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## Graphics and Audio Notes

- There **will** be a sermon starter video.
- There **will** be notes and / or scripture to show on screen during the sermon.
- [Include other notes about graphics or media during the service here]

Text highlighted in this way will have a slide prepared to be on screen.

Text highlighted in this way is a reminder for Andrew during delivery.



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## Key Questions

### What is this sermon about?

This sermon is about transitions and the neutral zone in our lives.

### Why is this sermon important?

It is important because the neutral zone is a ripe opportunity for transformation and new beginnings. Our faith offers us tools to help us make progress in the neutral zone.

### What is the good news?

The good news is that God brings new life to the wilderness, to the neutral zone, of our lives.

### What are the next action steps?

You are invited to surrender to the neutral zone.  
Take time to be alone.  
Write a log.  
Discover the truth about you.

### What is the context of this sermon?

This is the second sermon in a series focused on transitions. It is the first Sunday of worship in the Fellowship Hall during renovation of our sanctuary. It has been prepared with help from a series preached by Dustin Petz at Norfolk United Methodist Church in August of 2014.

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## Metadata

### Topics

- Change Lives

## **Sermon Books of the Bible**

- 1 Kings

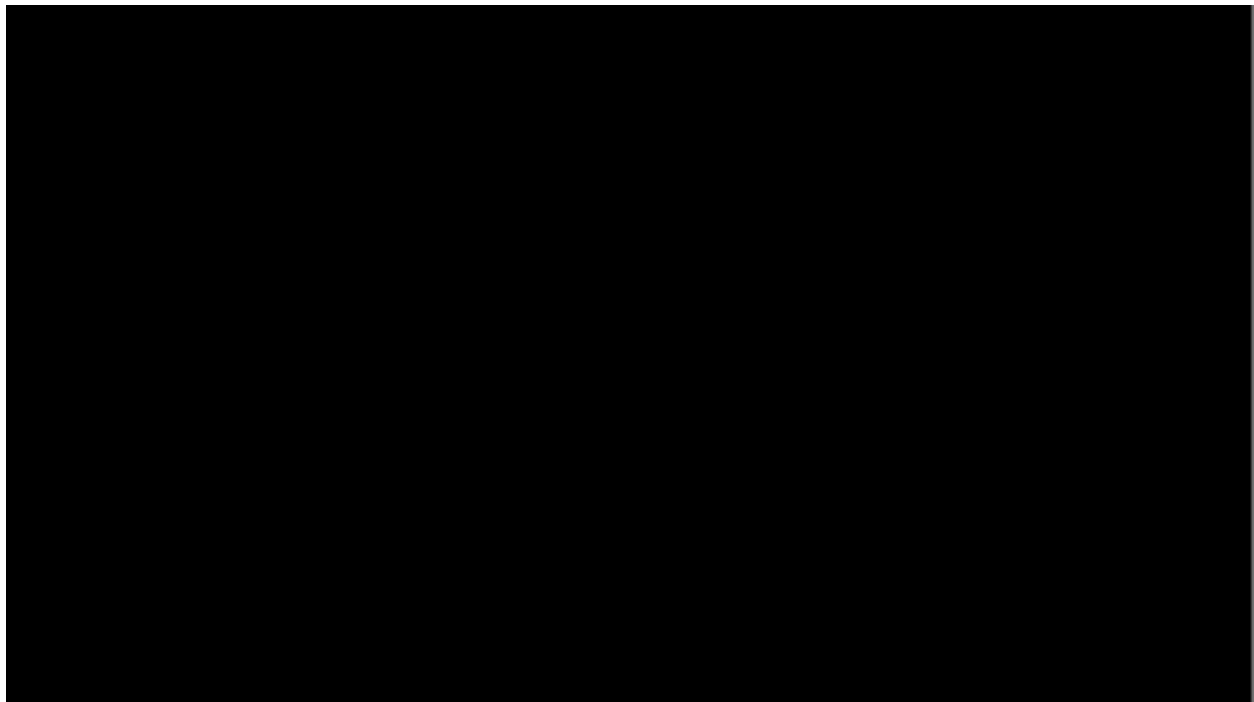
## **Tags**

sermon, worship, church, Methodist, UnitedMethodist, UnitedMethodistChurch, FirstUnitedMethodistChurch, ElDorado, Kansas, GreatPlains, AnnualConference, GreatPlainsAnnualConference, transition, transitions, change, changes, neutral zone, wilderness

## **Sermon Audio**

*9 a.m. Worship*

## **Sermon Video**



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## Introduction

### 1 Kings 19:1-16, CEB

<sup>1</sup>Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, how he had killed all Baal's prophets with the sword. <sup>2</sup>Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah with this message: "May the gods do whatever they want to me if by this time tomorrow I haven't made your life like the life of one of them."

