

Sermon – Sunday, February 19, 2023

Rev. Randi

In the ancient Near East, mountains were considered the pillars holding the sky above the earth. The mountain was considered a bridge between earth, the realm of humans, and heaven, which is the realm of God. [1] So, a mountain was a place to encounter the divine. Moses went up onto the mountain to talk with God. Elijah went to the top of the mountain when he was discouraged and heard God's still, small voice. Jesus takes three of his disciples to the top of the mountain to see Him as the divine God He is. In our culture, we also have thin spaces. These are moments when the separation between the world and heaven is so thin that we feel an overwhelming sense of the presence of God.

God offers us these opportunities to encourage us in our walk as disciples in this world. We've been talking about discipleship for the past several weeks. Discipleship is hard because it requires us to give up the notion that we are living our lives for ourselves. It requires us to live our lives for God. It requires us to live in a countercultural way, loving radically and giving radically. It requires us to keep our sense of hope and faith no matter how difficult life becomes. Sometimes we may wonder if living as a disciple is actually worth the trouble. Some days it may seem just easier to be self-centered or to continue to refuse to forgive our neighbor.

God gives us these "thin places" -- these glimpses of the Holy -- to reassure us that God is with us and that living as disciples is worth it.

We may experience these thin spaces on mountaintops. However, I suspect we more often experience them around the kitchen table, playing with our children or grandchildren, or just moving through life's dark moments.

I've shared before my experience of feeling the overwhelming presence of God at the moment my father died. That was a thin place. I've talked to others who lost relatives and later, when thinking of that relative, saw a butterfly flutter into sight, linger with them awhile, and then flutter away. For them, the butterfly represented a thin place. If we look for them, thin places are almost always near when we feel dejected or rejected. They are an encounter with the Holy that lets us know that God is with us and that struggling in life is and will be worth the trouble.

We need these thin places – these moments when God in God's glory is right here with us – to help us make sense of the world.

Those familiar with C.S. Lewis will know that the lion, Aslan, is a metaphor for Christ in a series of books Lewis wrote about a fictional world called Narnia. Aslan's final words in *The Silver Chair* are as follows:

"Here on the mountain, I have spoken to you clearly. I will not often do so down in Narnia. Here on the mountain, the air is clear, and your mind is clear; as you drop down into Narnia, the air will thicken. Take great care that it does not confuse your mind. And the signs which you have learned here will not look at all as you expect them to look when you meet them there.

That is why it is so important to know them by heart and pay no attention to appearance. Remember the signs and believe the signs. Nothing else matters." [\[ii\]](#)

When we have these Holy moments with God, we must listen carefully to what God tells us. We must treasure what happens in those Holy moments because the world we humans inhabit still is filled with sorrow, evil, and challenges.

Finding God in the world is difficult. Yet, if we remember what we've learned in the thin spaces, we can learn to believe in God even when God seems far from us. Holding God's promises in our hearts helps us make sense of the world and carry on our ministry as disciples.

God provides us with moments when we see God's glory and when we become close to God's Holy presence. Seek these moments and find rest in them, basking in the glory of God.

[\[i\]](#) The Rev. Judy Fentriss-Williams. (2010). [Pastoral Perspective on Exodus 24:12–18](#). In D. L. Bartlett & B. B. Taylor (Eds.), *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year A* (Vol. 1). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

[\[ii\]](#) C.S. Lewis. (1953) *The Silver Chair*, quoted by Anschutz, M. M. (2010). [Pastoral Perspective on Matthew 17:1–9](#). In D. L. Bartlett & B. B. Taylor (Eds.), *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year A* (Vol. 1, pp. 454–456). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.