

April 19 2020, Psalm 51:3-17 Text: Acts 1:1-11 Sermon: In Between

As a small child, I loved playing in the hay barn, especially on a rainy day where the raindrops make a loud pounding noise on barn tin to the point it would drown out my mother's calling. During those play periods at the age of nine, I played on top of freshly mowed stacked square bales near a cattle stall. During one of my attempts, my footing slipped, and I fall ten feet in between the end of square bales and loose hay into total darkness. I was frightened, fearful of not breathing and seeing. It was dark, suffocating, and disorienting. It was a tight fit, but I struggled and managed to crawl out to the light.

Even been caught between "a rock and hard place." It's an old saying describing a dilemma with two options, neither of which is acceptable. And as I travel through life, I realize it's easy to get stuck in the in-between times, the transitions of life, the movement from one stage to another. "In between," those moments when you find yourself caught between joys, sadness, conflict, struggles, and fights or flight, comfort. Those movements in life where you reach out to your innermost self, to your fellow human beings, and to God to find an answer. The "in-betweens" forces us to face and explore our inner restlessness, our mixed feelings toward others, and our deep-seated suspicions of ourselves and others, and even the perceived absence of God. The dilemma is: learning to live into the tension between loneliness and solitude, between hostility and hospitality, and between illusion and prayer.

For three years, Jesus had taught his disciples, performed miracles, and predicted his death, promised the Holy Spirit. After his resurrection, he walked and talked with them for forty more days, and then at this moment, Jesus is taken up into the clouds before their very eyes and disappears. They are looking up into heaven, wondering what to do next? It's an "in-between" moment. "Wait or do," be silent or busy." In this pandemic, we find ourselves caught in the middle. We are no different than the early disciples, struggling to break the silence, impatience, they asked a question wanting to know the answer. Is this the time?

Jesus' response is quite telling, "It is not for you to know the special days or the special times which my Father has put in His power."

<sup>8</sup> "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes into your life.

Somewhere in these words emerged for me the word "trust."

Henri Nouwen says in his book, **The Dance of Life: Weaving Sorrows and Blessings into One Joyful Step,** says

"Trust is the basis of life. Without trust, no human being can live." And he tells his story with his encounter with Trapeze artists as a beautiful image of trust.

"The Flying Rodleigh's are trapeze artists who perform in the German circus Simoneit-Barum. When the circus came to Freiburg two years ago, my friends Franz and Reny invited my father and me to see the show. I will never forget how enraptured I became when I first saw the Rodleighs move through the air, flying and catching as elegant dancers. The next day, I returned to the circus to see them again and introduced myself to them as one of their great fans. They invited me to attend their practice sessions, gave me free tickets, asked me to dinner, and suggested I travel with them for a week. I did, and we became good friends.

"One day, I was sitting with Rodleigh, the leader of the troupe, in his caravan, talking about flying. He said, 'As a flyer, I must have complete trust in my catcher. The public might think that I am the great star of the trapeze, but the real star is Joe, my catcher. He has to be there for me with split-second precision and grab me out of the air as I come to him in the long jump.' 'How does it work?' I asked. 'The secret,' Rodleigh said, 'is that the flyer does nothing and the catcher does everything. When I fly to Joe, I stretch out my arms and hands and wait for him to catch me, pulling me safely over the apron behind the catch bar.'

"You do nothing!" I said, surprised. 'Nothing,' Rodleigh repeated. 'The worst thing the flyer can do is to try to catch the catcher. I am not supposed to catch Joe. It's Joe's task to catch me. If I grabbed Joe's wrists, I might break them, or he might break mine, and that would be the end for both of us. A flyer must fly, and a catcher must catch, and the flyer must trust, with outstretched arms, that his catcher will be there for him.'

"When Rodleigh said this with so much conviction, the words of Jesus flashed through my mind: 'Father into your hands I commend my Spirit.' Dying is trusting in the catcher. It is the "in-betweens" movements when God offers us to die to self, to let go, not be afraid, but reach out and trust. Trust that He will be there when you make your long jump. Don't try to grab him; he will grab you. Just stretch out your arms and hands and trust, trust, trust.' "

Flyers have to trust their catchers. They can do the most spectacular doubles, triples, or quadruples, but what finally makes their performance spectacular are the catchers who are there for them at the right time in the right place.

Much of our lives are like flying and dancing, like swinging on a homemade vine. Until it seems God isn't there to catch us, all our flying seems fruitless. It is hard to do nothing. It is hard to *Weave Sorrows and Blessings Into One Joyful Step*. Those "in-between" moments force us to wait and watch before taking the next step guided by God. It takes courage to move away from the safe places into the unknown, to move from comfort and safety and stretch our wings and fly or dance to a rhythm forgotten or lost or hidden.

One of the blessings of this pandemic is we all realize that giving up the familiar and reaching out with open arms toward an unknowable God is risky. All our mental grasping for control and clinging makes us very vulnerable. Surrendering is not an easy journey. Surrender leads to trust. Surrendering leads us to give up: control, self, our illusions, whatever holds us back. It's in the surrendering that forces us into the "in-between" moments of silence and waiting, making us receptive to God's Spirit. The strange thing is it leads us where we might perceive it in the wrong direction. As God frees us, we are lead into pain and suffering

into our inner self.

The great paradox of moving into the unknown is living in the in-between moments. Jesus reminds us that love is purified in pain, "anyone who loses his life... will find it (Matthews 16:25). Love takes us places we choose not to go. The more we wait in silence, the more open our hearts to God's love, we will love more, and the more we will see the pain and the more we see and suffer. The more light we see, the more darkness we will experience, the more grace we realize, the more aware of sin, and the more we trust God, and the more we will trust each other.

The more we learn to embrace the "in-between" moments will we learn to fly and dance, with ourselves, with others, and with God?

Jesus told his disciples not to look up but look out to receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit guides us in the "in-between" times to be a blessing to others.

We are all wounded. We all have hidden fears. It is easier to look away rather than within. There are things that only we can see about ourselves, but the choice to jump over is up to us. I know the feeling all too well, fearing that if I step between the caresses, I will fall into darkness, I will be lost.

But the good news is God sent His Son so that we can be free to dance, free to fly. All we need to do is trust him. He's already waiting. Just stretch out your arms and hands and trust. Don't try to grab him; he will reach you. What is holding you back from flying? What is holding you back from dancing? What is the "in-between" moment that you find yourself waiting and watching to be guided by God's Spirit? It's an "in-between," don't try to grab God; God already has you in his hand. The Holy Spirit is waiting for you to step from the in-between into the unknown where God is waiting. It is in that moment God will weave sorrows and blessings into One Joyful Step. Living in the "in-betweens, you discover the dance of life.