<sup>3</sup>Elijah was terrified. He got up and ran for his life. He arrived at Beer-sheba in Judah and left his assistant there. <sup>4</sup>He himself went farther on into the desert a day's journey. He finally sat down under a solitary broom bush. He longed for his own death: "It's more than enough, LORD! Take my life because I'm no better than my ancestors." <sup>5</sup>He lay down and slept under the solitary broom bush.

Then suddenly a messenger tapped him and said to him, "Get up! Eat something!" <sup>6</sup>Elijah opened his eyes and saw flatbread baked on glowing coals and a jar of water right by his head. He ate and drank, and then went back to sleep. <sup>7</sup>The LORD's messenger returned a second time and tapped him. "Get up!" the messenger said. "Eat something, because you have a difficult road ahead of you." <sup>8</sup>Elijah got up, ate and drank, and went refreshed by that food for forty days and nights until he arrived at Horeb, God's mountain. <sup>9</sup>There he went into a cave and spent the night.

The LORD's word came to him and said, "Why are you here, Elijah?"

<sup>10</sup>Elijah replied, "I've been very passionate for the LORD God of heavenly forces because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars, and they have murdered your prophets with the sword. I'm the only one left, and now they want to take my life too!"

<sup>11</sup>The LORD said, "Go out and stand at the mountain before the LORD. The LORD is passing by." A very strong wind tore through the mountains and broke apart the stones before the LORD. But the LORD wasn't in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake. But the LORD wasn't in the earthquake. <sup>12</sup>After the earthquake, there was a fire. But the LORD wasn't in the fire. After the fire, there was a sound. Thin. Quiet. <sup>13</sup>When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his coat. He went out and stood at the cave's entrance. A voice came to him and said, "Why are you here, Elijah?"

<sup>14</sup>He said, "I've been very passionate for the LORD God of heavenly forces because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant. They have torn down your altars, and they have murdered your prophets with the sword. I'm the only one left, and now they want to take my life too."

<sup>15</sup>The LORD said to him, "Go back through the desert to Damascus and anoint Hazael as king of Aram. <sup>16</sup>Also anoint Jehu, Nimshi's son, as king of Israel; and anoint Elisha from Abel-meholah, Shaphat's son, to succeed you as prophet.

## Response to Scripture

One: The word of God for the people of God.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

## Sermon Starter Video

Play sermon starter video.

## Neutral Zone at First UMC

### ***Neutral Zone for Worship***

We have entered the neutral zone here at First United Methodist Church. Last Sunday, at this time, we were worshipping upstairs in our sanctuary. Today, we are gathered in the Fellowship Hall - just like those who came before who built the structure above.

### ***Neutral Zone until Easter***

We will be here until the sanctuary renovation is complete in mid-April and we worship again in our sanctuary on Easter. This is an in-between time for our worship life – the neutral zone. The neutral zone can feel like the wilderness and there can be an emptiness during this time.

### ***Messy Pattern of Transition***

Endings, neutral zone, beginnings. This is the pattern of transition, and yet the transitions in our lives don't always take nice neat steps. We might not yet have ended when we are already in the wilderness emotionally. Or maybe even more likely, our outer world has changed, and ending has happened, but we are just getting into the neutral zone with our inner journey.

### ***Sermon Series Orientation***

This series of sermons is designed around the three parts of every transition – endings, neutral zone and beginnings. Last week, we considered endings and how it is necessary to lean into endings so that we might have the opportunity for new growth in the future. Next week, we will take a closer look at beginnings. Today, I want to invite us to reflect upon the Neutral Zones in the middle – those places of wilderness and emptiness.

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*Pause*  
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## Neutral Zone

### Contexting

#### ***Story of Elijah***

The scripture passage from 1 Kings, speaks to our time of transition. Elijah was a major prophet in the Old Testament. He has been called to speak out against the king and his wife, along with the false prophets who were worshiping gods other than the Lord. But then his life is threatened by the king's wife, Jezebel. He is running for his life - running into the wilderness.

