

# The Time Between the Times

Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-5

BAMF (082017)

In the spring of 1972 I started a love affair with the writings of Luke... the traditionally accredited author of "The Gospel of Luke" and "Acts of the Apostles." I'll blame Professor Howard Charles with leading me down this path.

Luke is the only gentile writer of Biblical text. His two volume record has a unique blend of stories that links the Christ event to the context of world events. Luke is a gifted writer and storyteller with a particular interest and perspective in charting the course of salvation history as it moves from a Jewish/Jerusalem centered faith to its current global expression. He is intent in showing that movement as the movement of God from a centered set mentality to God's activity and grace on the periphery. He includes the most stories placing women, Samaritans and other non-Jews in a positive light of any Biblical writer.

Luke is intent in getting the story correct and it's evident that he had his ear to the ground in some deep listening so that... "Most Excellent Theophilus,"... got true authentic news and not fake news. (So who is this Theophilus? Did his status change from the first to the second books since the Most Excellent is dropped in Acts? Some think it was a man of significant stature in the Greco/Roman world. Others think the name is an editorial way of addressing the whole non-Jewish world because of Luke's own ethnic identity. I prefer the latter suggestion for reasons that will become more clear later.)

Now, the stories are told from within a particular timeframe and from a unique perspective in the history of God's salvation as it bridged the time between the times. This obviously is on a more macro scale although the individual stories inform and verify the larger storyline. We often can only see our own journeys on a much smaller shorter term scale. It would be so much fun to try to unpack a bit more the two portions of scripture read this morning, but time and current agenda does not allow that.

In the months of September and October, I have agreed to share with you some gleanings from Luke's material that can be very instructive in shaping a community of faith that is authentic, relevant and consistent with the Biblical narrative. The years of reflection on these texts, with the accompanying references, have shaped my life and practice. I encourage you to read these two books, Luke and Acts, over the next several weeks as a way to prime the pump of your inquisitiveness.

We in the Anabaptist stream approach scripture with a Christocentric interpretive view. We see all scripture before Jesus as pointing toward Jesus and all scripture after that as pointing back to Jesus. Palmer Becker did our spiritual stream a service in condensing essential elements of our identity into three lines: "*The center of our faith is Jesus; The center of our life is community; and The center of our mission is service.*"

May I suggest a way of defining the process of living our faith? It is a list of four essential practices that have both an individual and a corporate application. They are stated in active verb form to indicate that they are never-ending disciplines that must be cultivated and kept vibrant so that health and wholeness are formed internally and expressed externally. They are: 1) *Tending the soul...* 2) *Tending the mission of God in the world...* 3) *Tending Community...* and 4) *Tending creation...* I will make reference to these four practices in the sermons planned for Sept/Oct.

We here at Berkeley are now in a space... a time, between the times with our current pastoral changes. The research of Dr. William Bridges conducted in the 1970's resulted in his first book, "*Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*" published in 1980... His work expanded over the following decades with additional books and organizational consulting. Bridges helps us understand that transitions have three common elements; endings...neutral zones...and beginnings.

How we manage our endings has a great deal to do with how well we navigate the new beginnings. The space between endings and new beginnings...and overlapping both segments, is the neutral zone. It's a time of chaos, a time of grieving the losses...there is anxiety about the unknown future, sometimes fear...sometimes anger and it's a time of preparation for the anticipated 'beginning.' As we leave behind what has been "normal," we go through a reshaping for the future and enter a new beginning that eventually finds its way to a new normal.

Endings often begin before they actually happen... and the chaos of the space between often sets in before we are ready. Beginnings frequently start while some of the chaos is still present and often before the ending is even complete. Dr. Bridges suggests that endings are never completely gone from our lives and they continue to inform and accompany our journey into the new normal.

