

2020-05-24 The In-between

The In-between

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[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Judy Howard Peterson]

I feel super good to be back, and I always feel so honored to be able to be a part of any community. You know, a long time ago I said I don't ever want my ministry to be dishonored during a particular season, and I realized that you can't really diss the honor of pastoring people. It will always be an honor and it's always an honor, Scott, to serve alongside you especially in these times where we're kind of figuring out new spaces. I've been working on preaching via video, so thank you for the grace. I know the Artisan community to be such a gracious one.

I want to start by reading the scripture from 1 Peter today, and then I want to dive into the topic and text at hand, Ascension Sunday and what it looks like, I think, to live in the in-between times. So our passage from the 1 Peter says this:

[4:12-14]

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

[5:6-10]

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. 8 Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.”

2020-05-24 The In-between

Now our Gospel texts, or our text from Acts today said that those dates and times, they are not for you to know. "Someday," the text says. 1 Peter says "in due time," or "for a little while," and I want to be honest with you that these words about time and timing – they cause me a fair bit of anxiety. You see, I'm more of a date on a calendar type of person. I like to know when things are going to be happening so that I can plan for them. I don't want to be caught off guard, and things like those dates and times "they're not for you to know" or "someday" or "in due time" or "for a little while," well, that feels a bit vague to me and, truthfully, a real stretch out of my zone of comfort. Because these words place me in the in-between time where I'm really clear that something is incomplete. But the next thing, well, it's still pretty vague. It's still pretty next. In this place of living in-between, in the now before the next, it does require a certain set of skills that most of us struggle to sustain. And yet, this is where most of our lives will always be lived.

We have started to grow up but we are not yet grown. We haven't enrolled but we have not yet graduated. We have graduated and yet we have not found a job. We have found a job and yet not received a promotion. We've received a promotion but do not yet know how that calling will unfold. Or calling is unfolding yet we don't know what kind of fruit it will bear. It's bearing fruit yet we don't know when it will be ripe or how long we can keep harvesting. Or there was an end to a good thing; now we're waiting for the next good thing again. And over and over again, this in-between is our life. And over all of it right now there is this crazy pandemic that seems to have placed everything on pause, and that can really highlight the feelings that are already there in-between. Those dates and times, they are not for you to know scripture says. Someday, in due time, for a little while. We live in that in-between for most of our lives. We have taken the test and then we wait for the results. We have the diagnosis and we wait for the healing. We've taken the leap of faith and yet we're still waiting to see if we have enough faith to fly or if we really should pull the cord on the chute. We set out yet we've not yet arrived, or someone has left us and not yet returned.

In our reading from the Book of Acts, the disciples, who are real people living in a real life (and we know this because they take the time to list their specific identities) – and it's important to know when actual names are listed in the Biblical text it always says to me that they're trying to convince us: No, this *really* happened for real, for real. To real people. Oh, you could go ask Thomas and Bartholomew and Mary and I would like to ask them a few questions about the ascension. Jesus ascending back up into heaven and the moment that inaugurated this new kind of in-between when Jesus was here and yet he has not yet returned. I mean Jesus has been traveling with these people for a bit over three years and some in the circle have known him his entire life, like his mother Mary or their entire life, like his brothers. And now that Jesus

2020-05-24 The In-between

has been raised from the dead, now they want to know because nothing clearly can keep this man down. They want to know that he's going to rise up in power for real for real. Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and to restore our kingdom? And Jesus responds, those dates and times, they are not for you to know. [Sighs] Big sigh from all of us. This is frustratingly vague on timing, Jesus. And I imagine another big sigh from Jesus that the disciples are still frustratingly inquiring after worldly power. Let's all sigh with Jesus that so many disciples are still frustratingly inquiring after worldly power.

But Jesus continues, it's not that you're going to have no power at all. You're going to have this different kind of power. It will be yours. You'll receive the power of the Holy Spirit when it comes upon you and then you will be witnesses to meet the one who descended into the earth, who became nothing for the sake of the world. You can [be a] witness to that to the ends of the earth. And then, this man Jesus whom they had known for many years, a flesh and blood man, which I reminded you for four weeks last year, that this real person in real skin begins to rise up from the earth and ascends into a cloud while they're watching. And they strain to see him rising up into heaven, and I would be straining and staring too, if a human that I knew, a real human whom gravity had always had an effect on all of a sudden simply began rising up into the heavens. I mean, it is a good thing they listed the witnesses by name because some of the story can be really – well, it can stretch one's ability to believe. Help us in our unbelief.

So these named disciples are standing there looking up at the heavens at this friend of theirs who has gone up into the clouds when two men in white robes. Angels? We're not told exactly. We think so. They ask these people staring up into heavens at this man who is no longer affected by gravity – these two angels say, "Why are you standing here staring into heaven?" [Chuckles] This is a ridiculous question because our friend Jesus just went up into the clouds. Unfazed by my sarcasm, the men in white robes continue, "Jesus has been taken up into heaven but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go." And this begins the big in-between where we who follow this descending and now ascended Jesus wait for "someday." Let me change that last phrase; we don't just wait for someday, we live this day in light of someday. We live this day in light of someday. You see, even though the two white robed men were not overly helpful in what they had to offer or in the timing sort of question, I do believe the question can help us. Because they ask, "Why are you standing here staring into heaven?" And this does offer some insight I think into what I found to be a necessary principle in the practice of some of the in-between.