### ***Wilderness***

When an ending comes, when a change happens, we can find ourselves in the wilderness. We are in a middle place of our transition, where the old life no longer exists, and we have not yet arrived at a place of new beginning.

It feels different to worship here in the Fellowship Hall.

We are in the middle ... and the middle is often messy.

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*Pause*

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### **Fast Changes**

#### ***Expectation to Flip a Switch***

In most of our lives we do not go quickly from one thing to the next, like flipping a switch. We wish it was that easy. Sometimes we get confused because we live in a very mechanical world where we can simply plug and play and things work like they are supposed to.

#### ***Coffee Pots and Software Upgrades***

We unplug a coffee pot put it into a box, then at the new house, new office, we plug it in, and in a few minutes coffee is served. Our gadgets – phones and others – updated their operating systems or other components in just a few minutes. Sometimes it takes a restart, but very little time or pain or loss is involve.

#### ***Andrew 2.0***

Our lives are not that way. In a change of any sort, we don't simply go home or to the doctor or some other place and come out being a new version, updated ready to go.

Hello, I am Andrew 2.0.

No. It isn't that easy.

We are not machines or plug and play devices.

### **Slow Transitions**

Rather our transitions take time – more time than we would like. Sometimes we think we should be over this or that, or that we ought to be settled by now, but it takes time – it takes intentional time. Then at the right time, after we have named our losses, grieved, and walked in this confusing Neutral Zone in the middle, we are able to begin anew.

Our middle time (this Neutral Zone) is one that we might compare not to a switch or a plug and play device, but more to that of a time dormancy, of gestation, of laying fallow for a time.

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*Pause*

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**Key Example: Dormancy in the Flint Hills**

El Dorado is on the edge of the Flint Hills. Part of what is true about the prairie is that the grass doesn't grow year round. The land needs to be still, to regenerate, to gain moisture, to prepare to bring forth new life.

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*Pause*  
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The same is true for our times of transition.  
It is almost as if our lives have to come to a stop, to rest, to be reoriented. Perhaps, even further, we have to die to our old selves and our old ways of seeing and being, so that we can be made alive – fully alive, in a new life and in a new way of being.

**Transition**

Let's take a closer look at the neutral zone in scripture.

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## Neutral Zone in the Scripture

### Exodus

One of the most powerful stories of scripture is the transition that the people of Israel go through in what we call the Exodus. They had been crying out to God to have a new way of living, a new beginning, that God would intervene in their lives and world and bring them out of slavery and out of bondage and bring them to the land that had been promised to their ancestors.

And then it happened.

They were out.

They were free.

They crossed the Red Sea and were on their way to the Promised Land...but to get there, to the land flowing with milk and honey, they had to become new people. They had to die to their old selves, so that they could be made new and find new life.

It took them forty years to cross the wilderness – not because of the distance, but because of the struggle to grieve, let go, be transformed as people, and to be ready for a new beginning.

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*Pause*  
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### Elijah

Today's scripture about Elijah also tells of a transition. He has been a prophet of the Lord, but now, the queen is seeking his life. He may need to redefine who he is and what he is called to do.

What if we saw his journey down to Mount Horeb as time in the neutral zone – his time of dormancy or of laying fallow. Indeed, it seems like a time when he is trying to figure out who he is and what he is called to do.



It is a tough time. He wants to die.  
It is only by the nourishment that comes from an angel that he is sustained.  
He wants purpose, he wants direction, he want his life to make sense.

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*Pause*  
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## **Jesus in the Wilderness**

You might consider Jesus' time in the wilderness in a similar way. Jesus doesn't go directly from his baptisms in the the waters of the Jordan River to calling his disciples or preaching and teaching. Rather, he is in the wilderness for forty days.

He too was called into a time of transition, a time away to be still, to reorient, to prepare for his life, his ministry. We often focus on the temptations that come from the Devil, but that comes at the very end of the wilderness time.

What was the focus for the first forty days?

Could it be that even Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was drawn to a time of walking in the wilderness, a time alone, in the power of the Spirit?

Could it be a time of processing his ending as a Nazarene boy, a carpenter's son, so that he might become the Good Shepherd, the Bread of Life?

