This is the third Sunday after Easter, and a lot has been happening since the resurrection of Jesus. Two weeks ago, the Reverend Danielle Kim shared with us about the people walking alongside Jesus to Emmaus without recognizing him. Last week, I shared the story of how Thomas asked for evidence about the resurrection of Jesus, and when Jesus showed him, he believed profoundly.

There is a great deal taking place in such a short time. The world of the disciples was just turned upside down, and they had no idea what was next. They look back and don’t know what to do with their past, they look forward, but everything looks uncertain. These were transitioning times, what I like to refer to as “in-between” times, the kind that I know all of us have experienced. Those moments when we don’t know how to make sense of our lives because of the sudden change taking place in and around us.

Do you know what I am talking about? The “in-between” times are those seasons in our lives when something has changed but we don’t know yet what is next. We have moved on from something but have not arrived yet at our next destination, or worse, we don’t even know if there is a destination. It seems as if the way forward is concealed. The things that we used to know become unfamiliar. The paths we used to walk seem strange. We are neither “back there” nor “over there,” just here, waiting while feeling lost, confused, sad, anxious, or even punished.

“In-between” times are the most challenging experiences we can have but also the most fulfilling ones. In hindsight, many people would say that every “in-between” time is a blessing, but when you are in the middle of it, it often feels far from it.

For example, when I know people are going through change, I ask them how they are doing, and sometimes I hear many respond, “I am in transition,” “I am getting there,” or “I am moving along.” I think that is code for, “My life is falling apart, and I don’t know what the heck is going on!” Of course, we don’t want to admit that, but if we are honest, that is how we may feel when we are “in-between” times, like falling apart, struggling to make it through. So we mask our response by simply saying, “I am getting there.”

Today’s message deals with the question: Can I trust God in the “in-between” times? There is a story in the Bible that will help us learn about this. Let’s read John 21:1-6,

“After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish.”

This is the third appearance by Jesus after the resurrection. He came to the disciples that were by the Sea of Tiberias. This is somewhat surprising because this is not where Jesus told them to wait for him once they arrived at Galilee.

From Matthew 28:16, we get, “Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.” So, the disciples, rather than waiting for Jesus at the Sea of Tiberias, were asked, according to Matthew 28:16, to wait for Jesus on a designated mountain. And this, of course, is not where Jesus found them.

The question is, *why*? Why were they in a different place? Because they were confused about the events taking place in their lives. Their lives were turned upside down by Jesus but then he died and now is back. How can anyone make sense of these incredible events? Well, they were trying to make sense of their lives while “in-between” times by going back to what they knew best: fishing. John 21:3 tells us that “Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’ They said to him, ‘We will also come with you.’”

Perhaps Peter and the others thought they were better off forgetting the whole thing. So, they headed out to do what they knew. For them to make that decision after being instructed by Jesus to be somewhere else, there had to be some doubt, disappointment, and even resentment to do that. I can almost hear Peter’s thoughts: “Why would he (Jesus) do this to us? Why did he say all those nice things about us just to leave us here with nothing? Why did he even bother coming back?”

But isn’t this precisely what we do when we are experiencing transitioning times: we fall back to what we used to do, or at a minimum, we stop trying? However, the issue with falling back to what is familiar is that it sometimes means giving up on what God has for us or wants to do with us.

I understand how difficult it can be to appreciate times of transition in our lives as gifts, but those are the prime moments when we go through remarkable transformations and growth in our lives. These periods of transition, though often challenging and disorienting, offer us a unique opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of ourselves, our relationships, and our faith. They rearrange our lives not for our demise but for the next chapter of our lives, equipping us to live a more purposeful and fulfilling life.

I have been through a lot of these times. I can tell you many stories about transitioning times, like when we moved from Mexico to the U.S., but let me tell you just a couple of stories from my teenage years.

As a teenager, I struggled to find my path after finishing Junior High. I was discouraged and frozen, perhaps a little angry for not having a purpose or clear path forward. I was struggling to find my vocation. But my mother stood with me and helped me get through it by listening to my struggles and offering encouragement and wisdom. As I took to heart her advice, I made a series of decisions that opened the path to what was next for me. This next chapter led me to move into a new city (Monterrey), where I became a devoted Methodist. A huge event that I had no idea how of a major impact it would have on my life years later.

