

Most of the time, we live one day to the next. And most of the time, one day is more or less like the last. But occasionally, we enter seasons of life that are transitional. Once in a while, we're between two realities.

My wife Amanda and I got engaged the day after I turned 28. She had a big party planned for me, and I laid all these secret counter-plans that turned my birthday party into our engagement party. So both of us were making all these plans and then all those plans culminated in an Engagement! And it felt like this big moment, but it was only the beginning. Because of course you don't *stay* engaged. Engaged is a Between: you're *between* single and married. It ends when you get married.

Have you ever gotten a new job and had to put your two weeks in? You officially quit/resign/leave when you turn in your two weeks, but then you're still there for the next two weeks. Your Two Week Notice is a Between: you're *between* one job and the next. And your old job doesn't end when you put in your notice. It ends when you walk out the door for the last time.

Or consider getting pregnant. When you find out you're having a kid, you celebrate and get all excited, but getting pregnant is only the beginning. Pregnancy is Between: you're *between* not having a kid and having a kid. Being pregnant is going to end.

This first week after Easter marks a spiritual 'between time'. Easter is the day we celebrate Jesus' victory over sin and death. And in any good story, after the hero wins, the story's over. After Luke blows up the Death Star, they celebrate. Roll credits. After Jack kills the giant and returns home with the treasure, they all live happily ever after. After Boy gets Girl back, they get married and live happily ever after.

Easter feels like the End of the Story that began in Genesis 1.

We began to explore that story clear back at the beginning of 2013. We saw that God created the world with a certain Order, a logic to it. We spent six weeks exploring that world, the world of Genesis 1-2, the Way we were created to live in.

Then, during Lent, we saw how that all fell apart. We faced the reality of Sin, the truth that we all choose other ways. We saw the consequences our Sin has on the world.

But in facing our Sin, we also got to hear the Good News of God's rescue. Even though we had messed everything up, God rescued us. God removed every obstacle between us and God. All that's required of us is that we respond to God's rescue. We walk through the door God has unlocked and opened for us. And when we do, God forgives us, brings us back to life and calls us children.

That's what Easter is! Last week, we celebrated Jesus' resurrection from the dead. We talked about the Resurrection as God's victory over Sin, over Death. We claimed that Jesus' resurrection frees us to follow God, to chase after the life God created us to live. The Resurrection is what makes it possible for us to become children of God. [\[let's bring in the timeline stuff here\]](#)

So today, I want to ask, is that it? Is Easter only *The End* of the story? Or does something come next?

The Church proclaims that Easter is the fulcrum of human history. We believe that Jesus' resurrection is a historical singularity, that what happened on that Sunday is a once-in-a-universe event. We proclaim that while Jesus' resurrection is the End of Sin and Death, it also opens new possibilities. Easter marks the beginning of a between time.

We understand that intuitively because we still experience Evil in the world. The Resurrection is God's defeat of Evil, but there's still evil in the world. Jesus' death frees us from Sin, but we still sin and experience the consequences of Sin. We say that on Easter, God defeated Death, but people still die. [the bottom timeline goes on]

So... what gives? Are we actually free to risk? Are we really free to follow God? Is Easter the end of the story?

The answer to those questions is Yes! We *are* actually free to risk, to follow God. Easter is the beginning of a Between.

Easter is the *end* of Sin, Death and evil, but it's also the *beginning* of something new. You're between an old thing and a new thing.

When you're between, you need to know what that New Thing is. When you're engaged, you're looking forward to your wedding day. When you're pregnant, you're looking forward to the Birth. When you put in your two weeks, you're looking forward to your new job. And that New Thing Easter tells us to look forward to is what the Church calls the Second Coming. Throughout the Scriptures, it's also called the Day of the Lord.

Yes, we're talking about End Times. But hold on! Usually when you mention End Times, even to a bunch of people who love Jesus, eyes roll back in heads or people look for a pew to crawl under. Because when you think of Church and End Times, you usually think of a bunch of people arguing over *how* it's going to happen. Is there going to be a Rapture, who's the Antichrist, seven years or three years or 1,000 years?

All those questions are concerned with *how* Jesus is going to come back. And they're interesting (at least to people who think that sort of thing is interesting) but the Scriptures aren't very clear on *how* the Second Coming is going to happen. What the Scriptures *are* clear on, and what churches all over the world agree about is *what* the Second Coming is:

A Day is coming when God will take back the Earth. This is a Day when God will put a final end to Sin, Evil and Death and reclaim what was lost in Genesis 3. [Graphic adding 2nd Coming]

The Second Coming helps us see how we are living *between* two realities right now. One is the old, fallen reality dominated by Sin and Death. This is the world that we created when we chose our own way. [highlight this 'line?'] This is the world that God will put an End to when Jesus comes again.

