



Transfiguration of Jesus Sunday, March, 3rd, 2019

Thin Places: Touching the Edge of Heaven! Living an Integrated Life!



Assisi, Italy, in winter

This week we come to the end of the season of Epiphany which has been pretty much centred upon Luke's presentation of Jesus through the lens of Jubilee, the Sermon on the Plain and the ethics of "turning the other cheek" which, we learnt last week, the Christian Church has struggled with, either rejecting it altogether as impractical, or pairing it back to the minimal. Central to our thought, has been the idea of Jesus' moral imagination, which institutions – Christian or otherwise – prefer to avoid. Today, we end Epiphany with the image of Jesus' transfiguration, with a mystical experience of existence on the edges between heaven and earth, spiritual experience and real life. This story has often been a problem for people, since it seems so odd. But it is a wonderful reading, a reading that sheds light upon the need to look beyond the compartmentalised existence that we live, to an integrated life, marked by, you guessed it, imagination.

OUR GATHERING

Welcome

In the name of God
In the name of the Son
In the name of the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with
And also with you

Let's go up the mountain.
Let's go up to the place where the land meets the sky
where the earth touches the heavens,
to the place of mists,
to the place of voices and conversations,
to the place of listening.

Let's Sing: Christ, be our Light

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
Light for the world to see.

Chorus:

***Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light! Shine in your Church
Gathered today.***

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us
Make us your living voice.

Chorus

Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.

Make us your bread, broken for others,
Shared until all are fed.

Chorus

Longing for shelter people are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
Walls made of living stone.

Chorus

Many the gifts, many the people,
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
Making your kingdom come.

Chorus

Bernadette Farrell

A Meditation about Living in Thin Spaces

What I try to do in this prayer is to set the scene for today by asking the question about our struggle for identity: who am I? Am I one thing one day, and another, another day? What or who holds me together in one piece, when I am confronted by situations that threaten to undo me? Here I have adapted Dietrich Bonhoeffer's prayer, "Who am I" that he wrote in Tegel Prison, Berlin, months before his execution by the Nazis at Flossenbergl.

Who am I
as I step out each day to assume my tasks confident or trembling?

Do I know?

Who am I as I respond to circumstances, in control or in fear?

Am I that which other people see and speak of
or am I only what I know of myself?

Do I know?

Who am I? This or the other?
One person today and tomorrow another?

Who am I?

One who finds his identity
in withdrawal from others
or in the company of others?
Alone or immersed with others?

Do I know?

Whoever I am,

ultimately God I am yours.

Peace

SMG leaves for their activities

Introduction

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Some Sayings about the Thin Places and the Integrated Life

Mircea Eliade, the religious scholar, writing in his classic work "The Sacred and the Profane," observed that "some parts of space are qualitatively different from others." An Apache proverb takes that idea a step further: "Wisdom sits in places."

Eric Weiner, New York Times, from "Man Seeks God, My Flirtations with the Divine"

Getting to a thin place usually requires a bit of sweat. One does not typically hop a taxi to a thin place, but sometimes you can. That's how my 7-year-old daughter and I got to St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. Video camera in hand, she paused at each statue of the various saints, marvelling, in a hushed voice, at their poses and headgear.

Ibid

Taking charge of your own learning is a part of taking charge of your life, which is the *sine qua non* in becoming an integrated person.

Warren Bennis

A life is either all spiritual or not spiritual at all. No man can serve two masters. Your life is shaped by the end you live for. You are made in the image of what you desire.

Thomas Merton

Exodus 34:29-35 (NIV)

Gill Lloyd

Today's passage is about "thin places": the story of Moses bringing the people a new set of tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments (in Hebrew, 'ten words'). This follows the account of the breaking of the first set of tablets in response to the people's falling away. Chapter 34 is seen by some as another tradition of the covenant, parallel to that in chapters 19-24. In the context of today's passage, it can be read as the restoration of the law after the people's apostasy. In the Exodus passage, Moses is described as using a veil when talking with the people, to cover the blinding light of his countenance, because they were afraid to look on him. He took the veil off when talking with God. The people continue to witness his face shining when he returns from encountering God, underscoring the divine inspiration of the messages he conveyed to them. Paul picks up the image of the veil in today's set reading from 2 Corinthians, using the veil as a metaphor for the veiled understanding of God's people.

²⁹ When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. ³⁰ When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. ³² Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai.

