For the last couple of weeks we have been talking about the Space between – that time in which we are now – between Dr. Poplin’s retirement and Pastor Alex’s arrival on Oct 28th. The sermon prep team has decided to focus a bit on this period to hopefully help with the transitions we are in and that lie ahead for us.

This concept of the Space between is seen throughout the scriptures in many different places and circumstances. We see the space between for individuals, a group or community and even historical spaces. This morning I want to look at some of those spaces and how the biblical people responded in those spaces. Then I want to look at the spaces between that we individually and as families often face and how we can respond in a healthy way to those spaces. Finally, as a church, how can we respond to the current space between we find ourselves in today.

To begin let’s look at some biblical examples of this thing we have called the Space Between. As Justin said last week – the book of Job is a book all about the space between – between the first chapter and chapter 42.

The first biblical example I want to look at this morning is the experience of an individual and his wife with a space between. I want to look at Abraham and Sarah. Here is the set up… When Abraham was 75 years old God came to Abraham and we read in Gen 12:1-2 – *The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing*

God’s promise was to make Abraham into a great nation. In vr 7 we read, “*To your offspring I will give this land*”. So, at 75 years old and Sarah 65 – old even for this time of the bible, Abraham is promised offspring. But then he and Sarah enter a space between. For Abraham and Sarah it is the space between being told you will have a child and waiting for that to happen. They begin to wait. And wait and get older. And they began to doubt. Then a few years later the promise is repeated in 15:1-4. And they waited and grew older. We will come back to this story in just a bit

Now – another example. Fast forward about 500 years. Abraham’s offspring moved to Egypt to escape a famine and have grown into a community – a national group if you will – but have through the years been enslaved by their host nation. So God raises up a rescuer named Moses. Moses goes to Pharaoh and tells him that God has sent Moses to lead the people to freedom in a promised land so if he knows what’s best for himself and Egypt he better let the people go. Many of you have heard the stories of the Nile turning blood red and the plagues Moses caused. Finally after the first born of the Egyptians are killed during the Passover, Pharaoh finally relents and lets them leave. But you know what happens – he changes his mind and pursues these people to the Red Sea where they are trapped. But by a miracle of God, the sea parts and the people escape. And so the Hebrew people enter a space between. For them it is the space between the old land of slavery and the new promised land of hope. But what happened in that space between? We will come back to that in a few minutes.

In Abraham and Sarah we have an example of a personal space between. In the Moses story, the space between is for a community of people. A third example of a biblical space between is of a historical space. It is the space between the Old and New Testaments. It is the space between the last book of the OT – Malachi written somewhere around 400BC and the birth of John the Baptist as recorded in the gospel accounts of the NT. 400 years known as the silent years for the voice of God, through the prophets was silent during this period…

The New Testament also records different spaces between. But I believe the most powerful example of a space between is seen in the crucifixion story. It is the space between Good Friday – when Jesus is crucified – and Easter Sunday when we celebrate the resurrection. One author put it this way: “There are a lot of books written about Good Friday and a lot written about Easter Sunday but there is hardly anything written about the Saturday between.” That Saturday when dreams had been crushed and yet memories of promises made came to the surface. The disciples lived that day in uncertainly and some despair, having believed Jesus to be the one to set them free and yet he was now dead. But they also remember he spoke some things about rising from the dead. This is where we pick up the story. Turn with me to Luke 24 and the story of two of these disciples. Here is the situation…figuratively still in Saturday.

Lk 24: 13-17 *Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven milesfrom Jerusalem.They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”*

*They stood still, their faces downcast*

They were hurt, disappointed, confused, any number of words. Jesus basically asks them why? Well, they tell Jesus why. Look at 19-21

*“What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet,powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.*

But then a glimmer of hope in their story when we read the next verses:

22-24 *In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus*

You can hear the confusion…We want to hope it might be true, but none of the brothers saw what the sisters did. So they are downcast on this journey; they still don’t recognize what has happened.

Well, the story ends with Jesus talking with them for several hours and finally revealing himself to them. At that moment they figuratively moved from Saturday to Sunday They rush back to Jerusalem and report they have seen the risen Lord.

 People, I believe a lot of life is lived in a space between. We live much of our lives in a Saturday world. I would define the Space Between as a time often characterized by silence, uncertainty and almost always involves a period of waiting. It can be a time of anticipation and excitement as well as a time of experiencing crushed dreams and dreaming new dreams. Sometimes these spaces between are by our control – we literally make a decision to enter this kind of time, but often they are not in our control…

Many of you right now are living in some space between. You are living in the space between two jobs…

The space between engagement and marriage…desiring to have children and waiting for your first child…The space between your kids going off to college and then their move back home!

But even bigger than that – if you think about it – from the time you accept Jesus as your savior and enter a relationship with him you are entering a space between. It is the space between being promised eternity and entering eternity. In theological terms we call it experiencing the Kingdom of God as already but not yet. It is partially present on this earth in our relationship with God through Christ, but it is not fully experienced until God redeems the earth at the end of days. Until then we are in a space between, awaiting a homecoming.