But there's another reality - the Kingdom of God. This is the world we were created to live in, and it's the world that the Resurrection reopened to us. We could say, this is the story that *began* when Jesus walked out of the Tomb on Easter Sunday. It was a whole new beginning, a new world. The first day of a new Genesis creation week. [highlight this line]

Right now, both of these worlds, these realities exist. The reality of Sin is still all around us. But it's on its way out. It's passing away. It's dying.

And a new reality is being birthed in the midst of the old. The Kingdom of God is bursting forth all around us. Through Jesus' resurrection, God is making all things new!

When we choose to follow Jesus, we're choosing to leave the old, dying reality and step into the new, living reality God is creating right now. We're between worlds.

In other words, Jesus' Kingdom is *already* here. It began at the Resurrection. But Jesus' Kingdom is *not yet* here. It won't fully arrive until the Second Coming.

Seem like a contradiction? Doesn't it have to be one or the other? Yes, unless we're *between*. When you're engaged, are you single or not? Well, you're still definitely single. You're not yet married. But you're also not really single. Your life looks really different from a single life. You're planning weddings and figuring out bank accounts and living arrangements and meshing your schedules and all kinds of things you didn't do when you were single. You're both single and not really single *at the same time*.

When you're pregnant, do you have a kid yet? Well, no. Not in the same way you will once you've given birth. But you *do* have a kid. You're buying nursery furniture and pack-n-plays and clothes and picking out names. You're both a parent and not a parent *at the same time*.

When you put in your two weeks notice, have you quit yet? Well, yes. But you're still going into work. You work there, but you don't work there the same way you did before you resigned. You're preparing to leave. Saying your goodbyes and maybe training a replacement. You both work there and don't work there anymore *at the same time*.

So too with God's Kingdom, with the new life available to us in the wake of Jesus' resurrection. Our new life has already begun and is not yet here. We're Between.

So what do we do? Are we waiting around, trying not to be too bad, until God comes back? Are we just in a sort of holding pattern?

Absolutely not. Quite the opposite. When you're Between, you prepare. The future fact of the Second Coming calls us to live fully engaged lives in the here and now. Knowing that Jesus is coming back, that God's still not done with this world, teaches us how to live in this world right now. The second letter attributed to Peter the disciple addresses a group of Christians in the same place we are. They were living in the wake of Jesus' resurrection, wondering, When will Jesus come back? How much longer do we have to wait?

In chapter 3, the writer tells them:

The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent. But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Then the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise, and the very elements themselves will disappear in fire, and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment.

So there it is: a Day is coming when God will return and the old world will be undone. The world that's been infected and consumed by Sin will finally unravel. It'll be done. And the reason God delays is so that more people will have the chance to leave that old world, that old reality, and find the rescue Jesus offers. So what do we do in the Between?

Since everything around us is going to be destroyed like this, what holy and godly lives you should live, looking forward to the day of God and hurrying it along. On that day, he will set the heavens on fire, and the elements will melt away in the flames. But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness. And so, dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen, make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight. And remember, the Lord's patience gives people time to be saved. -- 2 Peter 3:9-15 (NLT)

Since you know how this story ends, you should live holy, godly lives. Since you know that the old world characterized by Sin is headed for destruction, don't live in that world! When you're engaged, you plan your wedding. You don't just walk through life hoping that you and your fiancée will accidentally run across someone who will say "husband and wife!" You prepare for married life. Because you know where you're going.

When you're pregnant, you prepare for your baby. You don't wait until after the birth to get the nursery ready and buy all the clothes and read parenting books and choose a name. You prepare. Because you know where you're going.

So too with the Christian life. When you choose to follow Jesus, you know where you're going. And that should affect how you live. That's what Peter says: Look, while you're waiting, live peaceful lives that are pure and blameless, lives that God approves of. Lives that look like Jesus. Prepare for Jesus' return. Prepare for the fulfillment of what started at Easter.

Right now, you and I are between two realities. One is headed for Death, and one is headed for Life. The good news is that right now, we still have time. God is patiently delaying the end so that more and more of us can find that path to life.

