

SERMON

29 JULY 2018

2 KINGS 4: 42-44

PALM 145: 10-19

EPHESIANS 3: 14-21

JOHN 6: 1-21

IN THE NAME OF GOD, FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

This is a nostalgic day. Six years ago this last Sunday in July was my last Sunday as Rector of Christ Church.

It was also the Sunday that we consecrated the Gabard Building. The Bishop was here for that happy occasion and he celebrated at 10; there was only one service that morning as is his custom.

I did preach. It was rather strange thinking that it might be my last sermon here. I think I should take a moment and thank Father Dave for calling on me and giving me the privilege to be here in this pulpit and that altar. It has been a very happy reunion for me.

The Gospel that morning was the same as that of this morning; the Feeding of the Five Thousand.

The Old Testament lesson was from Samuel, the story of David and Bathsheba. In his remarks the Bishop said he had expected me to preach about the latter but all I talked about was fish.

Looking back on sermons and homilies over the years I really have preached only on the Old Testament readings or the Gospel, generally ignoring the New Testament, the Epistle. I was about to do so again this morning when I read the reading from Ephesians again.

For centuries there has been a divided opinion about who wrote Ephesians. It's generally believed that the writer wasn't Paul but someone using his name.

It is conceded that Paul spent time in Ephesus; the Acts of the Apostles makes that clear. It also makes clear that Paul considered the foundation of a Christian community there to be his crowning achievement. It was then a large, important commercial center with an internationally famous temple to the pagan Artemis, considered to be one of the wonders of the ancient world.

What could have been Paul's attraction for the people of such a city? It was personal in a way that the worship of Artemis in its huge temple could not have been.

Paul spoke directly to the heart and the mind of the Ephesians when he was credited with saying "I pray that you may have the power to comprehend... what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with the fullness of God."

He continued that "... the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine."

In those few words that writer called upon the Christian community of Ephesus to come into contact with God through Jesus Christ, to be participants rather than observers of their faith, and to know the presence and the power of God in their lives every day.

It tells us, as it told the Ephesians, that our God is very close. We need to be present to Him as He is present to us. We need to find those places where His presence is strong and personal. It can be life changing.

Centuries ago in England there were two great Christian churches, one that had come from the ancient Irish churches of the west, another from the church of Rome. There was a synod to determine which would be the church and practice of England; Rome won. Actually, the Celtic church is still here.

The Celtic church has a saying that "Heaven and Earth are just three feet apart," and that they are even closer in the "thin places."

The Celts believed that to behold the divine you must either stumble into the thin place unexpectedly, or come with the proper reverence at the proper time. The divine encounters you, not the other way around.

Thin places are "... locales where the distance between heaven and earth collapses and we are able to catch a glimpse of the divine or transcendent."

In thin places we are "...jolted out of old ways of seeing the world; we lose our bearings and find new ones." We are transformed.

Thin places are not necessarily tranquil or beautiful or fun although they may be those things. In fact, we don't seek those thin places, The Divine seeks us.

Many years ago I experienced an unmistakable call to become a deacon in the church. At the time I was an Army officer stationed at Fort Gordon in Augusta, Georgia.

I spoke about it to the priest at Saint Augustine's in Augusta. He in turn sent me to the then bishop Paul Reeves and he sent me to a meeting of the diocesan Commission on Ministry when they met at Honey Creek near Brunswick.

I waited and waited and waited. They finally called me for an interview late in the afternoon of the second day. Actually, they admitted they had forgotten me. It was raining.

I really had to drive home that afternoon. I drove a tiny Volkswagen Rabbit at the time. The beginning of the drive wasn't too bad, just wet. Then I found myself on a small, two lane north of Statesboro and the persistent rain turned to persistent ice, first on the sides of the road, then on the road itself. It was dusk; I had seen no traffic or gas station or farm house for miles. I was worried.

Prayer seemed to be a very good idea at the time, so I did and there was an answer. A voice, a real voice, said "Do you think I brought you all this way to abandon you on a road in Georgia?"

That was a thin place. The Divine sought me out in a tiny car on an icy road and gave me assurance that my life and my world had changed with God's call and that He would not fail me in the journey that day or in the journey I had begun in the church.

The Australian aboriginals have the saying "God is everywhere and everywhen."

If God is everywhere is not the whole world a thin place? Perhaps it is if we would see it.

IN HIS HOLY NAME