³³ When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. ³⁴ But whenever he entered the LORD's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, ³⁵ they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD.

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:6 (J.B. Phillips New Testament)

Playing with the detail that Moses removed the veil when he went back to speak to Yahweh, Paul implies that when you turn to the Lord Jesus, you get an unobscured view of God. That sets you free. From what? From the rules and regulations which Paul declares are the letter that kills in 3:6 and which he explains further in Romans 7. ¹²⁻¹⁷ With this hope in our hearts we are quite frank and open in our ministry. We are not like Moses, who veiled his face to prevent the

Israelites from seeing its fading glory. But it was their minds really which were blinded, for even today when the old agreement is read to them there is still a veil over their minds—though the veil has actually been lifted by Christ. Yes, alas, even to this day there is still a veil over their hearts when the writings of Moses are read. Yet if they “turned to the Lord” the veil would disappear. For the Lord to whom they could turn is the spirit of the new agreement, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, men’s souls are set free.

¹⁸ But all of us who are Christians have no veils on our faces, but reflect like mirrors the glory of the Lord. We are transfigured by the Spirit of the Lord in ever-increasing splendour into his own image.

4 ¹⁻⁶ This is the ministry of the new agreement which God in his mercy has given us and nothing can daunt us. We use no hocus-pocus, no clever tricks, no dishonest manipulation of the Word of God. We speak the plain truth and so commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. If our Gospel is “veiled”, the veil must be in the minds of those who are spiritually dying. The spirit of this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, and prevents the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, the image of God, from shining on them. For it is Christ Jesus the Lord whom we preach, not ourselves; we are your servants for his sake. God, who first ordered ‘light to shine in darkness’, has flooded our hearts with his light. We now can enlighten men only because we can give them knowledge of the glory of God, as we see it in the face of Jesus Christ.

The word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Luke 9:28-44 (J.B. Phillips New Testament)

Barry Lloyd

In Luke’s version of the Transfiguration, there are echoes of our Hebrew reading, of Moses’ ascent of Sinai. The threads of allusion run in a number of directions. The suggestion about tents or hatches echoes the wilderness story which the Feast of Tabernacles celebrates. The cloud recalls the cloud over Sinai, the voice, the divine voice. The words from on high appear to include a phrase from Deuteronomy 18:20, where the scene has many of the trappings of a vision of the climax of history. We are being given a foretaste of that event. In effect it is saying: what the hearts and minds of the visionaries have longed for is being realised in Jesus and will come to full completion in him. In Celtic language, this is all about “thin spaces”: heaven and earth meet in him (the space perspective); future and present meet in him (the time perspective), without dissolving the distinction between either.

²⁸⁻³⁵ About eight days after these sayings, Jesus took Peter, James and John and went off to the hill-side to pray. And then, while he was praying, the whole appearance of his face changed and his clothes became white and dazzling. And two men were talking with Jesus. They were Moses and Elijah—revealed in heavenly splendour, and their talk was about the way he must take and the end he must fulfil in Jerusalem. But Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep and it was as they struggled into wakefulness that they saw the glory of Jesus and the two men standing with him. Just as they were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is wonderful for us to be here! Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” But he did not know what he was saying. While he was still talking, a cloud overshadowed them and awe swept over them as it enveloped them. A voice came out of the cloud, saying “This is my Son, my chosen! Listen to him!”

³⁶ And while the voice was speaking, they found there was no one there at all but Jesus. The disciples were reduced to silence, and in those days never breathed a word to anyone to what they had seen.

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Christ

A Clip from “Call the Midwife”

The series “Call the Midwife” is a classic in speaking not just about post-war Britain and the social and economic struggles that ensued, but also about the human condition and the Christian life. In this clip, we see evidence of an *integrated life*, a life lived with both an *inward and outward journey*, a life lived with moral imagination. Chummy, (Camila Fortescue Chumley Browne - with an ‘e’), is a young woman who has been bruised by her aristocratic background: raised as a child in the British Raj in India and dispatched back to England to private school for the ‘stiff upper lip’ wealthy, she experienced emotional loneliness and isolation. What we see in ‘Chummy is her Christian identity, her active spirituality at work occupying thin spaces: immersed in the drama of real life, while carrying an awareness that transcends it. The journey is difficult, for her history, her accent, not to mention her size, leads to rejection, especially from the ever-critical Sister Evangelina. That said, her inward journey, her imaginative spirituality, furnishes her with the resources she needs to cross boundaries, to live creatively in love. Her life is an inspiration.

