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In Between, Part 2

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Last week, I wrote about the in-between time that is Holy Week – that transition from Palm Sunday’s triumph to the cross. This week, our “in-between-ness” continues. On Easter Sunday, many of us heard the good news of Jesus’ resurrection from the Gospel of John, an alternate option from continuing the lectionary in Luke. In it, Mary Magdalene stood weeping outside the tomb, wondering who had stolen Jesus’ body. She questioned two angels and Jesus himself about the body. In her distress, she did not recognize Jesus until he spoke her name.

Jesus thrusts us into our liminal space by cautioning Mary, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” (John 20:17 NRSV)

“Do not hold on to me...”,

or in some translations, “Do not cling to me....”

Jesus anticipates this is exactly what Mary wants to do: to hold on to him. She wants to cling to him and wrap her arms around him – to hold him tightly and never let go. Her friend and teacher is back. He is not dead, but alive!

In his admonition, Jesus refuses to go back to the way things were, and he won’t let Mary either. Jesus has not yet ascended to the Father. There is more to come. Their relationship – Jesus’ relationship with all his disciples – remains in transition. They are in between.

This Easter reading reminds us that we gain little from holding too tightly to what was. In all change, we can experience loss and grief. It is natural to reach out for what is slipping away from us. Somehow, if we can only grab and hold on a little longer, we won’t have to face the unknown of what is coming. My father fought death, clinging to what was known and the life he had built. We resist change in our congregations and ministries, holding tightly to what we’ve known and the programs we have sustained. One Sunday, in my former church in Denver, we intentionally moved all the chairs and forced people to sit in new places. Even that was hard!

I have announced this week my resignation as your Presbytery Executive, effective May 31. I will be moving to Boise to help care for my mother, sharing that privilege with my siblings. In the coming weeks, I will share more about my plans. This, too, is one more change for all of us. It is tempting for me to cling to you all, to wrap my arms around you and hold on tightly. The Milwaukee Presbytery is a special place, ready to answer Christ’s call and take risks for the sake of the gospel. I have been blessed to come alongside you in that ministry.

Much of what is coming for me – and, of course, for you – is unknown. The Presbytery Council and its Personnel Committee are assessing the opportunities that lay on the horizon, and I’m encouraged by their diligence in seeking what is best for the Presbytery in this time of transition.

Although Jesus prolongs our time in between what was and what will be, I take comfort in his words to Mary, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” We share one Father and one God with each other and with the Risen Christ. No matter how our circumstances and relationships change, we remain inextricably bound to each other in the One who will never let us go. That is indeed Good News! Like Mary, may we proclaim with joy and amazement, “I have seen the Lord!”