

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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Grace to you and peace from God, our Creator, and our savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. I recently read the book *Unlocking Leadership Mindtraps* by Jennifer Garvey Berger. Berger writes how that in a world of complexity, we simplify our reality to reduce our stress and move through the world more easily. This is generally a helpful and necessary process EXCEPT when we are making decisions that require us to incorporate complexity.

This is where we run into the mindtraps. Berger lists five of these instincts we return to when we actually need to dig deeper into the complexity. These traps include: telling simple stories, an over commitment to alignment over challenging one another, a need to be right, a need for control of the situation, and an ego that keeps us as were we are instead of reaching for who we can be.

Berger highlights these quirks as tendencies that keep us from deeply examining complexity for when we enter into liminal spaces. Spaces where complexity has shaken us and changed us or the world around us. It's an in between time where we are uncertain for what the future holds. When we can be intentional about how we see the complexity and respond to it, we can be better leaders into the future. Even under stress and doubt, we can hold confidence in our ability to adapt and move forward in complex situations, holding true to our mission and identity through liminal spaces.

The story that takes place in our Gospel is a demonstration of this liminal space. The disciples are shocked and confused about a complex situation unfolding before them. The disciples, in the midst of an experience that is truly indescribable, are trying to discern how they should proceed. They offer making tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. As this unfolds, a cloud falls over them. It punctuates they are truly, "in a fog," their sight is obscured, and the path forward is unclear. God speaks to them with the simple words, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

God speaks directly to God's people and makes it as simple as possible. Just like our first reading, God speaks to Moses and gives the ten commandments. The concern about Moses' shining face is not something Moses feels, or some negative consequence God passes on for speaking to Moses.

No, it's just concern for an unexpected change. Change when God enters the world and does things that we cannot understand or anticipate. This shocks us and moves us into a liminal space, where God's words then move us into a new reality and sense of self.

Moses gives the Israelites the ten commandants inscribed on the tablets. Jesus, the next day, demonstrates what it looks like to listen to Him, to live into God's will. A young boy possessed by demons terrifies his family and the disciples who attempt to heal the boy. Jesus, almost defiantly, moves toward the boy. Not running from evil but moving towards it. Jesus confronts this evil with love, grace, and care as he heals the boy. He moves into the liminal space where the boy is ostracized and integrates him back into the community.

We are, “on the verge” in so many spaces in our lives. In this church community we are entering a liminal space as we approach Lent, and as we anticipate both Pastor Jason’s sabbatical and my graduation from Seminary. In our city, we are entering a liminal space as COVID cases continue to fall and health protocols in the city and state expire.

In our country, we can recognize the liminal space as we see a continued attack on transgender children and their care givers as the Texas AG claims that affirming care for these children is a “crime” that can be punished under by the law. And in our world, no doubt have we entered a liminal space as Russia wages war on Ukraine and parties all over try to discern the way forward.

Everybody let’s just take a collective breath. A world chock full of complexity and change. It feels like we are in the cloud on that mountain right now. How do we proceed? What is to be done in this world that feels as though at almost every level like we live in liminality moving towards frustration and depression?

Let our faith be simple and consistent. Let Jesus be our guiding light; the one we listen to. The world is complex but living our faith out is assured when we dedicate ourselves to following Jesus. Surely, we make mistakes because this world is full of complexity, and we are imperfect but our faith leads us to pursue God’s will revealed to us by Jesus.

That continued desire for integration, integration of self and integration of all of creation into God’s perfect Kingdom moves us and makes us think critically of how

best, in every situation, we can include and love those that inhabit these liminal spaces with us. We ask for revelation from God to proceed in a complex world and we hold in our hearts the love and harmony between all as a guiding promise from God.

In our own community, Wicker Park Lutheran will experiment and grow through change, continue in its traditions of radical inclusivity and care, and will pursue our faith in creative, diverse, and authentic ways.

In our city, we can be an example as we continue to put at the forefront, inclusion of all people, and take the precautions to keep all of us safe while still living in community with one another.

We may not live in the state of Texas, but we can certainly pursue justice for those whose existence and love is criminalized. We can provide of our own time, talent, and treasure to help keep those affected by regressive laws safe and continue to oppose any law in this country that strips people of their dignity and seeks to separate them from their neighbors.

And in our world, we must continue to support leaders who strive for peace. Not peace found through threat of violence, economic coercion, or mutually assured destruction. These consequences are always passed on to the least, those who are most vulnerable and marginalized. Instead, we can support leaders that seek peace and justice through common humanity, through respect for one another, and for shared prosperity in this world.

Jesus' words to us, what we are called to listen to, are simple. Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself. Let those who are without sin, cast the first stone. Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

What we must dedicate our time to is not sitting with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah on the mountaintop but to go out and lead with what Jesus has told us. That through us, God will transfigure this world, something beautiful, filled with love for one another and peace that knows no end.

To end my sermons, I normally like to pray but today, I want to do something a little different. Jennifer Garvey Berger, when teaching about complexity, mindtraps, and leadership likes to include the poem "Autobiography in Five Short Chapters," written by Portia Nelson.

This is a great illustration of our lives, our revelation in Christ, and how this revelation leads us in our new lives in Christ.

1. I walk down the street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I fall in. I am lost... I am helpless. It isn't my fault. It takes forever to find a way out.
2. I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I pretend I don't see it. I fall in again. I can't believe I am in the same place. But it isn't my fault. It still takes a long time to get out.
3. I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see it is there. I still fall in. It's a habit. My eyes are open. I know where I am. It is my fault. I get out immediately.

4. I walk down the same street. There is a deep hole in the sidewalk. I walk around it.

5. I walk down another street.

Amen.