

## Liminal Spaces

by Linda Rex

**July 23, 2023, Proper 11 / After Pentecost**—This week I have been thinking about liminal spaces and life change, and how we never know what life will throw at us. From what I have learned about liminal spaces, they are places of transition or change, whether real or metaphorical. We may be uncomfortable or feel anxious during seasons of change or transition, especially when they mean facing difficult challenges or dealing with stressful events.

Whether we like it or not, our lives are full of these experiences of transition. This week I learned that a dear friend and former ministry co-worker passed away. Even though I am sorry that she had to go, I am grateful that she is now enjoying what she always longed for, and that was being face-to-face with Jesus and her heavenly Father in the Spirit. She had embraced her life as God's child and had looked forward to the culmination of all that Christ had done in her life. And she longed to be with those she loved who had gone before.

We never know what may occur in life, or where we may be in the next hour, the next day, the next year. We can make plans, but in the end, we have no control over the outcome. We struggle through life, difficult situations, and long for things to be better. In many ways, all of us are caught in a liminal space, for we are present in God's kingdom even now by the Spirit, and yet we are not fully there, for it has not yet arrived in its fullness. We are caught in the already not-yet of the kingdom of heaven, and along with the creation groan and long for the ultimate redemption of our human flesh and this world.

In the New Testament passage for this Sunday, Romans 8:12–25, the apostle Paul reminds us that how we handle this in-between time before Christ's return in glory is important. In this in-between space, Paul says, we are under no obligation to serve our fleshly desires and will. Since the result of doing those things is a life full of fear, slavery to sin, and death, it is better that we, by God's Spirit, put those behaviors and actions to death. The call is for life instead. And life in all its fullness is directly related to our connection with our Creator and Redeemer.

Living in this transitional space of the already not-yet of God's kingdom is best done as a child. Accepting our being children of our heavenly Father through Jesus in the Spirit enables us to embrace God's love and grace, and live in the truth of who we are. As God's children, we were designed to live in God's grace embrace, to love God devotedly and to love one another. God's indwelling Spirit creates a resonance in our hearts which tells us that indeed we are God's children—we hear Jesus' own "Abba, Father" in our hearts and realize that in Christ we can see the Father's gaze and know we are loved.

Even though we embrace who we are as God's children, this liminal space of the already not-yet of God's kingdom is one where we have no guarantees of an easy, comfortable life. Because God's kingdom stands in direct opposition to the kingdoms of this world, it is more likely that we will struggle and suffer because we have embraced our kinship with our Lord. But the apostle Paul assures us that whatever we may have to go through, nothing can compare to the vast and wonderful majesty of what we are now heirs to and will receive in glory. This is why we can, in the midst of difficulty, have hope.

And held within God's love and grace, our hearts filled with hope, we wait. While we wait there is much to do—most especially living right now the kingdom life we were created for. We don't have to wait for Christ's return in glory to live as adopted children of our Father. No, we begin even now to live in the truth of who God has made us to be in Christ. Because we are given the Spirit and are even now participants in God's kingdom through Christ, we love God and love one another. We share the good news of what God has done for us in Christ, and we tell others about

God's love and grace. And we trust that what God has in mind for us is better than what we could ask for or imagine, because he loves us.

*Dear Father, thank you for including us in your life. By your Spirit, enable us to hear Jesus' own words of affection, so we can share in your life and love. Grant us the grace to live free from our old ways and live in the truth of who we are as your beloved children, through your Son Jesus and by your Spirit. Amen.*

*"Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently." Romans 8:12–25 NIV*