The Second Coming isn't a far off future fact. It's a call to find Life right now. To live kingdom lives, lives that follow the Way of God *right now*.

It's like Michael Jordan.

When did Michael Jordan become a basketball player? When he got a pair of shoes named after him? When he won his first championship ring? When he got drafted by the Bulls? When he played for North Carolina? Or was it in high school, when he didn't make the varsity team his sophomore year, so committed to being the best JV player he could? Or was it even before that, when he shot baskets as a little kid, dreaming like so many of us did that one day he'd play pro?

Once you know the end of the story - that Michael Jackson is the greatest basketball player of all time (sorry LeBron), it's easy to look back and see that he had it in him all along. But what about before he "made it"? What about when he encountered set-backs, minor defeats?

When did Michael Jordan become a basketball star? The day he made it? Or the day he decided he was going to make it?

Obviously, there's a point when he was an undeniable star (maybe somewhere around championship number 3?). But Jordan put in a ton of work before that moment. How did he behave *between* the moment he first picked up a basketball and the moment of his superstardom? By preparing. By practicing. By playing. By getting better. By keeping his eye on the goal. Every step on his journey, every basket he shot, every practice, was a necessary part of his journey to super-stardom.

Michael Jordan didn't become the greatest of all time by sitting around, waiting to be discovered. And we could say the same of an actor or musician or writer or business person or parent.

When you know where you're going, it determines how you get there. If someone tells me they're going to be a writer but they haven't written anything, I'm skeptical. Because you don't become a writer when someone drops a book deal in your lap. You become a writer when you start writing.

That's the power of future fact. If you want to be an athlete, start playing, running or swimming or biking or whatever. If you want to be an actor, start acting. If you want to be a scientist, you better learn some physics. The future reality you want starts right now. You have to *act* like the person you're going to be. [pause]

Try to tell an engaged couple they're not going to get married. A person who's already put in their two weeks they can't quit. A pregnant woman she's not already a mother.

You might get punched. Because they all know that the future starts *right now*. Not later, when the big moment comes. The future is real. The *not yet* is *already* here.

There is a *slight* problem with that philosophy, of course. And that's the painful reality that I'm not Michael Jordan. You're not either. Or Venus Williams or Brad Pitt or Meryl Strepe or Ernest Hemingway or Albert Einstein... well, you get the picture.

We can *want* something with all our hearts, but that doesn't make our dreams future facts. Greatness isn't awarded based on how badly you want it or how hard you work for it. Just because every boy in fifth grade wore Air Jordans and stuck his tongue out when he jumped didn't mean he could dunk from the three-point line.

In so many things, our future is uncertain. But not in choosing God's way. When we're caught between these two realities, we can *feel* an uncertainty. Does God's Way really lead to life? Should I really respond to hate with love? Should I really give up my own rights for the sake of others? Should I really not worry about my own needs and focus on meeting others' needs instead? Should I really order my days with prayer and take time each week to observe a sabbath rest? Can I really afford to give sacrificially?

What's at the bottom of all those questions is that question of risk: does God's way *really* lead to life? Or, if I follow God's way, will I just get trampled on, taken advantage of and left out in the cold?

Will God really return to fix all this? Or should I get mine while I still can?

Jesus' resurrection is proof. Proof that God is faithful to bring life even in the midst of death. Proof that God isn't finished with the world. Proof that a new story has begun.

The Resurrection wasn't the end, it was the beginning. And so now we can choose to step out of sin and into life, confident that God will meet us and be with us. We can choose to follow God's Way even if it gets scary, even when it's hard, because we know how the story ends. We know where the trail leads. We know where we're going, so that tells us how we get there.

We are living *between* the Resurrection and the Second Coming. We know that the old world, the way of Sin, is passing away. It's headed towards death and destruction. We know that a whole new reality is bursting forth in the midst of it. And we don't have to wait to be a part of it.

As Peter said, we can choose right now to live in God's kingdom. We can live holy, pure lives that look like Jesus. We can be part of calling those around us, who are still trapped in Sin and Death to repent, to recognize that Jesus is calling them out of Death into Life.

God raised Jesus from the Dead. And one day, Jesus will return to finish what he started. In the meantime, what do we do?

We step up and join in what God is doing.

### **Prayer of Examine**

1. Where in the past week were you living in the old reality of Sin and Death?
2. Where in the past week were you living in God's new reality of Life?
3. Where in the next week will you be tempted to fall back to the Old Reality?
4. How can you choose to live in God's Life this week?