The second “in-between” time milestone happened after I finished high school. Once again, I was struggling to find my purpose. I went to college and did a semester of Industrial Engineering, but I gave it up because my heart was not there. After that, a year passed, and I kept searching for something. Finally, at the end of the year 2000, while on my search, I had an amazing experience with God, where I discerned my calling to ministry. And a couple of months after that, I met Evelyn. The following year I started seminary, and the rest is history.

My “in-between” times were not a waste of time but a time of rearrangement through transitions. They were a time of discernment and change in perspective. In order for me to move into my future, my heart and vision needed to change. To see the vision of God for me, I needed to gain a new understanding of myself and life as a whole. During those times, my priorities were rearranged and I gained new ones. What I thought was important was not anymore. What became important I did not have it before. And when that happened, everything fell into place and made sense.

The way I see those experiences in my life is that while I waited, searched, and changed, God was also organizing and getting things ready for the next chapter in my life. God was making me ready for the path set before me.

I know these are very personal and particular experiences that you may or may not relate to. I am sure you all have different stories that may bring memories of joy or even heartbreak. Perhaps your “in-between” times experiences have to do with the loss of a loved one, career changes, divorce or relationship breakup, health crisis, parenthood, getting married, retirement, a personal crisis of faith, or a new business venture. Whatever may be the case, whether it is an emotional trouble time or an exciting new beginning, those decisions going forward are very difficult. But the one thing we can do in any situation is to keep trusting and listening to God so we can confidently move on to what is next.

This is the lesson today: the way forward won’t show if we give up faith. The disciples had to trust and believe even when everything seemed to be against them.

This brings me to the last point. After fishing all night without catching anything, Jesus appeared to them and something profound happened, he told them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish.”

How is this possible? This sounds almost like a joke. What difference does throwing the net on the left or right side of the boat make? I mean, do fish stay only on one side? That is silly, of course. This is about trusting what Jesus said and is asking us to do. The reason the disciples caught fish this time was not because of a new special skill they learned overnight but because they threw the net one more time as directed by Jesus—even if reluctantly. This experience was foretelling their future. It was the beginning of their “in-between” times breakthrough, which came not through skill but trust and faith.

The experience the disciples had was about learning to listen and trust Jesus. The miracle happened not because they fished on the right side but because they did not give up and threw the net out again as instructed. And so it is with us. We can’t give up when life is messy or does not make sense. We can’t abandon our nets and get off the boat because we are having a bad time or feel out of luck.

Let me ask you some challenging questions: Have you ever considered that you may have been stuck with “empty nets” because you are not listening to God’s instructions? What if what is holding you back is your reluctance to do what you know in your heart God has spoken to you? What if what is holding you back is the fear of the unknown, when God had told you, “Trust me, it will be fine”? What if what is holding you back is trying to keep your comforts, and God is telling you, “Trust me, you will not lack”? What if what is holding you back is a sentimental attachment to your past, yet God is telling you, “Trust me, this is not the end but there is much more ahead”?

My friends, we all know that transitions are not always easy. In fact, most of the time, they are painful. But they will come and find us no matter how much we try to hide from them or how hard we try to hold onto the old stuff. Remember, the disciples did not find their new purpose by going back to what they were. In the same way, you and I will not find our purpose by waiting for things to go our way, for our troubles to disappear, by trying to make sense of everything, or by holding onto the past. Instead, we must listen and pay attention to Jesus speaking to us so we would know when and how to “cast the net” when the time is right. Those are the milestones that change our lives in beautiful ways. I am a witness!

Here is the invitation and good news: As we journey through the inevitable “in-between” times of life, let us be reminded to place our trust in God and listen intently to his guidance. When we are tempted to revert to the familiar or shy away from the unknown, remember that God is with us in every step, even when we feel lost or uncertain. Let us boldly face those transitioning times in our lives, knowing that God will lead us to our next chapter, filled with grace, transformation, and renewed purpose.