

THIN PLACES

Daniel 7. 9-10, 13-14

2 Peter 1. 16-19

Luke 9. 28-36

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

When children are young, they often ask, ‘Is it real?’ When they encounter something new or different, that is what they want to know. Reality for them is something that can be seen, tasted, touched, smelled and heard. Reality is determined by, and limited to the five physical senses. And even many adults believe that if things cannot be seen, tasted, touched, smelled or heard, then they are not real – at least in this world. We tend to live with a veil that separates the exteriorised world of tangible, measurable, rational information from that other world, the inner world of mystery, transformation and encounter.

There are moments, however, when that veil is parted and we stand in what the Celtic tradition calls a ‘thin place’. Thin places describe the veil being parted between this world and the other world, between heaven and earth, between the divine and the human, between matter and spirit, between the eternal and the temporal. In the thin places, the dual nature of those worlds disappears; and in the thin places, we experience union, wholeness and holiness.

Thin places invite us to step outside the five senses, to step outside what we know, and what we can understand and explain. They invite us to be astounded by the greatness of God and the tremendous mystery of God’s presence and love (‘mysterium tremendum’). In the thin places we find that we are overshadowed by the holy.

Thin places transform our lives. The veil parts; and we know ourselves to be different. We and our whole world now stand in a different light. That is what happened to Peter, James, and John on the mountain, as recorded in our gospel reading from St Luke. Our Lord led them to a thin place, a place where human ears would hear God's voice, human eyes would see divine light and human life would be enveloped in the cloud of God's presence.

That experience is the great longing of humanity. Throughout history, and even today, all of us long to stand in the thin place and to step through the veil when it parts. It is what has encouraged the first pilgrims to journey to the holy places. It called our spiritual ancestors to the desert and monasteries. It is why we persevere in prayer and study. It is that longing that causes the disciple to seek a teacher or spiritual director. And it is, at least in part, the reason why we show up in church week after week. We want to come face to face with what is really real (capital R).

That is exactly what happened to Peter, James, and John on the mountain. They came face to face with the Real; they came face to face with the holy. It was not simply an outer experience, one that could be tasted, touched, smelled, seen or heard. It was also an experience that marked them inwardly; and it changed them for ever. There on the mountain Peter, James and John saw a vision of the glorified Jesus, risen from the dead and ascended into heaven; they saw a vision of the future, glorified humanity of Christ. And as they saw this vision of our Lord, they were given a peek at *their own* future humanity, as it would be glorified one day with the same glory that is poured out on our Lord's humanity.

But this is not simply a story about Peter, James, and John. It is also a story about us. In the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the humanity that we share with him will one day be lifted up to share in the divine life and glory of the Holy

Trinity. You and I are also called to the thin places. We too are invited to step through the parted veil.

Think for a moment about the thin places of your own life. What were those moments when the veil parted for you, when you knew that you not only stood in the presence of the holy, but you also felt incredibly close to God, even united with him? And after that, your life was for ever changed.

Perhaps it was when you first had an understanding of God's forgiveness, and that opened the possibility for a new life, because you knew beyond a doubt that you are loved by God not because of what you have done, but simply because you exist. Or maybe it happened when you sat in the deep silence of God's presence and knew that all was well. Or perhaps it happened when you held your child or grandchild for the first time; or when you looked out at a sunset over a Guernsey beach that was so beautiful that you have never been able to forget it. These are the thin places of our lives, moments of transfiguration that leave us astounded at the greatness of God.

Did you know that the word 'transfiguration' (translated from the Greek μεταμορφωσις) has both an exterior and an interior meaning? Whether we are talking about Christ or ourselves, transfiguration suggests a change that is outwardly visible to others *as well as* an inward change of a fundamental character or condition. As we have seen, on the mountain the face and the external appearance of our Lord suddenly changed; but Jesus also suddenly changed fundamentally inside, as the disciples saw a vision of his glorified humanity.

Yes, like the disciples, you and I will also be gloriously transfigured one day when we share in the glory that is now that of Christ. But let us remember something very important: even before we leave this earth, in a sense God has already begun the

process of transfiguration in us. He has, through the work of the Holy Spirit, begun a process of sanctification in us, a process that is designed to make us become more and more like our Creator. In the process of sanctification, God works within us so that we can progressively grow into the fullness of redeemed life.

If we were to take a look at ourselves in the mirror this morning, what would we see? And if we were to take a look at our exterior life as it is manifested to others, what would they conclude? Our exterior life manifests our interior condition; and our interior condition orients and guides our exterior behaviour. If we are moving closer towards union with God, and if we are progressively becoming more like him, our interior change and growth should be visible to others. They are revealed in how we live, behave and relate.

What do we see, and what do others see?

Amen.