24th Sunday after Pentecost - November 8, 2026
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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O God, my Source and my Redeemer. Amen.

The In-Between Times

There are two more Sundays in Pentecost, three weeks until we begin the season of Advent, the beginning of the church year, that time in the church calendar when we hunker down, get quiet, focus on *being* more than doing. A season of waiting. We point to Mary waiting for the child growing in her, to be born. It is a time of diminishing light, days getting shorter and shorter, waiting for the return of the sun and the birth of the Son.

If Advent is a time of waiting for some new thing to be revealed, why (you may be wondering) am I talking about it now, *before* Advent? Before the waiting time?

Because we are not there yet. Right now, in this time *before* Advent, we are, I want to suggest to you, in a very different but equally important time. There is a kind of busy-ness, but all with a heightened sense of anticipation. We are *about* to settle in, snuggle down, be still . . . but not yet. This is the time in-between.

It is a threshold time.

All spring and summer and early fall, every morning that the weather doesn't shut me in, as soon as I'm up and dressed, I go outside and walk in my garden, coffee mug in hand.

I walk and look and notice. I feel into what's emerging, what's growing, what's changed. What the rain did overnight. What was eaten by whom.

There aren't words going through my head so much as a perception, an exchange. Something settles in me, something exudes. Spirit enters, spirit breathes out. It's soothing and quiet, a walk through Creation.

When I prepared to move back to IC after 30 years in Michigan, I surveyed the gardens I'd created and tended there on my hillside plot and thought, I can't do this again—I'm not going to be doing this much or this kind of gardening again. So I reduced by half the paraphenalia I moved here.

But the yard of our house here was, it turned out, completely overgrown; the previous owner had planted trumpet vine every 3 feet along both property lines, and Japanese knotweed all along the inside perimeters. After years of neglect, it was so overgrown that it was like hacking through a jungle to clear the gate and walkways and a surprise pergola or get into the garage. Once cleared, I found I had a blank slate, large areas of empty space and rich soil that I couldn't ignore or resist. The garden that eventually emerged was entirely my creation: over the year of Covid, I filled it with plants I transplanted from Michigan, plants gifted from friends, retrieved from strangers on facebook, and some I had even paid money for.

Each year since then, as the growing season winds down, I have walked the garden imagining how things will emerge differently next year, after the turn again towards longer, warmer days. What will need to be moved, what might reseed itself, what will finally grow into the space I've given it.

Now, as the land moves towards its season of rest, there is no more exerting energy for something new. The garden has finished its growing. Falling leaves are covering any new buds, and leaves are all you see. I pot the plants I'll bring indoors, or dig up bulbs so they can enter the dark period needed for next spring's new growth. I clean, rake, trim back. I put the garden to bed. Squirrels are frantically burying nuts, caching them away. We humans have finished harvesting. We know that in the cycle of growth and renewal in this part of the world, things must go dormant for a period. Must cease all growing, appear inert, gather energy, and rest before any new growth can begin.

New things will emerge, but not yet. Their shapes and health, their neighbors and needs are not yet clear, and won't be, until after this period of rest and shedding.

But we aren't *yet* to winter. Things haven't yet gone dormant. We aren't yet hunkered down beneath bare branches and a layer of ice and snow.

Between the explosion and growth, and the quiet, hidden rest, there is a threshold. An in-between place and time, where things are not any longer what they were, not yet at all clear what they will or might become.

How easy it is to miss the threshold — itself a distinct place and space. Neither one thing nor another. Not what has been, nor yet what will be. We can take stock of where we've been, all that has happened in the growing season. But we're not yet clear about what new thing is coming. What that new thing might mean.

A threshold is a liminal space of in-between. Where we pass from one thing to another, from outside to inside or from activity to rest.

Between what holds me and what calls me. Moments of no longer and not yet. Across time and culture, people have stepped into wilder places to

meet themselves anew, to seek clarity, mark transitions, and remember what truly matters.

Pause for a moment on this threshold, and notice what is about to change.

