

CERTAIN AND UNCERTAIN



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Acts 1:6-14

Acts 1:6-14 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
The Ascension of Jesus

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” 9 When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10 While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. 11 They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. 13 When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of[a] James. 14 All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

In this Season of Easter we remember that Jesus appeared at the empty tomb to the women. Later, the disciples had been locked in fear when Jesus entered their room and breathed peace and life into them. Two had walked alongside Him on the road to Emmaus, and finally they realized it was Jesus in the breaking of the bread. And in this story from

the opening of Acts, the resurrected Jesus appeared again. This time they had the question they had been meaning to ask him. "Is this the day we have been waiting for? Is this the time you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" Will you finally do what we were expecting? Is now when you overthrow Rome? Is now when you sit on the throne of your ancestor David?

And instead . . . Jesus said it's not for you to know the times . . . But I promise you this, you will receive 'power' when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be 'witnesses' in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. And then Jesus ascended not to the throne of David, but to God from once he had come, with the promise that he would return again just as mysteriously.

Well Ascension was not what they were expecting. They had been so certain and sure of how things would go. They returned to Jerusalem where they gathered and prayed and waited. They were somewhere between what had been. . . and what would be.

Stay A Blessing for Ascension Day

I know how your mind
rushes ahead
trying to fathom
what could follow this.
What will you do,
where will you go,
how will you live?

You will want
to outrun the grief.
You will want
to keep turning toward
the horizon,
watching for what was lost
to come back,
to return to you
and never leave again.

For now
hear me when I say

all you need to do
is to still yourself
is to turn toward one another
is to stay.

Wait
and see what comes
to fill
the gaping hole
in your chest.
Wait with your hands open
to receive what could never come
except to what is empty
and hollow.

You cannot know it now,
cannot even imagine
what lies ahead,
but I tell you
the day is coming
when breath will
fill your lungs
as it never has before
and with your own ears
you will hear words
coming to you new
and startling.
You will dream dreams
and you will see the world
ablaze with blessing.

Wait for it.
Still yourself.
Stay.
—Jan Richardsonⁱ

That space between what is known and what is yet to be known is sometimes called liminal space. 'Liminal' comes from the Latin word, limen, which means threshold. We find

ourselves on the threshold when what we have known and have always done slips away. Liminal time is a time of uncertainty. Richard Rohr says, Get there often and stay as long as you can by whatever means possible.ⁱⁱ Liminal space is holy space. It is the space of greatest transformation. In it we wait and pray and turn towards one another.

This weekend I expected to be at Family Camp at Camp Skyline, along with many of you from church. We would have packed our vans and driven to Almont, and wound down the dirt road and read the signs along the entrance, “In this place,” “We welcome all,” “Who seek some peace,” “Among these trees.” Family Camp at Skyline ushered us into another time and place, where the children could run and explore and the adults could walk and talk, where baby goats could be carried and gardens tended, where boats could be paddled and slippery fish caught for an instant. I do not miss the bunk beds, or food lines, or the showers with water that smelled like sulfur. Still, this is not what we were expecting.

And in these days of the unexpected when I am missing Skyline, I still remember you and give thanks and hold you in prayer. I delight in being able to gather through technology. I rejoice that Sue Schanckenberg dreamed up trying Family Camp online; inviting us to tune in for fire side singalongs at Skyline and late-night chats, early morning breakfast and puzzling games and more fireside songs with each other. Doing so expanded our circle beyond the camp to those throughout the congregation and beyond.

And in these liminal days when I am not at Skyline, I still go on walks. I gaze at the leaves and am dazzled by how green and full they are. I delight in spotting wildflowers and blooming trees. I wave and smile at anyone I see. I notice what hadn't been there days before, and the mystery of it all soothes me. I am reminded that we dwell still. . . “in the presence of the God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.” (Romans 4:7)

This morning we still sang, “Morning Has Broken,” like we often have during Sunday morning worship in the woods, but with less mosquitoes and more people:

Morning has broken, like the first morning
Blackbird has spoken, like the first bird
Praise for the singing, praise for the morning
Praise for the springing fresh from the word (vs 1)

Mine is the sunlight, mine is the morning
Born of the one light, Eden saw play
Praise with elation, praise every morning
God's recreation of the new day (vs3) ⁱⁱⁱ

And we will pray as we sing, “Give me Oil in my lamp, keep me burning, burning, burning, keep me burning to the break of day.” And finally, Kum-By-Ya, Come by Here, “Someone is

praying, Lord, Come By Here. Someone is crying Lord, come by Here. Someone is singing, Lord, come by here. O Lord, come by here.”

These are holy days. And this is liminal space. We find ourselves in the threshold. We wait. We pray. We turn toward one another. We draw from the Risen One who met the women at empty place; the One who breathed into those locked in fear; the One who walked alongside and was known in the breaking of the bread. Our hearts burn within us, as we witness re-creation all around and within. Called into the space beyond our knowing, we rise.

ⁱ 133, Jan Richardson, “Stay,” *The Cure for Sorrow*.

ⁱⁱ Richard Rohr, “Liminal Space,” *Center for Action and Contemplation*, July 7, 2016. <https://cac.org/liminal-space-2016-07-07/>

ⁱⁱⁱ 664, “Morning Has Broken,” *Glory to God Hymnal*.