

‘LIMINAL SPACE: EXPECTATIONS’

John 5: 1-9

I want to introduce today the concept of Liminal Space...that is transition space. That is the time between what was and what is to come. That is the time between the election of Laura the Sunday after Easter and her start date of July 1.

I like the image of a hallway or a foyer in a house being liminal space. We are in the foyer having come in out of the cold and gathering ourselves to decide whether to take off our coat or keep it for a while. Standing there we are greeted by the host before moving to the family room for some refreshments. We know where we have come from and are on the verge of where we are going.

For us as a congregation, we are in the foyer. We know our past, where we have been, who we are and are now on the threshold of a new venture in which God will show us the way. It has been 3.5 years since the last installed pastor, Kevin, left South Plains

John 5: I have loved this passage for years. It is so much about you and me. Seems Jesus was in Jerusalem for a festival of the Jews. He goes by the pool at Bethesda. It was known as a pool which had healing powers. We are told that blind, lame, and paralyzed people lay by the pool. They were waiting for the ‘stirring of the waters’ by an angel of the Lord. For when the waters were stirred up, it was believed whoever stepped into the pool first would be made well from their disease. So people were always ‘ready’ for one never knew when the waters might be stirred up!

Jesus encounters a lame man laying by the pool. In fact, the man had lain there for 38 years. So, Jesus asks him a simple question, “Do you want to be made well?”

That question is what is so attractive to me in this passage. It is not just a question for the lame man. It is our question. It is a question we all have to answer. It is a question that can make us squirm. It is a question that can make us very uneasy.

So - - do you - - do you want to be made well? From a marriage that is just so-so? From a relationship that is not life-

giving but life draining? From a job that is literally costing you your life and your family? From a feeling of inferiority around other people? From a superficial and typical church-type relationship with Jesus Christ?

All of us have to face this question. All of us have to allow this question to touch us deeply and personally. It is everybody’s question!

Notice the response of the lame man. He did not answer Jesus. I thought it was a rather simple YES or NO question.

Yet, he did not answer. He just gave excuses:

- (1) I have no one to put me in the water.
- (2) While I am going down, someone jumps in front of me.

He never answered the question which

highlights why the question is so central for us...because we do the same thing:

1. I don’t have time
2. I am preoccupied with my work
3. I need help.
4. I am not worthy.
5. No one really cares.

We are that lame man, and we have very lame excuses...pardon the pun. And why is that the case? We have very low expectations. We do not think it is worth our time. We are just not sure it is worth the effort. It takes too much energy and determination on our part. We just sit by!

Expectations: a crucial aspect of living life. A crucial focus in being a disciple of Jesus Christ. A critical part of our Christian faith. Expecting God’s Spirit to do powerful things in our lives and for God’s Kingdom.

For example, if you came to worship today with few expectations, you will leave rather empty. If you just are listening to scripture being read aloud, that’s all that will happen. Yet, if you expect some word from God’s Word today, God’s Spirit will be alive and lively for you.

This morning, I want us to focus on our expectations which we have for our new pastor. We all have expectations. Maybe not intentionally thought through at this point, but we all carry a set of them for any pastor. I have expectations about pastors.

It was drilled into my head by my father that if I was going to be a preacher, DO NOT read your sermons or your prayers. I cannot shake that expectation and it influences me every time I lead worship.

In my first pastorate, Miss Sarah, the 80-year-old church treasurer, brought a very nice lady to church for me to meet. We did introductions all around. I did not take the bait and did not invite the woman out on a date. Several weeks later, Miss Sarah said, "Huh, I'll never introduce you to anyone else again!" I felt my prayers had been answered. She was clear the minister is to be married! Very clear expectations on Miss Sarah's part.

I talked once with a church Pastor Nominating Committee in our presbytery while serving as General Presbyter about their search. They were looking for a male pastor who is married with 2.3 children in tow. So, I said, "So, you would not consider me for the position?" To which they said, "Nope!" Expectations.

What are our expectations for Laura coming to South Plains? Will she walk on water? Will she be a regular Joe...or is that Josephine? Will she wow me? Will she preach the Bible? Will she be a good friend to me and my family? Will she visit in our homes? Will she be easy to talk with? Someone mentioned they hoped she will have a sense of humor!

I jokingly surmise with 100 members, there would be 300 expectations for her, which is probably low actually.

So, let me define more clearly the pastor in the Presbyterian Church. To outline what we expect from Pastors when we call a Presbyterian pastor.

First, titles: we use the title of "Minister of the Word and Sacrament" to describe the office to which Laura has been ordained. We also use the term Pastor, Teaching Elder, and Reverend. All of which you'll need to learn from Laura her preference.

Secondly, in the Presbyterian Church, different from other denominations, we do not have the title of Senior Pastor. There is no hierarchy in our system. We use the titles Pastor and Associate Pastor. Now many of us in talking to our

neighbors rather naturally say that Laura is our Senior Pastor as many of us are from the corporate world. However, if Laura is our Senior Pastor, that makes everyone else around here 'juniors.' And I don't see many "juniors" in this crowd!

We are very intentional about the titles we use...because the title defines the functions of the pastor, not the status of the pastor. Elders also have defined responsibilities. So, our understanding of church Officers is that all of us have different functions. We have different jobs. We have different talents and when working together help the church to be the church.

As the passage from I Corinthians says, are we all eyes or ears or hands? What good would it do if everyone were the same or had the same function or jobs. It would not be able to be the body, the Body of Christ.

So, we in the Presbyterian Church all have different functions. One is not more important than any other. We are attempting to be the Body of Christ all working together.

Our Book of Order gives a good description of the Minister of the Word and Sacrament:

1. Shall be committed to teaching the faith in word and deed...hence the title, Teaching Elder.
2. Shall support people in the discipline of the faith and struggles of daily life...hence the title, Pastor.
3. Shall serve at the table and font to show forth the mysteries of God...hence the title Minister of Word and Sacrament.

So, you see, our Pastor is not a CEO (though some try and fail miserably);

Our pastor is not our buddy and close friend, if they are going to be pastoral.

Our pastor is not trained in high finances to figure out all the financial matters of the church.

We also need to realize that Laura and Naomi will feel overwhelmed upon arrival. With all the hospitality and friendliness of this congregation, she may need to declare a "TIME OUT" ...for they could be overwhelmed.

My sense is that expectations around this place are high - - nothing like our lame brother by the pool. And

Laura's expectations are equally high as she anticipates the beginning of her ministry with you.

May the relationship of Pastor and People be a solid one that is life giving and energizing. And may it also honor the gifts which she brings as well as the incredible gifts that exist in this congregation.

So that Pastor and People move forward to a future no one can imagine at this point.

For in doing that, the credit and thanks and praise will be appropriate...to God who has brought this relationship into existence. To God be the Glory!