

Grace and Peace!

A few weeks ago on Easter Sunday we were saying: “**Christ is risen**” (and you might have responded with “**Christ is Risen Indeed, Hallelujah!**”

Well today is Ascension Sunday. And Jesus, now raised from the dead at Easter, rises from the earth to be in heaven with God. So again we could say; Christ is Risen and you could again say; Christ is risen indeed! Hallelujah!

So here’s another word that I have been pondering lately.

Liminality. Liminality! It sort of rolls off your tongue if you say it often enough. Liminality!

Liminal comes from a Latin word meaning **Threshold**. It refers to a transition or in between state or space. And it is characterized by ambiguity, and time of change. It’s when a person or organization or group is transforming **from** something, **to** something, but is not there yet. What was known is gone, what is to be is not yet here. Hmmmm. You sometime hear it said as being in “**liminal space**”. On the **threshold!**

So the first time I knew of that word was when our son Ian was in Bible School in Camrose. They had a “spring Tour” as they usually do. The students sang and did skits and shared testimonies. It was called “The Space Between, the Liminality Tour”. The students were in that space in their lives, after high school, and before they went back to school or began work or whatever. It was an uplifting concert.

The Second time I heard the word used was some years later. When my wife Barb “retired” a couple years ago (well sort of retired) she changed her LinkedIn Profile to “**in liminal space, exploring new adventures**”. What was known and familiar was gone, and what was to be was not yet evident. Because she was in that period of her life when she needed to see what her life and mission and calling looked like now. The phone has rung a few times, but she hasn’t changed the LinkedIn profile. Guess she is still exploring!

The next time I was to come across the word LIMINAL was this February at the pastors study conference in Canmore. (no I’m not a pastor but they let me in) Our Bishop, Larry Kochendorfer, also spoke of “liminal space”. Liminal space as it relates to us as a church. We are not the ‘church’ that we knew as children –

most of us, anyway. In those days, pews were full and kids didn't play hockey or soccer on Sunday mornings. Even All Saints has been impacted by changes in the culture around us. We as a larger church often talk about what we were. We know that things have changed, and realize we are in a time of "threshold". To what? What's on the other side of the threshold? We await!

Liminal space.

Ok, so, it's Ascension Sunday. Are we going to talk about that? Yes. Yes we are. The texts today talk about Jesus' ascent into heaven. I especially like the text from Acts that was read. Jesus is teaching the disciples till just before he leaves. Then Jesus ascends into the clouds and soon isn't seen. And of course the disciples are staring up into the sky. I'm sure in disbelief. If that isn't enough "two men in white" appeared! Hey, want to guess they were angels? So what do the angels say? "why are you looking up into heaven"? As if someone disappearing into the clouds was an everyday occurrence. **We** would have been looking up too! Then the angels gave some instructions. So what are the instructions? Go to Jerusalem and what? WAIT! Wait! Wait for what? Imagine how they might have felt. They had just lost Jesus for the second time in just over a month, and they were pushed **in an instant** into a place where the old was gone, and what was to come was unknown.

Liminal space!

They were to wait till they have received the power of the Holy Spirit. Wait till they were trained and ready! For what? So they could continue the ministry that Christ had started. And they did! Wait for Pentecost Sunday to hear more about that. And of course, wear red!

No, the word liminal does not appear in the Bible. But there are a lot of stories of being in that space. Stories like Mary and Martha waiting for Jesus after their brother Lazarus had died. Like Abraham and Lot obeying God's direction to go to a new land where they didn't know what was waiting for them. Or Moses and the Israelites in the desert. 40 year is a LOT of liminal space.

The word LIMINAL is not in the bible, but instructions to WAIT appear many times, and often in the Psalms.

The disciples were asked by the angels to go into a Liminal Space for a time. And to do what as they waited? To learn, to pray, and to be apart for a while.

So this likely sounds familiar: To be APART, and to WAIT?

Here we are in this time of Pandemic. We are required as a church to be apart, to wait. And so is our community, our city, our province, our country, our world!

This has been a very, very, disruptive time. Many of you are staying home to work, and some of you are also educating your children while working from home. You may have been on ZOOM or SKYPE when a presenter was interrupted by a question from their child. It's a new normal. (And did you even know about ZOOM or SKYPE before the pandemic?) The disruption has had adverse effects on so many, many, people, from cabin fever because of isolation, to loneliness, anxiety and even depression.

This is liminal space for all of us.

A time "in between" and what we knew is gone, and what will come is not yet clear. Some say we will never go back to the way things were. And it's not all bad – we've learned some things that need to be improved, like maybe our long term care facilities. Employers are learning that their workers can be very productive from home. Workers are enjoying the shorter commutes! After COVID, our world will be different. For us as individuals, for us a church, for us as a nation, for the whole world. What are we on the threshold of?

Hmmmmm, I don't know the answer to that. But I am reminded of what the disciples did during their liminal space. They waited; they waited and then they listened to what the Spirit was telling them. And then they went and established Christ's church on earth.

As we are apart and waiting, what might the Spirit be saying to us? What might God be calling US to do now? And are we **still** enough to hear?

Our congregation is now also in Liminal space. You may have heard the expression, "The church has left the building"! What might God be calling us to do now? How might the Spirit be leading us as a community in this time?

I don't know the answers. It will take all of us to discern them.

But this much I DO know: that despite the challenges we face today, and they are huge, God will never leave us, nor forsake us.

I know that Jesus died and was raised from the dead. And 40 days later he rose again, this time to heaven. He died and rose so that by grace we might have life!

Some word of hope and comfort from the book of Romans that applies to this time, no matter what has ended for us and no matter what is to come: from chapter eight:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No! For I am convinced that neither death, no life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers. Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in ALL creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing.

In Psalm 46 we are admonished to **be still** so that we can hear the Spirit's still small voice, and to know that God is God.

And to conclude, a verse from Psalm 27

Wait for the Lord, be strong and take heart and WAIT for the Lord!

ESPECIALLY in liminal space.

Let us pray,

Lord, we believe that you are with us now, especially during these difficult and challenging days. And as we are apart. And as we listen. Help us to BE STILL so that we can hear you. So that you can lead and guide us. Amen

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