Series 1, Episode 2, 6:40-9:22

Some thoughts...

Let's Give

Doxology

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*

Prayer of Dedication

Sacrament of Holy Communion

Hymn: Far beyond our mind's grasp (TiS 542, Caturrog Na Nonoy, Francisco F. Feliciano)

Invitation

This is the table of the Lord.

It is to be made ready for those who love him and who want to love him more.

So, come, you who have much faith and you who have little, you who have been here often and you who have not been for a long time, you who have tried to follow and you who have failed.

It is our Lord who invites you.

It is his will that those who want him should meet him here.

The Story

Now let us hear the story of how this sacrament began.

On the night on which Jesus was betrayed, he sat at supper with his disciples. While they were eating, he took a piece of bread, said a blessing, broke it and gave it to them with the words, 'This is my body. It is broken for you. Do this to remember me.'

Later on, he took a cup of wine, saying, 'This cup is God's new covenant, sealed, with my blood. Drink from it, all of you, to remember me.'

So now, following Jesus' example and command, we take this bread and this wine, the ordinary things of the world which Christ will make special. And as he said a prayer before sharing, let us do so too.

Prayer of Gratitude and Concern

Gratitude, praise, hearts lifted high,
voices full and joyful...these you deserve God.

For when we were nothing you made us something; When we had no name and no faith and no future.

You called us to be your children;
When we lost our way or turned away,
you did not abandon us;
When we came back to you,
your arms opened wide in welcome.
And look, you prepare a table for us
offering not just bread, not just wine,
but your very self
so that we may be filled, forgiven, healed, blessed, and made new
again.
You are worth all our pain and all our praise.

So, we join our voices to those of the church on earth and in heaven
and say

(We sing)

***Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.***

***Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the
highest***

Lord God, as we come to share the richness of your table
we cannot forget the rawness of the earth.
We cannot take bread and forget those who are hungry.

Your world is one world and we are stewards of its nourishment.
Lord, put our prosperity at the service of the poorest of the earth

We cannot take wine and forget those who are thirsty. The ground
 and the rootless, the earth and its weary people cry out for justice.
Lord, put our fullness at the service of the empty

We cannot hear your words of peace
 and forget the world at war.
 Or, if not at war, then preparing for it.
***Show us quickly, Lord, how to turn weapons into welcome signs
 and the lust for power into a desire for peace***

We cannot celebrate the feast of your family and forget our divisions.
 We are one in Spirit but not in fact; history and hurt still dismember us.
Lord, heal your church in every brokenness.

Prayer of Consecration

Lord Jesus Christ, present with us now,
 for all that you have done and all that you have promised.
 What have we to offer?

Our hands are empty,
 our hearts are sometimes full of wrong things.
 We are not fit to gather up the crumbs from under your table.
 But with you is mercy
 and the power to change us.

Send down your Holy Spirit on us
 and on these gifts of bread and wine
 that they may become for us your body,
 healing, forgiving and making us whole;
 so that we may become, for you, your body,
 loving and caring in the world until your kingdom comes.
Amen.

Among friends, gathered round a table,
 Jesus took bread, broke it and said,
 “This is my body: it’s broken – for you.”

And later he took the cup of wine and said,
 “This is the new relationship with God
 made possible because of my death.
 Take this – all of you.”

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us.

O Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, grant us your peace.

Look, look, here is your Lord coming to you in bread and wine.
 These are the gifts of God for the people of God.

Bread and wine are distributed among the people

We come forward as a family to partake of the elements together at the Communion Table. The cup on the right-hand side as you face the table is unfermented grape juice and the cup on the left-hand side is alcoholic wine.

Concluding Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you have put your life in our hands,
 now we put our lives in yours.
 Take us, shake us, remake us.

May we become as God-like as you are human
Amen

Prayers of the People

Annette Burne

The one who prays offers the following words at the end of each series of petitions, “May we seek out thin spaces” The people respond, “To integrate heaven and earth”.

Hymn: Lord the light (TiS 675, Shine Jesus Shine, Graham Kendrick)

Blessing

Thin spaces are life giving.
 Seek them, recognize them, occupy them!

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

Amen

**We sing: You shall go out with joy (TiS 755, Trees of the Field,
Steffi Geiser Rubin)**

Closing Postlude

Pianist:

Rosemary Osborne