One cannot avoid making a connection between Dr. Bridges' seminal work and the development of the idea that organizations like churches could benefit from paying careful attention to the process of the time between the times... that movement from the former leadership and making preparation for the new. Both Alban Institute and a number of denominations developed material and seminars that offered training for leaders to help congregations navigate "the neutral zone." (*Alban Institute is an inter-denominational/inter-faith research/resource organization...that is now primarily a publishing entity*)

These resources used a model that defined certain developmental tasks or processes that needed to be done in each transitional situation. There were five areas to complete: 1) *Coming to terms with history...* 2) *Discovering a new identity...* 3) *Shifts in power and leadership changes...* 4) *Rethinking denominational linkages...* and 5) *commitment to new leadership and a new future.* Over the ensuing decades the practice has matured. While those tasks are still informative and useful, a more flexible approach is encouraged given the reality that not all congregations are at the same place or in the same condition at point of the transition.

One of the elemental tasks or processes that has endured, and is at the very core of transitional work is '*coming to terms with history.*' It includes a very careful listening to the story/stories of the congregation as experienced by each household willing to offer their perspective. It includes a reading of the congregation's context, organization and recorded journey. I refer to this process as "deep listening." In each of the four transitional pastor assignments that I had privilege to lead, that first 3-4 months of careful listening, formed the basis of what the congregational leadership would consider in preparation for the new beginning. A full written report is prepared for the leadership group and a public version of that report is made available to the entire congregation so that they can respond to its veracity and to ask questions for clarification.

The Spiritual Leadership Team discerned that we here at Berkey Ave could benefit from a modified transitional process given the current clarity of mission, connection, organization and leadership. We have engaged the services of Paula Killough to guide us in this process. Paula comes to us with recent training in the transitional process and has been an active participant in congregational transitions. She is recently retired from Menn Mission Network and is active in IN-MI Conference leadership. We will hear from Paula in our congregational meeting later this morning.

We would do well to ask the hard questions about who we are...where do we see God active around us... and how we might tend the mission of God most faithfully in a world context that has been changing at the speed of technology in recent decades. That pace of change will continue. We would be wise to inform ourselves on current trends and cultural changes that will impact our lives in order to make the adaptive changes needed to keep faithful to the Jesus way and relevant in our context.

The work of the Spiritual Leadership Team is that of spiritual leadership... not only governance leadership. They are to discern the trends and cultural challenges that face us and how our faith, centered in Jesus, informs our responses and adaptations to the new realities that come into our experience. They are to lead the congregation in processes that will encourage and empower all participants to discern wisely our way forward. It is not their role to answer all the questions, please everybody or make all the decisions... However, it is their role to make sure we are wrestling with the right questions. This requires them to be tending their own souls as they provide opportunity for the congregation to tend theirs.

We live in a country and time that is presenting major moral and ethical challenges as evidenced by the activities last week-end in Charlottesville and this week in Washington D. C... although not limited to these events. In some ways it seems new and nasty...However, it has been festering in the dark corners for some time and has come more into the full light of day in the recent past, a result of unwise leadership and cultural changes. How do we shape our lives and conversation in the broader context to acknowledge and demonstrate the presence of Jesus, the Prince of Peace...Premier leader of the Peaceable Kingdom?

May God help us... May the Peace of Christ be with us all...

Today, in the congregational meeting, Greg Smucker will outline the plan for leadership during the neutral zone...our time of chaos...and chaos, by the way... is a good thing because chaos is the seedbed...the birthplace of creativity and new order. Greg has served the congregation extremely well over the past number of years as SLT member and chair, also as Congregational Chair. Due to term limits proposed by SLT and affirmed by the congregation, Greg will take a break from those duties, but continue to be of service to the congregation in other ways. Thank you Greg, for your wise dedicated service!!!!

## Luke 1

<sup>1</sup>Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup>just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, <sup>3</sup>I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first,<sup>o</sup> to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup>so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

## Acts 1

<sup>1</sup>In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning <sup>2</sup>until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup>After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>While staying<sup>o</sup> with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. **“This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; <sup>5</sup>for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with<sup>o</sup> the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”**