. You know God likes the number forty...Forty days Noah and the animals were in the ark, forty days Moses was on the mountain getting the 10 Commandments (twice!), forty years Moses and the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, forty days that Elijah spent in the

wilderness until God passed by him in the sound of sheer silence, forty days Jesus was tempted in the wilderness before he began his ministry, forty days Jesus walked the earth between his resurrection and his ascension.

There are just a few people in the Bible who have ascended – that is, who were taken up to heaven. The three people are Enoch, Elijah and Jesus. Enoch, who is Noah's great grandfather, just sort of disappears, we're not really sure about him. So let's skip to Elijah because he's a big deal.

Elijah is a prophet, the prophet. He is the central, most important prophet in the Old Testament. Elijah is set to retire. Elisha is poised to take over as prophet and leader. He's not sure how or if he can do it. It's a time of transition, just like for the disciples. When Elijah asks Elisha what he wants or needs before he leaves, Elisha asks Elijah to give him a double share of his spirit---that is, the Spirit of the Lord that has been poured out upon Elijah. He promises it shall be so, and then, Elijah is taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire, in a whirlwind.



Elijah and Jesus do go up, up and away. They leave. But, they leave with a promise to send the Spirit, the Spirit of God who will empower and comfort and guide. They also leave with a promise to return. To this day, Jews leave an empty chair at the Passover meal for Elijah, as if they expect him to arrive any minute. We Christians also live in anticipation of Christ's return, when the Kingdom of God will be fulfilled. Until then, we know that Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, and intercedes on our behalf. He is alive in our hearts. He didn't really go up, up and away. Jesus is up, up and everywhere.

Francesca Battistelli, who recently won “Female Christian Artist of the Year,” is known for her song called “He Knows My Name.” She also wrote a song called, “The Time In-Between.” She writes,

You were there when Your Father said
‘Let there be light.’
You obeyed when He whispered,
‘Son, You have to leave tonight.’
To spend nine months in a mother’s womb,
three days in a borrowed tomb...



But it's the time in between
That brings me to my knees
Knowing You came for me and all that I can't be
I'm amazed, so amazed and I thank You for the time in between



It's the time in between
That I fall down to my knees
Waiting on what You'll bring and the
things that I can't see
I know my song's incomplete, still I'll sing in
the time in between

It's the time in between
The middle of two thieves
That says everything, it's the reason I believe
I'm amazed, so amazed,
And I thank You for the time in between
Oh Lord, I thank You for the time in between



May God be with you in the now, and the not-yet and all the time in between.

In the name of the Father, and of the son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.