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A Dwelling in the In-between

Alleluia! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Trekking poles and provisions.

We were in the cascade mountains. Our base for 10 days was the old abandoned mining outpost turned Lutheran retreat center. Completely off the grid. Besides praying, eating, and learning together; one of the things you do there is hike. The landscape was blanketed with *feet* of snow. We set out, led by our guide. The trail transformed numerous times. From clear and well taken care of paths, to an open field we had to intuitively discern which way to go. Eventually we entered the woods. Climbing as you do under nature's tent.

Because of my gate and my general struggle with balance as keen as I am to challenge my body, sometimes I need extra help. Our guide noticed and offered trekking poles to me. And immediately I felt lighter. It was an unexpected surprise along the way.

Eventually we reached the halfway point of our hours- long adventure and our guide set a table for us. Just what we needed to go the rest of the way. Amid the peaks and valleys and pine martens. Tea, dried fruit, bread. The sun shone upon us in our own little dwelling place deep in creation. We had not arrived back to our chalet yet. We knew we would get there though.

We inhabit many dwelling places throughout our lives. As stable and fulfilling as they seem, as honorable as they are, we know that they are all temporary. Like vapor. We move to different homes as the years pass. Whether those are vocational, relational buildings, or simply the way the scenery around us changes as we all get older. We become familiar with the rooms named loss, transition, new chapters, different challenges. The same place but it feels completely foreign. We have to find our bearings again and again.

We live our lives on the way. As people on the move. In-between. We find ourselves planted east of Eden and longing for the eternal homes of God. Despite our attempts to control our own destinies, destinations, and fashion our futures we have not arrived. Even when we feel like we have made it, it doesn't take long for that feeling to diminish bit by bit or the arbitrary nature of the world to knock the wind out of us. Instead, we are somewhere along the rocky and unpredictable path of existence that twists and turns as it will. On the way from sickness to

healing, longing and fulfillment. Our thirst for justice and the power of sin. Between death and life.

However many miles we have traveled and whatever our view is from this place, we find ourselves echoing Thomas. Even if its particularity is in the language of our hearts that are often troubled. How might this question sound coming from your lips? What are the nuances for you? How do you ask this question when paying attention to your gut? What are you looking for? It contains layers as innumerable as our different experiences. In the midst of all that is going on within and without, how can we know the way?

As much as we would like a compass and map, specific instructions or bright flashing lights Jesus does not answer that way. Nor does he mention a five point plan or a feeling. His answer comes up from below where he is intimately acquainted with our lostness. It is one he gives to you while looking into your eyes, knowing everything that you carry. In our baptism we are not gifted with coordinates but with the crucified one.

Jesus answers that he is the way, the truth, and the life. Wounded yet reaching from the future to take us by the hand. He has gone down to the depths before us. He comes from the ends of our world. His flesh is our guide. From every death to the promise of life in impossible places. Where are those left for dead places in your life that cry out for resurrection?

The risen one has come to greet you while you are on the road. He is visitor, guide, companion, salvation, surprise, and provision. For you.

It has happened more than once. That I have been hiking somewhere. Growing weary as I stumble. Uneasy. I wouldn't have made it on my own. Just when I needed it someone offered me those trekking poles. Helping me walk the way ahead.

There was the time at the Thai restaurant under the blue line in Wicker Park too. I was having lunch with someone who had also chosen to become a Lutheran after spending time at Bible College, coming out and wrestling with faith. There I found sustenance. A sign. Marker. An arrow. Way forward. Through a fellow member of the body of Christ.

We often encounter the way himself, broken open through his people. Who has accompanied you? Who has brought you trekking poles or a meal in a time of searching, struggling, and discernment? Who showed you the way? What was it like to hear the word of forgiveness tear down the walls you had built? Who are you being called to receive Christ from in the in-between. When the ambiguity of life is our only clarity?

There we get a glimpse of the place where we live. Our address that spans the fullness of time. Longing for the eternal dwelling places of God- yet situated in somewhere roomy right now. A place where we can abide through it all. Filled with the Holy Spirit. Joe and Arlo are taking up residence here today. A house for us built on the cornerstone. The frame is made of forgiveness, freedom, and life spilling forth from every parched place. A refuge no matter what other structures we are moving in and out of. In this assembly we take in the provisions of Christ's body and blood. Taste and see that the Lord is good. We can rest here even if the destination is still a ways off. Like a tent in this wilderness where we can stretch out and be ourselves. Here we need not pretend like we've arrived but only hear that Christ who was dead is alive. And we too are caught up in the outlandish insistence of Easter. Death leads to resurrection. In dying we live. Under the entrance marked with the cross we are held tight through every turn.

Until we are home may we, as someone said, be "foolish enough to look for our God under all the crooked signs of the opposite." Find our way. Wherever we are wandering we are found today in this house. Our times are in God's hands as Christ is placed in yours. Come get your bearings. Around this table, word, community. Dip your hand in this water and know where and whose you are! Look around and receive unexpected gifts along the way. Trekking poles and all.

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