

IN-BETWEEN

¹⁶ When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” ¹⁷ He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.” ¹⁸ Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. ¹⁹ He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

Genesis 28:16-19

⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” ⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” ⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.

Acts 1:4-10

I. Neither here, nor there

- A. The words liminal and liminality are both derived from the Latin - Limen, meaning the threshold; that is, the bottom part of the doorway that must be crossed when entering a building. It refers to a stone placed on the threshold of the door that physically had to be mounted to cross from one space into another.
- B. A liminal place is a neutral space between an ending and a new beginning.
- C. During liminal seasons we stand on both sides of a threshold we have one foot rooted in something that is not yet over, whereas the other foot is planted in the thing not yet defined, something not yet ready to begin.
- D. Miracles happen in-between. Jesus says that the real miracle occurs in-between sowing seeds and collecting the harvest. (Mark 4:26-28)

²⁶ He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷ Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. ²⁸ All by itself the soil produces grain-- first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.

II. Three characteristics of a liminal place

- A. Separation - Something comes to an end.
- B. Liminal period - We enter the liminal place between seasons marked by disorientation, disengagement, anxiety, and a lack of control.

- C. Reintegration - Something new emerges and we are re-oriented to the world in newness.
- D. Liminal places equal holy ground, sacred space, God's waiting room!
- E. No one enjoys being stuck in an in-between place, but this is always where God is leading us.
- F. A liminal space is the time between "what was" and "what's next"

III. The Bible through a liminal lens / A story of thresholds

- A. Adam and Eve. They lose the garden of Eden. Humankind leaves, and begins an ongoing journey toward redemption and salvation.
- B. Noah and the flood. All humanity is lost. They leave the world behind, safely confined in the ark, followed by a re-orientation to a new world.
- C. Ruth. Ruth gives up her identity as a Moabite, attaches herself to Naomi, leaves her family. After a prolonged period of wandering, and not belonging, she eventually becomes the great grandmother of King David.
- D. Joseph. Joseph is thrown into a pit, signifying an end to his identity as a favored son. He is enslaved in Egypt, his liminal testing ground, but eventually gives birth to a new identity and becomes the savior of the people of God.
- E. Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, and Job all experienced an ending, followed by a disorienting season of transition, and finally, a re-orientation to something new that was totally different from what they left behind.

- F. Our Lord begins his ministry in a liminal space. Rising out of the baptismal waters, Jesus enters the desert for a period of 40 days and nights, a liminal pilgrimage during which his new identity is formed and tested. His return from the wilderness signals entry into a new life as teacher, healer, and Savior.
- G. The apostle Paul. Paul enters a liminal period, suddenly, when he is struck blind on the road to Damascus. In a moment he is separated from his old identity. He emerges from his blindness re-oriented as an instrument of God to bring salvation to the Gentiles.
- H. “All transformation takes place here. We have to allow ourselves to be drawn out of ‘business as usual’ and remain patiently on the ‘threshold’ (Limen - Latin) where we are betwixt and between the familiar and the completely unknown. There, alone, is our old world left behind while we are not yet sure of the new existence. That’s a good place, where genuine newness can begin.” - Richard Rohr