Maybe he too needed to die to his old self, so that he might be our Savior and Teacher.

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*Pause*  
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## **Lose Our Lives**

If we want to be ready to experience new beginnings and new life, we have to walk in the wilderness. We need to let go of who we had been before, so that we can become new – new individuals, and even a new congregation.

It takes intentionality.

It takes creating safe space to explore who we are and what we want to become.

This is a time of preparing, changing, diving deep into our lives and purpose.

Like prairie grass, like seeds of wheat, like the pregnant mother, we spend time in-between. The neutral zone makes possible a place to bring forth new life and bear fruit, even one hundred fold.

It could mean that we have to lose ourselves, who we have been and our ways of being from before, so that we can find ourselves again, in new life, in resurrection.

Jesus says, those who lose their lives for my sake and for the kingdom will find them!

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*Pause*  
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## Invitation to Reflection

I suspect that many of us here today are in some transition. We often think that we are alone in a time of transition, but the reality is if we are open, if we trust that it is safe to be in-between, we might discover that this is a common element of our human experience.

Even as a congregation, we are in the midst of a time of transition.  
We walk this road together.

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*Pause*  
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## Actions in the Neutral Zone

So, what can we do in the wilderness, in the neutral zone of the transition?  
What actions can we do when we are in a transition?

William Bridges from the book I am recommending, argues for many things, here are four:

### Surrender and Release

Surrender and release

Surrender and release. Instead of trying to fight it, we are invited to give into the emptiness and to stop struggling to escape it.

I heard the story of a man who was experiencing a dark time in his life and he wrote that he finally turned into the darkness, and roared it to the bottom ...and that was the only way out.

It may be the same for us in transition. How might we go into the wilderness even further and not seek to get out as soon as we can?

We might surrender and know that new life will come on the other side!  
We know that Christ is with us, and many others as well!

### Be Alone

Surrender and release

Be alone

Find a regular time and place to be alone. Maybe this is all at one time, where you leave for a few days to be alone, to process, to just have inactive attentiveness. Or maybe it happens in small bits over multiple weeks and months.

### Write a Log

Surrender and release

Be alone

Write a log

Write a log of your wilderness experiences.

Consider write an autobiography – often times we make sense of our present and future by writing about the stories that have shaped our past. Just start writing

about what is really going on, about how you are making meaning of this transition. Let this time be one of reflecting on the past and seeing how you have transitioned before. What can you learn about yourself in this transition time? This is a fertile time out of which greater meaning and sense making is possible, so that you might discover the new beginning getting ready to spout in your life!

## Discover the Truth about You

Surrender and release  
Be alone  
Write a log  
Discover the truth about you

Take this opportunity to discover the truth about you.  
Rarely do we know what we want – what we really want.  
Or take time to reflect on who we are – who we really are.  
In the midst of a time in the wilderness, we find the space and the breathe to really discover who we want to become, the truth about us and what new life may spring forth from our endings and transition.

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*Pause*  
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## Conclusion

### Good News

The good news is that God brings new life to the wilderness, to the neutral zone, of our lives.

### ***God's Question to Elijah***

In the passage from 1st Kings, God actually asks Elijah this question: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" God asks him this twice.

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*Pause*  
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Maybe Jesus is asking us, What do you want me to do for you?

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*Pause*  
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When we are walking in the middle zone, the wilderness, when much of our previous life and ways of making sense of the world have ended, then we have the freedom to create, to do what is on our hearts, and to become the person that God dreams for us to be.

## Call to Action

So let's walk into the wilderness together.  
Surrender and release to the neutral zone.  
Take time to be alone.  
Write a log  
Discover the truth about you.  
This time in the wilderness may be scary. It can be hard.  
Those things that we have held on to for so long may disappear, but we will not despair.

## Invitation

Christ will be with you, with us, and we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

## Closing Prayer

Will you pray with me?

You do not have to pray out loud.  
You can repeat after me,  
just quietly under your breath.

Jesus, I want to walk with you in the wilderness  
I am sorry for the times I mess up.

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*And if anything comes to mind, ask God's forgiveness.*

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Forgive me and make me new.  
Thank you for your love.  
Please fill me with your Spirit.  
Help me to follow your path...  
...in all the stages of life.  
In Jesus' name, Amen.