If we aren't just going to wait for someday, but rather, we're going to choose to live this day in light of someday, we simply can't just stand around. *Why are you standing here? Why are you*

2020-05-24 The In-between

standing here? I have found that one of the great temptations in the in-between time is to stand around, to hit the pause button on our life and to wait until what? 'Till we're grown? Until we're graduated, until we get a job, until we receive a promotion? Until we become clear on the calling or have all the knowledge? Why are you standing where you're standing? Are you waiting for results before you get going? Are you waiting to be healed before you get after it? Like Bartholomew and Thomas and Mary, are you waiting for Jesus to come back and make things all normal again before you get going? What is the "someday" that you are standing around waiting for, and what might it look like for you to change the waiting for someday to living this day in the light of someday?

I have had several seasons in my life where I've had dates circled on calendars, dates where I believed something would be delivered. And then, I believe my life at that time, once this someday had come, could really move forward. And yet those dates on that calendar came and went and I began to explore how I might live, I mean really live, into a life where those dates and times – they are not for me to know.

And I want to share a revelation with you, a revelation I received during this someday season, and this is the revelation: This is the only "this day" you and I will ever get. Oh sure, there's going to be other days, but this day? It only happens once in all of eternity, and we will either choose to live this day or we will miss out on this day. This day is not coming around again. The men in white robes said to the disciples, "Why are you standing around? There is a 'this day' to get after." And this woman on your screen, I'm asking all of us the same question. Why are you standing around? What is holding you back from living fully into this day, this precious day? It's never going to come back around again. Could you consider that it's possible that there might be some life in "this day" that you want to bear witness to? I have found that in "someday" seasons, that forward momentum is actually pretty key because even when it's not the fullness of the life we long for, there is always life to be found in the in-between on this day.

Recently I was having a "when will someday come?" kind of day. Truthfully, I was tempted to pull the covers over my head and then I reminded myself, "Judy, this is the only 'this day' you are ever going to get. Perhaps you want to just get up and take a peek and see if you find any life in it at all that you want to bear witness to. You know what happened? I saw the sunrise. This was a sunrise that is never ever going to happen the same way again, and I saw it. And so many people slept through it, and I saw some new plants poking through the earth. I witnessed a breakthrough, an actual breakthrough that day. Have you ever seen anybody or anything break through the dirt of life? I saw it. I took in some deep breath deep into my lungs and I

2020-05-24 The In-between

realized the blessing on “this day” that so many people are struggling to breathe because of COVID-19 and I'm breathing this day.

And I had the opportunity to witness to a friend – a friend who's also living in the in-between – that although I, too, was in a season of longing for “someday,” that “this day” held gifts, and that I was glad I hadn't missed it, and that “someday” was actually going to be a real thing, some day.

Can I just offer that one of the things I feel most proud of, because I know how much discipline it can take, is that I haven't missed out on my real life while waiting for the life I had hoped for “someday,” because that's what happens to so many people. I mean, I hope you get your “someday,” but my prayer is that you do not miss out on “this day” while you wait for “someday.” I hope you will live “this day” in light of that “someday” you hope for, because if we wait to witness what God is doing in our life until the day that “someday” arrives, if we wait to go about witnessing what is coming and witnessing to others what we've experienced, well, if we wait, I believe we will wait our whole lives away. There was witnessing to do all the way to the ends of the earth, things both to see and to proclaim that they had been seen, so much life for the disciples to live during this in-between, while they waited for “someday.”

And remember: we are living “this day” in light of “someday” and while the revelation of “this day,” it has kept me from standing around or pulling the covers over my head, living in the light of “someday” is what actually has kept me going. You see, I have absolute confidence that there will be a day when all that God has promised actually will come to pass, in due time, but I'm confident we will all be lifted up in that due time. And it *will* be a thing to see; it will be as spectacular – no, it'll be even *more* spectacular than Jesus ascending into the clouds! This moment when God raises all of our deaths, when we are all restored and supported and strengthened and established, when we are all lifted up in due time – oh man, that “someday,” I can't wait to see it. And tethering myself to this promise of “someday,” it pulls me through “this day.”

I wonder if any of you have watched the movie *Free Solo*. It's several years old, but we're all rewatching things these days. It's about a climber, a mountain climber, by the name of Alex Honnold; he's a climber who often climbs without ropes, which means if he makes a misstep “this day,” there is no “someday.” What I learned from that is if I'm going to climb a mountain, the mountain of those dates and times are not for you to know, and that is a steep thing to climb. Can I just suggest that, unlike Alex Honnold, that you get yourself on belay – harnessed in to a promise of “someday”? You see, tethering yourself to a “someday,” it doesn't keep us from

2020-05-24 The In-between

missteps, and sometimes there is a bit of a drop when we lose our grip on “someday,” but it keeps me from falling into the abyss of “It will never happen.” It will happen, “someday;” I know because I'm on belay – tethered to it – and I can feel the firmness of the “someday.”

