

A Message From Pastor Karyn
May 27, 2020

Thin Places of Faith

I was introduced to the Celtic idea called “thin places” several years ago by a student of mine. I have had these kinds of experiences before but never had this particular language to describe them. The Celtic phrase, “thin places,” describes situations where heaven and earth come together so profoundly that the distance between them is almost erased – a moment of connection to the Divine that is close and profoundly intimate.

In the Celtic tradition, heaven and earth are about 3 feet apart. But in “thin places” the distance is significantly reduced. I’m not certain about the 3 feet estimation of this tradition, but I’ve definitely had “thin place” experiences.

When I was in high school, I went on a two-week backpacking trip into the high Rocky Mountains of Colorado. We packed in our food and water for a wonderful experience in the mountains. I was stunned and amazed every day and night at all that I was seeing.

We had some remarkable opportunities. We saw herds of elk passing through grassy valleys, majestic eagles flying overhead, and dug out snow-packed areas for tent sites. I saw and experienced things that I never had before as a teen from the plains of West Texas. I had a tremendous time.

And I learned the most important rule of camping and hiking – never go anywhere alone. We were paired up and had a buddy for

most of the trip. On occasion we had a different buddy but mine for the majority of the trip was Beth.

One night – way into the wee hours – nature called. I tried very hard to wake Beth up but she was out cold. I tried a few others in our camp and no one was budging. So I decided I could head out on my own as long as I stayed close to the camp (I know, it was dumb but I was young and fearless). I grabbed my trusty flashlight and headed out.

After completing my task, I thought I saw some deer moving by me and followed a bit to get a closer look at them. It did not take long for me to get turned around and lost.

Then something bad happened. The batteries in my flashlight burned out and I was in the dark. It wasn't just dark – it was pitch dark. It was the darkest kind of dark that I had ever experienced. I could not even see my hand in front of my face. And I began to get a bit scared.

Then I started to panic. I was lost, I had no light, and I did not know what to do. So I sat down to figure out what to do next. I wondered who would find me and tell my parents I loved them if I did not make it back home (I know, it's dramatic but again – I was young).

As I sat there, my eyes started to adjust to the dark. And as they did, I discovered that it was not as dark as I had thought it was. There was actually light shining from the amazing array of stars up in the sky. But I was in the high Rockies and they appeared so close that I literally thought I could reach out and touch some of them. There were millions of them – bright, shiny, translucent, and flickering.

In that moment I knew heaven and earth were so close together and that I was experiencing that. There was a razor's edge between the two. And it was astonishing. I felt God's presence in ways I never had before. I hope you have had "thin moments," as well. But some of you may never have felt this kind of closeness to the Divine or heaven or God or whatever you call this presence. But in that moment, I believe that I did.

I felt calmer, I began to make out familiar tree lines and ridges, and I could see the outlines of the area where I was pretty sure our campsite was. I began to walk on a trail I found – lit by the abundant heavenly stars – and found the campsite in just a short hike.

It was definitely a "thin place." And I was grateful heaven and earth were so close together in that moment. But I've also had the reverse – I guess we could call them "think places." I've had moments when I did not feel connected to God and times when I felt a great distance between heaven and earth. It felt much wider than 3 feet. Most of you have felt the same way. Maybe you feel this right now as we are isolated due to COVID-19.

Now as I look back on the moments when I felt the distance between heaven and earth was wider or felt somewhat alone, I know it was not God who moved away. The Divine was still very close – maybe I didn't feel it as closely as I felt it on that mountaintop, but God was close, nonetheless. The distance between heaven and earth is so often erased.

What's the difference? Sometimes I'm just not sure. Was it me being open and needy on the mountaintop that led me to feel that connection? Or was it simply the circumstances? I can't say I

really have an answer but I am trying to be open to the “thin places” every day. Some days I am better than others – but I pray to be open enough to experience them. And I pray for you to experience them too.

During this time, know that God is so close to you that you can feel it. These “thin places” are all around us. Open your heart and mind to feel that presence.

God loves you and so do I.

PK