Paul, in his letter to the Philippians says it this way: (Phil 3:20-21) *But our citizenship is in heaven.  And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies) so that they will be like his glorious body.*

Peter says it this way: (I Pet 2:11) *Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.*

The question for us is not how to avoid the space between. As Rob stated a couple weeks ago in looking at leadership in the space between, the important thing is how we live in these spaces. How do we live well in the space between times when we are there – and everyone in this room will be or is.

Sadly, we often don’t live there very well. Last week Justin mentioned that we want to read Job 1 and Job 42 and skip over as quickly as possible all the other chapters. The same could be said about the Bible as a whole. It would be a great book if it only had Gen 1&2 and then Rev 21-22. The problem is the space between those chapters is where we live life.

Let’s now go back to the stories we started with this morning. How well did Abraham and Sarah live in the space between the promise given and the promise realized? Remember, they have been given the promise of a child and then a couple years later, after Abraham expressed some disappointment the promise is restated. Here is what happened in that story – it is now 10-11 years after the promise is given. Sarah has become desperate, and so she takes matters into her own hands. We read in Gen 16:1-2 (a+b)

*Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slavenamed Hagar; 2 so she said to Abram, “The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.”*

But surely Abraham would not agree to this – the giant of the faith that he was! Let’s keep reading: *Abram agreed to what Sarai said.*

Their response to the space between was to take matters into their own hands and thought they could figure out a better plan. So in their plan Ishmael is born to Hagar. Within some years enmity will exist between two half-brothers and the result has been felt to this very day in the enmity between Jew and Arab for Ishmael was the father of the Arab nations.

It never works out better when we take circumstances into our own hands when God has spoken something else…yet even then God is gracious and forgiving…

Now back to the Hebrew people in the wilderness. God has rescued them from captivity and slavery and miraculously delivered them from the pursuing Egyptian army at the Red sea. The Promised Land awaits but they have entered a space between – between the rescue and the promise. In that space God provided them with food and water on a daily basis, and even attempted to show them the land that was promised by prompting the sending of 12 spies into the land. However, 10 of the 12 came back with a negative view and the space drug on and on. So how did they respond to this “delay” in the fulfillment of the promise and in the negative report of the spies?

The Bible tells us that they started to grumble and some even wanted to return to slavery. It got so bad that while Moses was on the mountain where God gave the 10 commandments, they were in the valley creating an idol and sacrificing to it in hopes of deliverance. They took matters into their own hands and thought they could figure out a better plan. And the result? Not one of those who entered the wilderness and participated in their own plan would end up entering the Promised Land – including Moses and Aaron. Only Joshua and Caleb of that generation would be allowed to enter as they alone clung to God’s promise that the land was theirs to have.

So the questions for us this morning – how do we choose to live in the spaces between that the Father sends or allows to come? Remember – it is easy to believe in the goodness of God when you are living in chapter 1 or 42 of Job – with wealth, food and comfort; with life’s dreams appearing to be fulfilled. It is easy to believe in the goodness of God when you find your life partner, get pregnant with you plan it, change jobs, make a move, retire all when it looks good and right.

But what about when you are in a space between and the dreams seem crushed, the life partner does not appear or the marriage ends due to broken trust; the pregnancy doesn’t happen or ends prematurely; when the interview doesn’t lead to a job, when retirement funds evaporate due to economic downturns? Is God good then? Does God still love you as a father or mother loves their children no matter what? Can you trust in that goodness? Can you say with Job – though he slay me yet will I hope in him?

Job learned about the sovereignty of God in the space between, not in the front or back. We too can learn of God’s sovereignty in the spaces between if we choose to trust in his goodness and love for us.

Finally, how do we as a church live well in the space between Dr. Poplin’s ending and Pastor Alex’s beginning? How do we use this time to grow in our understanding of the sovereignty, goodness and love of our Father?

First – Rob called us two weeks ago to one way. That is to pursue reconciliation in relationships during this time. We do not want Pastor Alex to enter his ministry here trying to determine where the land mines are. I have been around church life for too many years to be naïve enough to think there are not relationships within the body of CBC that need to be reconciled. Whether personally with another member or within your own family, between member and staff, between staff and staff or any form thereof, this is a time for us to pursue healing and restoration. Perhaps there are still hurts from the last three years of changes; perhaps there are issues simply from Dr. Poplin retiring, or Pastor Alex coming. I don’t know what needs to be reconciled, I just know there are relationships that need healing.

Secondly, we need to maintain and grow our focus on the mission of the church to grow disciples and present the *gospel of life* to a dying world. The mission of the church does not change during this space between nor does it go “on hold” until a new pastor comes.

Thirdly, and most importantly perhaps, we can use the space between to pray. I would like to ask Charles Cranford to come at this time and tell you how you can join with us in this space between…