

**St. Andrew's Episcopal Church**  
**Proper 28 Year B**  
**The Rev. Barbara Hutchinson**

I once remember living in mid-air. I was wholly terrified and equally exhilarated. I felt unprotected, yet strangely safe. I felt as though my world had cracked open and the contents of my life's story had come spilling out, never to be reassembled with the same plot, without even a glimpse of the new stories yet to be written.

This mid-air living experience drew me deeply into a heart-held childhood memory of when Barnum and Bailey came into town. I was sitting on the hard gray bleacher seat, clutching my bag of roasted peanuts, snuggled near to my big sister, with a sense of being wholly terrified and equally exhilarated, as one spectacular act unfolded into another. Sights and sounds flooded my being and transported me to an unfamiliar yet rather exciting place. There was one act, during which I needed to shut my eyes, bury my head into my sister's arm, and beg her to tell me when it was safe enough to watch. It was the flying trapeze act.

With my eyes glued shut, I could only imagine what was happening by the noises emitted from the audience. I heard the "oohhs" and the "ahhhs" and the sharp gasps for breath, and the picture was etched in my head.

Here's what I saw:

There is this tall lanky man, adorned in teal sequined tights, with a body suit of peacock blue. He laboriously and deliberately climbs rung after rung as he ascends 35' above the ground, reaching hand over hand, moving steadily toward the platform, from which he will launch himself into mid-air. His eyes project a sense of firm resolve to embrace the risky endeavor of "flying with the greatest of ease." His stare at nothing at all and everything at the same time tells me that he is feeling completely alone, in midst of the whole world. His feet appear to glue themselves to the solidness of the platform, and I detect fear and trepidation, deep within. Thoughts are racing through his mind: "Do I really want to do this? Must I really take this leap into something so unprotected?" For even though he had done this act hundreds of times, each flight ushered in it's own particular challenges and opportunities. No two were ever the same.

The “ahhs” I hear from the crowd surrounding me, tell me he’s taken the first brave, albeit, (in my opinion) foolish step. His legs kick upward and he pulls them downward and his graceful body turns circles around the bar. He’s swinging repeatedly back and forth. For a split second, he is transfixed by the motion and lulled into complacency.

But then the true moment barges into reality. His heart is in his throat. The adrenaline pumps through his lean body. He wants to glue his feet back down on that platform.

Then it happens. He sees the other bar coming toward him and the moment of decision crashes upon him. He must let go, and as he does, he enters a tunnel of darkness, strangled with anxiety, with his mind on fire. He grabs the bar for he instinctively knows that it is his salvation.

But then something miraculous happens. While he is mid-air living, after the loosening of his grip upon the bar, something within him loosens as well. His heart is released, and he knows this new place, which is wholly terrifying and equally exhilarating; unprotected, yet strangely safe; and where his life stories come spilling out, never to be reassembled with the same plot, is where true living happens. Living mid-air, which is wholly terrifying and equally exhilarating, requires a vulnerability he is never prepared for, and yet he instinctively knows, is the source of real life.

Jesus calls us into mid-air living, not just once, but continually. In our gospel story today, Jesus invites his disciples to live mid-air, and to do so, they must loosen their grip of what is certain, what is powerful, what is formidable, and what they had believed to be true, and to let it go, to swing in mid-air, and to live in the place of vulnerability, as God reframes their lives. Mid-air living is often wholly terrifying and equally exhilarating, yet always is richly rewarding. For it is in this place, where we find the risen Christ.

The invitation to mid-air living to the disciples came disguised as Jesus stretched out his arms of love on the hard wood of the cross. All that Jesus told them would happen did. Everything they had attached themselves to, all their beliefs, all their hopes seemed extinguished with his death, and they entered a place of vulnerability for which they were wholly unprepared for, yet ultimately offered them new life.

This invitation to mid-air living can happen for us:

In the silence of the woods, as a golden leaf falling to the forest floor grabs our full attention and we've discovered something of a thin place; it can happen on a noisy subway, when the sights and sounds of an eclectic group of passengers create a constant hum of conversation, which consumes our very being.

It can happen within the depths of our own soul; it can happen in a great expanse of a wildflower meadow, in which we can look up into a night sky littered with the Milky Way.

It can happen in the sweet moments between notes during a piano concert, when life is forever changed, for our soul has been set on fire; it can happen in the relentless squeal of toddlers, collapsing in giggles over a joke parents would never understand.

We can be invited into mid-air living: in our comfortable chairs, while watching the nightly news, and what we view tears down our basic belief in the goodness of humanity.

It can happen when we feel the warmth of someone's hands upon our heads, and the power of the Spirit flows through our bodies, and we are healed.

This invitation to mid-air living can happen for us in a sterile doctor's office, after the diagnosis of cancer is proclaimed, and our hopes for our expected future, come crashing down around us; it can happen as an adoring couple, clasping each others' hands, looking boldly into each other's eyes and proclaim their vows to one another and pledge a future together.

It can happen in a hospital room, when suddenly who you were, before the heart attack, is never to be again. And your heart locates itself in your throat, and tears flood from your eyes, because where you are is unknown and uncomfortable. It can happen at the birth of a child, when your heart locates itself in your throat and tears flood your eyes, because where you are is unknown and uncomfortable.

This is never a safe place to be.

And yet this is a crucial part of our salvation mid-air flight of faith. Jesus tells us the reign of God will clash against the truths we have been told, will collide with the life we have lived, and transform our imagine of who we are, for something mid-air will be released that will bring us into new and renewed life.

Knowingly or not, we seek out this divine union, although it can be against all our instincts for security and survival. For every time we open ourselves to encounter God, every time we settle into a spiritual practice, every time we walk in the woods, every time we feed the hungry, every time we hold the hands of those who are sick, every time we sit with the ones we love, every time we come forward and stretch out our hands to receive grace, we are asking this to happen. We are asking for God to loosen our grip from the places where life has become stagnant and to soar mid-air into a place where our souls will flourish.

Amen.