



In-Between Spaces

July 22, 2020

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There is a sweet spot between the known and the unknown where originality happens; the key is to be able to linger there without panicking. – Ed Catmull (Pixar)

An increasing number of practical resources are ready to guide leaders through (1) living through a pandemic while (2) facing challenges to the relevance of the church in a post-Christian era in the midst of (3) unprecedented political division with a looming general election as we (4) confront upended and intolerable practices in our legislative, administrative, and judicial systems. Our sense of normalcy is ending, and something else is emerging that we can't yet see. For the moment, however, we're stuck in the middle, between the known and the unknown. Ed Catmull, Pixar's co-founder, labeled it a sweet spot for originality. Similarly, the word "svaha" is attributed to an indigenous language to mean the space between the thunder and lightning – perhaps a space in which we might imagine and dream and wonder. Some describe this disorientation as a *liminal* space: poised at the threshold.

No matter how we describe this space of disorientation, we're there. We've got it all (*see* items 1-4 above for starters). The key, Catmull says, is to linger there without panicking. Franciscan father and author Richard Rohr proactively urges us to seek out liminal spaces: "That's a good space where genuine newness can begin. Get there often and stay as long as you can by whatever means possible. It's the realm where God can get at us because our false certitudes are finally out of the way.... If we don't encounter liminal space in our lives, we start idealizing normalcy. The threshold is God's waiting room."¹

I've been in a lot of waiting rooms in the last few months – primarily while I wait for Zoom calls to begin. I doubt that many of us look forward to liminal spaces, or seek them out, or linger in them. They're uncomfortable and uncertain. Our tendency is to scramble out of such spaces to return to what we had or to rush toward what might be. In doing so, though, we leave a space where the Spirit can speak clearly, if we're patient enough to listen.

Lingering in a liminal space doesn't mean doing nothing. It doesn't require us to let chaos wash over us. Liminal spaces are wonderful opportunities for experimentation and risk-taking, even if that feels a bit scary at first. Because we don't know what's ahead, we don't have to commit to any particular approach; we can let go of behaviors that no longer serve us well; we can imagine "what if..."

The Church has always lived in a liminal space between the Judeo-Christian history set out in Scripture and the promise of Jesus' return. When early Christians grew weary of waiting for the coming of the Kingdom, they were reminded that we do not know the dates or times Christ's return, so we must remain sober and alert. (1 Thess. 5). We still live in that liminal space, and it is the space in which the Church has thrived. In that sweet spot, the Church sets its hope on the Kingdom, but lives its faith through action in the world.

Presbytery, you named "risk taking for the sake of the gospel" as a core value. What if we now give up panic about going back to what was familiar and do what we've always done: live in the hope of God's promise, while living out our faith in the world? That sweet spot offers us the chance at newness, originality, and wonder. Let us linger while we can.

¹ Rohr, Richard, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (New York: The Crossroad Pub. Co. 1999)