

**Sunday, February 19, 2012**  
**Rev. Diane Monti-Catania**

**Sermon – “Finding the Thin Places”**

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Our season of Epiphany comes to an end with much the same message as it started – the voice of God from heaven saying “This is my son, the Beloved; listen to him.”

It seems like such a short time, this journey from Bethlehem at Christmas to Jerusalem at Easter.

It reminds me of the slide shows that people put together for display at memorial services.

Every effort is made to capture the wonder of the person, the highlights of their life, the things that mattered.

They flash by one after another.

There is really no time to completely absorb each scene –certainly no time for reflection.

Our liturgical year is like that.

We try to cover all the big events in Jesus’ life, to paint the picture of the glory of the son of man – compressed into 52, one-hour services.

I find myself wondering about all of the other moments in Jesus’ life.

What were the quiet conversations about?

What did Jesus, Peter, James and John talk about as they were walking up the mountain?

How many important teachings went unrecorded?

Was today the only time the disciples heard the voice of God or witnessed the true divinity of Jesus?

Was the transfiguration a culminating event or was it simply the time that it all became clear for the disciples?

So often we reduce a life down to the big moments and we forget everything that goes into building a life.

Someone wins a gold medal and we celebrate their athletic ability, but we don’t mention the lessons in perseverance and defeat taught by an early coach;

Someone publishes a best seller and we laud their literary genius, without thinking about the years of creative writing classes and rejection slips;

Someone wins the Nobel prize for peace and we forget how much time they spent in jail.

Our season of Epiphany – the season of light – comes to an end and we turn our attention to Lent – the season of reflection.

We slow down, liturgically speaking, and take time to look at the moments that make up each day.

We pause and reflect on opportunities to experience God’s presence.

Our readings today serves as an ideal marker between what was and what is to come.

On a mountaintop, Peter James and John have an experience that will change their lives.

They are witness to Jesus’ divinity - “he was transfigured before them and his clothes became dazzling white.”

They see Jesus with Elisha and Moses, prophets from old.

They hear a voice from heaven, the voice of God.

They experience what is called a “thin place.”

A thin place, a term most often used in Celtic Spiritual Writing, is where “the veil that separates heaven and earth is lifted and one is able to receive a glimpse of the glory of God.”

These are places along one's spiritual path where God's Spirit feels especially near.

For some it is a moment or experience of transcendence, or a time when God reveals a vision of the future, or confirms a calling.

At other times, these thin places can be moments of communion with God's wondrous creation.

Poet Mindie Burgoyne says

*Thin Places are ports in the storm of life, where the pilgrims can move closer to the God they seek, where one leaves that which is familiar and journeys into the Divine Presence. They are stopping places where men and women give pause to wonder about what lies beyond the mundane rituals, the grief, trials and boredom of our day-to-day life. They probe to the core of the human heart and open the pathway that leads to satisfying the familiar hungers and yearnings common to all people on earth, the hunger to be connected, to be a part of something greater, to be loved, to find peace.*

Experiencing the “thin places” is not something that happens every day.

It is, however, what can sustain us in our day-to-day lives.

Memories of mountaintop experiences, and hope for more, carry us along.

Where are your thin places?

Where do you feel closest to God?

For me, the outdoors has always been a place where I feel close to God.

The warmth of the sun on my face and the beauty of nature bring me a sense of peace while reminding me of God's majesty.

I also find a particular type of serenity in this meetinghouse.

Sitting here in the afternoon light, or in the quiet evening before prayer gatherings – there is a stillness that I associate with God's presence.

Sometimes, when the day seems overwhelming with tasks and responsibilities, I come and sit in the balcony and just close my eyes and breath deeply and find peace.

I invite you to explore your thin places this Lent.

Give yourself the opportunity to be in God's presence, to feel the Holy Spirit move through you.

Last October, when we began discussions about what God is calling this church to do, I used the acronym LOVE – Living Our Values Everyday.

I would like us to recommit to that practice for Lent.

I would like each one of us to make an effort to be more conscious of LOVE, living our values everyday.

My belief is that we can create thin places in our lives most readily by using the gifts that God has given us to care for one another.

Susan Trout captured this beautifully in her book, *Born to Serve*. She says,

“We reach out to touch another's hand and our souls connect. In that moment, we touch God.”

God is there.

God is waiting for you.

Give yourself the opportunity to feel God's presence.

I came upon this wonderful little story this week called, *Lunch in the Park with God*

There was once a little boy who decided he wanted to find God. He knew it would probably be a long trip, so he decided to pack a lunch-four packs of Twinkies and two cans of root beer.

He set out on his journey and went a few blocks until he came to a park.

On one of the park benches sat an old woman looking at the pigeons.

The little boy sat down beside her and watched the pigeons too.

When he grew hungry, he pulled out some Twinkies.

As he ate, he noticed the woman watching him, so he offered her one. She accepted it gratefully and smiled at him.

He thought she had the most beautiful smile in the world.

Wanting to see it again, he opened a can of root beer and offered her the other one. Once again she smiled that beautiful smile.

For a long time the two sat on that park bench eating Twinkies, drinking root beer, smiling at each other, and watching the pigeons.

Neither said a word.

Finally, the little boy realized that it was getting late and he needed to go home.

He started to leave, took a few steps, turned back and gave the woman a big hug.

Her smile was brighter than ever before.

When he arrived home, his mother noticed that he was happy, but strangely quiet.

'What did you do today?' she asked.

'Oh, I had lunch in the park with God,' he said.

Before his mother could reply, he added, 'You know, she has the most beautiful smile in the world.'

Meanwhile, the old woman left the park and returned to her home.

Her son noticed something different about her. 'What did you do today, Mom?' he asked.

'Oh, I ate Twinkies and drank root beer in the park with God.'

And before her son could say anything at all, she added, 'You know, God's a lot younger than I imagined.'"

Last week I had the privilege of delivering the beautiful valentines the children had made in Sunday school.

As I visited those members of our church family who are homebound or ill, I was moved by the impact all those greetings had on the recipients.

Giving love away is free.

Doesn't cost anything.

Takes some time, but the rewards are many.

Why not make a commitment during Lent to visit someone who is sick or send a card.

Sharing your love is a core value of Christian life.

To prepare ourselves for service to others we will gather on Wednesday evenings for a half an hour of contemplative prayer.

In the stillness of this meetinghouse we alternate between readings from scripture and periods of silence. It is simply a time to rest. Rest in God's presence.

On Thursday mornings we will meet to discuss the various faith perspectives presented in Francis Collins collection of essays, *Belief*. We will continue our exploration of what we believe, in the context of other writer's faith experiences.

This individual work, praying and reading, is preparation for service to others.

As our liturgical seasons fly by – as our lives fly by – let us be cautious not to miss opportunities for God's grace.

Let's work together to keep our eyes and hearts open to the wonders of God, not just in the big moments, but in the small ones as well.

If we find ourselves on a mountaintop, let's be certain that we notice when the veil is lifted.

Look for God in every encounter.

Watch for Jesus in the face of your neighbor.

Feel the Holy Spirit moving through you.