

# The Liminal Zone of Spiritual Unknowing

*A sermon on Acts 1:6-14 by Anna Killigrew, 24 May 2020*

We hear today, in the Book of Acts chapter 1 that Jesus' followers are standing in the liminal zone of spiritual unknowing.

Liminal zones are those seemingly empty times and places when we are between one thing and another. But they are anything other than empty. They are times when God is strongly present.

On the one hand, Jesus has physically and finally left his followers and disappeared into a cloud of unknowing.

On the other hand, these followers are remembering hearing Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit is coming to equip them with divine power, power that will send them to the ends of the earth with their Jesus-story. (*Acts 1:8*)

Something strange and surprising is happening. Liminal space, and time, is here in the story that begins the book of the Acts of the Apostles.

All the followers of Jesus, women, men and family members, find themselves in this in-between zone.

And what do they do in their liminal zone?

They feel uncertain as they ask, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom of Israel?"

This is their age-old desire, and they touch base with this ancient longing for comfort. They learned this value at their mothers' knees and they think it is the normal future, to be expected, restoring the old order of things.

However, this isn't the horizon that Jesus came to illuminate for the world. To see as Jesus sees, these followers have some adjustments to make. There is the need to let go their expectations for their future.

There is a pertinent saying, 'Let go and let God.'

That saying is good advice for these followers as they stand in today's liminal space and time.

Looking backwards is not what Jesus plans for these beloved followers.

Jesus gently helps them forward, into the place and time of transition.

He replies to their question about 'what next' with the assurance that – 'this is a time and place of unknowing for them'.

'But', Jesus continues, 'on the other side of transition, through a doorway of God's devising, your horizons will be hugely expanded and your lives will be meaningful in a global way, even to the ends of the earth'.

With that final earthly act of turning their eyes to the future, beyond this zone between Transfiguration and Pentecost, Jesus departs.

They are left, alone in their unknowing, in the darkness of unknowing, in holy silence.

...

As those who have come after them have pondered what was going on in this strange time, we have come to understand that this is the mystical time and place where their lives metamorphose and from which they emerge as the early church.

It is a small step for us to feel ourselves into such a situation. Today our lives have been suddenly and unpredictably changed. We too wait in an in-between time and place. This liminal zone of *our* day is also the crucible of the sacred for us,

- a time of non-activity,
- and the loss of who we were before;
- a place where change foments,
- a time when we cannot be driven by our everyday activities,
- a place to be humble, vulnerable, to be open to possibility and opportunity.
- a place to treasure our homes, our relationships, the lives of our young adults, children, pets and plants.
- a time and place of a sacred 'right of passage' for *all* the earth.

We are in the borderlands of the known, a transition time, the liminal zone on which hinges our future lives too.

What has been happening to us if we have been able to let-go into this liminal zone? Have we been able to trust what is here in this zone to offer us something we have not yet seen? Maybe some new form of community? A new way to be church?

We may have had one of the usual responses to our anxiety in this time of lockdown during this pandemic:

- bulk buying toilet paper and pasta to assure us of normality,
- reaching for alcohol or Netflix in a search for oblivion,
- making meaningful contact with our virtual community, who have so often been neglected in the hurly burly as we busily sleepwalk through our lives,
- busting out of lockdown to reach the *physical* liminal zone of the beach as we try to work out what is happening to us within our *virtual* liminal zone.

And we may have also experienced a sense of wonder, awe and transcendence

- as we have stopped the struggle to control our lives,
- as we have cast our anxieties on the caring God of scripture
- as we have sat in openness in this liminal zone, hands open in our laps.

At times in my life during a liminal zone I have sought out ways to *physically* be in that sacred time and space. It is the physical environment that carries some of the Presence of the spiritual reality for me. Here in the desert of Western Australia we have some striking liminal zones to bring God's Presence home to us, as you can see. What are some of the ways that you have found a physical expression of this in-between time and place?

These are liminal zones. There are many liminal zones in life.

- A liminal zone may be under the covers in your bed after the alarm has gone off.
- It may be a relationship budding in love or ending in many emotions.
- It may be the funeral of a loved one, a marriage ceremony, a baptism, a holy communion.
- Our liturgy and gathering to worship, either virtually or in the church building is designed to take us safely through the sacred liminal zone that has us emerge into God's presence.

Out in the world around us, we see what is happening to our earth as the people have been stalled in a world-wide liminal zone.

- The earth is being healed of misuse and overwork.
- The air is cleansed of smog and chemical pollutants.
- Animals have been returning to old haunts from which our city structures and busy-ness has driven them.
- People can see the sky and stars, many for the first time.
- The oceans are fostering renewed life as they are rested, not exploited.
- People have been becoming creative in intuitive ways; great innovations have been flourishing.

We have been given many new opportunities as we slowly emerge into the world, through this experience. Let us think what would Jesus do in this zone? Because we have been sent to do likewise, would we:

- treat the unemployed and the homeless among us with dignity instead of scorn, and support politics to give shape to such respect?
- consider the plight of refugees locked down at our command for seven years, unlike our seven weeks?
- nurture our young adults and children to be resilient even when their ego-needs are not being met by social interaction?
- maintain our new-found humility that would enable us to allow God of all grace to ‘restore, support, strengthen and establish us’? (*1 Peter 5:10*)

As we slowly come out of sheltering in place, and re-enter the world that now has a new member-organism, Covid 19, we think how to keep learning the lessons we learnt in this time alone.

Your leader, Nathan and his team is well-versed in the process of shepherding you through the liminal zone each worship time.

They lead you through the borderlands between the profane and the sacred.

Times of worship are the chrysalis in which we metamorphose, as those early disciples did, growing into a new identity as God’s own people. These are the places where we become one as God, Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit are one.

In today’s readings, the Jesus-team stood on a threshold.

As we stand today on this particular spiritual threshold, courtesy of Zoom and the leadership of South Yarra Baptists, may we desire and be equipped to live-out God’s confidence in us,

- that we have received the words that God gave Jesus to give to us,
- that we have kept these words and allowed them to act in us
- that we are coming to believe in truth that Jesus came from God and we are sent to do likewise. (*John 17*)
- 

May your word live in us, and bear much fruit to your glory.