While I have not always felt completely triumphant in this space – as I've already confessed, not knowing times and dates, oh it stretches me beyond my comfort, and it is a steep climb for even me – I am refusing to miss out on my real life and I'm tethered in to “someday,” and I hope *you* will want to live “this day” and tether yourself to “someday,” as well. And before I wrap up my time with you, I want to just give you a few more maybe footholds, handholds for this climb.

I want to offer 2 more little truths for living in the midst of the middle of the climb that we find in 1 Peter today. In the NLT, it says “Remember,” in verse 9, “Remember your brothers and sisters and all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.” To “remember” is to put back into your membership – put back into your membership that other people are going through hard stuff, too. Other people are living the in-between. As you live in to “this day,” tethered to “someday” it's good to *re*-member that the hard things that happen to you, the things that make you long for a different day, most of them are not personal. And by this I mean, I don't believe we are being personally set apart for these difficulties – difficulties and struggles and pain and disappointment and suffering and sadness – these are universal experiences. We do all experience a different variation of them, but we all experience the hard; we all have things that make us long for a different day. People the world over are facing struggles slogging through “this day” longing with us for “someday,” and I want to highlight this because I have found that when people come to believe that they're the only ones that are in this boat, this boat of the hard day, two things happen. One, we begin to feel all isolated and lonely, and there is simply no reason for that. You will find you are not alone; if we will all be honest not only about our successes, but about the struggles we have, we will find that we are actually not very solo in this experience of days we wish we move faster. Also, when we think we are the only one struggling, not only do we feel isolated and alone, but we also often absolve ourselves of getting after “this day.” We think things like, “Well, the rest of the world is living “this day” because they aren't struggling like me, which is true, to a point – they aren't struggling *exactly* like you, but everyone is struggling “this day.” “This day” is either done with struggles or it isn't done at all. This is what I want you know: everybody is dealing with the struggle. You are not alone, and it isn't a reason to not get after “this day.”

And let me offer one last thing as you try to live into “this day” tethered to someday. It says in verse 7: “Cast all your anxieties upon God, because God cares for you.” I recommend this

2020-05-24 The In-between

practice “this day” in light of “someday” to share the fullness of your cares and anxieties with God. Don't hold back! Be honest with God about all the things that make “this day” hard. Use all the words necessary; I certainly do. And all the reasons and longings you have for “someday,” say them to God. And let me be clear that when you do this, the scripture does not say “This will make your cares and your anxieties go away.” We often fill in the blanks of scripture. We're like, “Cast all your anxieties on God and they'll be gone.” It's not what it says! It says, “Cast all your anxieties upon God and God will care for you in them.” The scripture does not say that giving over our worries and cares to God will even get our “someday” here any faster. It says that in this long, who-knows-how-long time, God will care for us.

The scripture offers the good news that we have a God who knows the struggles and sadness of our days. This is a God who put on the skin and life and flesh and blood so we can be confident that when our God is called a “man of sorrows” who's well “acquainted with grief” that this isn't just a theory. Our God knows what it's like to live “this day” even this hard “this day,” longing for a “someday,” which means we can boldly, without any shame or any pause, place all of our cares and all of our worries and all of our anxieties into the care of this God who is going to care for us. The good news is we have a God who descended onto the earth before he ascended back to the throne. We have a God who knows our flesh and blood struggles, rather than a God who sits in a lofty place expecting us to rise above them every single time. We're not asked to pretend our worries and cares and anxieties and longings don't exist; we're invited to share them with a God who knows the reality of the cares and anxieties and longings and worries of this life. Cast all your anxieties upon God; he cares about you. God cares about you. God *is caring* for you “this day,” so, there's no need to stand around tending to all your cares and worries like they're children that need you; you actually can trust your worries and cares into the care of Jesus. He will tend to them, so that you can go about the business of living “this day,” as together we live for “someday.”

Let me pray. (I'm going to leave my eyes open.) Lord God, I can't see everybody, but I pray that they would know that they're seen – that in this place, where they feel like “this day” is a day they might want to pull the covers over their head, that they forgot that there were things to witness and things to witness to – I pray that on “this day,” you would tether them well to “someday;” that they would know this long and steep climb to we-will-not-know-the-times-or-dates – that they would know that even if they slip and fall, they're on belay – that you've got them, and that you will keep them in their cares. God, for those who need to actually express those cares and worries and anxieties and fears and have held back because they don't want to seem weak, or they don't want to be a burden, or they don't want to jinx themselves in their relationship with God – they feel like they need to be

2020-05-24 The In-between

righteous – I pray that even “this day,” they would know they have a God who put on skin to come and walk with them, who knows the sadness and worries and difficulties of our days, and when we share them with him, he says, “I’ve got them. Whew, I know how hard that was!” And I pray that we would know the tending to of our cares and worries “this day,” so that we could not just stand around, but get after it, to see what life might be here for us on “this day.” We pray this all in Jesus’ name. Amen.

[End of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information, visit us at [ArtisanChurch.com](https://www.ArtisanChurch.com).