

STANDING ON THE THRESHOLD



Alice Fleming Townley
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Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matthew 7:13-14)

A few years ago, our family visited Mt. Zion National Park. As we hiked along, we marveled at the beauty of the ancient red rock formations. As we explored a trail, we noticed the formations rising on both sides, and as we journeyed further, the way got more and more narrow and winding. We could not see, and we did not know what lay ahead. We re-assessed our packs and our width and adapted as needed. We put one foot in front of the other, held out our hands, and checked in with each other. The wonder of the present moment and the mystery of what was to come suspended me in awe.

And Jesus said, “For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life.” (Matthew 7:13) I think of that hike when I imagine such a narrow passageway. Joyce Rupp reflects on this scripture and adds the images of the narrow birth canal, or the opening in a chrysalis or the crack of an egg. How possibly can a baby, or a butterfly, or a chick fit through that space? It is hard and painful work. And it is transformative.

Jesus says that few find the narrow door. The way that is wide seems so much easier because anything goes with no thought of harm to us, or others or creation. Fitting through the narrow requires awareness, care, and adaptations. Inside narrow passageways, we can’t always see what’s ahead, or even behind, so we have to stay true to what we know deep within.

During Holy Week when I was first summoned to my parent’s home by my sister and Neil, I returned to my family in East Lansing and announced that my Father was dying. We did not know when or any details ahead, but we did know we would walk the way in love, as always. And we did, holding and being held by the Holy and one another. This week, we learned that Neil’s mother was dying of Covid. She was distanced by hundreds of miles and no visitors allowed in the crowded hospital with overwhelmed staff. So much was uncertain, but this we know, to walk in love. And we supported Neil as he bridged the distance with phone calls and prayers and held his mother and father and the staff in gratitude and compassion. His witness through and beyond her death awed us and ushered us into Holy Space, thin space, once again.

‘Thin space’ is a Celtic term referring to times when the veil between heaven and earth is permeable. Yes, I prefer certainty, safety, and control. I really like to know what is ahead and that we will all be fine. And yet, despite our best efforts, there are moments when this illusion falls away. These are also thin spaces where God’s spirit and the support of the living and the dead is very near.

Joyce Rupp says that the threshold of change, that space between the old and new, the known and unknown, is such a thin space. We find ourselves in thresholds in so many ways. We are in the middle of a pandemic. We are wondering about school in the fall, and even church. We are missing what we took for granted pre-covid. I took out a box of club crackers last night and my daughter and mother got very sentimental thinking of how much they miss coffee hour. We are missing each other and family and friends, and some are suffering from extreme isolation. We are still navigating the now and how to care for ourselves and each other safely. We are asking hard questions about race and coming to terms with history, and disproportionate access to healthcare and education and resources. We have said goodbye to a beloved pastor and await the arrival of our interim pastor. Some are struggling with loss of health and navigating treatments and therapies. Others are wondering about jobs and reductions and future opportunities. Others are wondering where they will live, and in what city or even country. And, I think I have given a similar list before, because this threshold is stretching. It is so easy to get wrapped tightly in our angst that we become closed to that which nurtures us, which feeds, which gives us life.

What would it mean to say that our thresholds, our in-between spaces, our not yet knowing spaces are also thin spaces? It would mean we claim all the gifts of thin space. We look around with the eyes of our hearts and draw from the supportive presence of the communion of saints spread among heaven and earth who are cheering us on. Even though we can’t see details ahead, we re-commit to walking the way in love and care. We hold sacred space for ourselves and one another as we re-balance and adapt to the now. Perhaps holding sacred space means listening, or walking, or doing daily devotionals and prayer, and continuing to find ways to worship and be church. Let us feast on what gives us peace and strength and clarity in the threshold, in the uncertainty of now. In thin spaces we also become keenly aware of mystery, awe, and holiness. We remember other uncomfortable passageways as we remember the journeys of the baby, the butterfly and the little chick. And examples from scripture like Israel in the wilderness, or the disciples after the Ascension. As Joyce Rupp says, “These passageways serve as spiritual wombs where the soul grows stronger wings in spite of doubts about whether those wings can soar freely. Threshold experiences contain tremendous energy.”ⁱ And our opportunities for tremendous growth and creativity.

I remember here at church how we used to begin early service on Easter morning outside, by the fire. Rob would remind us how the woman would have returned from seeing the Risen Christ to talk to others around the fire. There would have been the ‘how’ and ‘what ifs’ and uncertainty. And we would kneel to light the paschal candle from that fire, reminding us that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ, no

suffering, no hardship, no death. And on Easter morning, the open doors of the church symbolized the heavy stone rolled away and the tomb opened for us to walk through.

As Megan McKenna writes, “The Resurrection is not a single event, but a loosening of God’s power and light into the earth and into history that continues to alter all things, infusing them with the grace and power of God’s own holiness. It is as though a door was opened, and what poured out will never be stopped, and the door cannot be closed.”ⁱⁱ

And so we stand here, in the threshold. Yes, we are suspended in much uncertainty. What we do know is that we will walk this way in love and care. We can stretch out our hands and hold another with prayers and words, bridging the distance. And we know nothing can separate from the loving presence and power of God. And so dear ones, in this time may our wings gain strength, and confidence. And may we rise.

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