The stories we inherit as people of this faith and history are filled with threshold experiences. The Hebrew people freed from slavery in Egypt were led by Moses into "the wilderness," wandering. Take a look at the maps that biblical scholars have created showing the route they posit the Hebrew wanderers took. It's fascinating — it really was wandering, in circles sometimes. They wandered long enough that none of those adults who had left Egypt were allowed to enter the Promised Land, so that those who entered the new place had no memory of the old life. That wandering was an in-between time — no longer slaves in Egypt, not yet who they might become in a new land. In that wandering, a number of hugely significant things happened that eventually shaped who the Israelites would be.

At this point in the story that we heard today, the story of what it took to get the Hebrew people to the Promised Land, Joshua is a very old man. He has brought the wanderers into the Promised Land, and has led a many-year series of wars and battles against the native Canaanite peoples, and when he had almost pushed them all out, he divided the land among the 12 tribes of Israel. Now, as he approaches death, he gathers them together for a farewell address. He reminds them of their history, that it is God who has led them to this place, and exhorts them to turn from the worship of any other idols or gods. He makes them choose, to re-commit themselves to the God of their ancestors, and ends with his own vow—

"Choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites

in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

I can't help but hear, in this declaration of Joshua's, the kind of unquestioning quiet faith, quiet groundedness, that Mary had as she declared, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

After the angel's visit, she is no longer the person she was before; she does not yet know what will unfold from the angel's announcement. But in the moment—in this moment when she stands on the threshold between what is no longer but also is not yet—her choice is to declare, like Joshua, I serve God.

Just as I hear echoes of Mary in Joshua's story, I also hear the themes of Advent beginning in Jesus's words to his disciples. "The kingdom of God is like this," he begins. Like most of his parables, the Parable of the Ten Virgins is hard to understand, especially if you try to find exact correspondences between the story and the lesson we are supposed to take from it.

In many of the parables, Jesus decodes the details, sometimes verse by verse, to help his followers understand their meanings. But in this one, he only provides a summary, a single-line takeaway at the end:

"Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

There have been all the preparations for the wedding feast; but the principal party has not yet arrived. And so there is a waiting time. An in-between time. Jesus speaks to that in-between time: keep awake. Watch. Wait, but be alert. There's nothing to do, if you have prepared. Yet there *is* something to do: Stay awake!

We are at a threshold, in a season of transition. No matter where we are in the journey of our lives—between one stage of life and another, between working and retired, one job and another, between grandmother

and great-grandmother, one book project and another, or between one decade and another—we are now, here, in the middle of the northern hemisphere, at this point in the earth's cycle around the sun, at a threshold. What we planted has grown and ripened and been harvested. We are raking up the leaves, bringing in the more fragile plants, getting ready for a time when there's nothing to do in order to tend to growing things. We've done the work of building a career, growing a family. We're getting ready for the hunkering down, lying low, turning inwards.

We are in the space between what has been and what is to come.

Because all human life is woven through and through by change, whether we recognize it or not, it is possible to find yourself in those moments between who you are now and who you are meant to be, and feel at loose ends, lost or unsteady. It can be uncomfortable. Or, it can be seen as a tipping point, at once the culmination of longing and the initiation of a transformation we await. At the same time, it is a stand-still—a pause in the present between past and future; an interlude between two chapters that shape the stories of our lives.

All *parts* of human life—all moments of living—are woven through and through by change. Sometimes you walk through a door and pay no attention to that transition, so focused on where you are headed or what you're coming from. Some changes are too big not to notice, but we often don't recognize change until long after it's happened.

Whether approaching a threshold in everyday life or marking a season of transition, we are invited to approach it with awareness and intention, in order to listen deeply to the liminal space where God walks with us.

So, now, I invite you to pause at this moment in the season, this point in your life, this threshold. To linger it in. To let it speak. How will you acknowledge this threshold before moving forward? What action might be required on your part to carve out time to more intentionally engage this in-between space? How might you listen now? How might you find God calling you: Stay awake! In what part of your soul and with what new meaning might you find yourself responding, "As for me, I will serve you, Lord."

Amen