

## THE THIN PLACES

Isaiah 6:1-8, I Corinthians 15:1-11, Luke 5:1-11

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On this Super Bowl Sunday, I remind you of the immortal words of country great Bobby Bare: *“Drop kick me Jesus through the goal posts of life, end over end neither left nor to right, straight through the heart of them righteous uprights. Drop kick me Jesus through the goal posts of life.”*

Now perhaps you are far too sophisticated to have ever sung or perhaps even heard that song, but lots of other Americans have. And those lyrics, while amusing, do provide us with a window into the theological bent of much of this country: that is, conceiving of God as your best bud. Asking Jesus to drop kick you implies a rather personal relationship. But “Drop Kick Me Jesus” religion is problematic in many ways, not the least of which is the void of wonder and mystery and awe.

In the lectionary readings of the day, God is certainly not presented as our best bud. Instead, in each case humans encountered the Living God and the result was awe and trembling, fire and smoke. Isaiah and Paul and Peter experienced what the Celts called the “thin places,” those places where the

eternal touches the temporal; heaven touches earth and God appears in power and majesty to us humans. And it changes our lives.

The prophet Isaiah saw the Lord upon a throne, with fire and smoke and heavenly creatures flying about. And the sight of it caused him to cry out: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

Before his conversion, Paul had been a persecutor of the church. But all that changed one fateful day, when Paul stopped talking about God and actually experienced God. He had a vision of the Resurrected Jesus that literally knocked him off his horse, blinded his eyes, and humbled him.

Simon Peter had been fishing all night and hadn't caught a thing. Jesus asked him to sail to some deeper waters and try again. And when he did, the nets were so full of fish that it threatened to sink two boats. And Peter fell at Jesus' feet and said: "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"

Now some people don't like all this talk of trembling and being humbled before God. These stories, they say, somehow diminish our dignity. And if

you've ever been abused by the powers that be, then these biblical stories might just sound like a power trip on God's part. But God's power, while awesome and awe-inspiring is not the main point of any of these stories. Instead, these are stories about how people changed because of an encounter with the divine. They were empowered and set on a new path.

When the smoke cleared and the vision was over, Isaiah was ready to set out in a new direction and said to God, "Here I am. Send me." Saul, the persecutor of the early Christians, became Paul, a beloved father of the church. And Peter left his life as a fisherman, to become St. Peter, the Rock upon whom the church was built. Each of these persons experienced encountered God in a thin place and it changed them.

These stories remain powerful for us today because they are human stories and thus our stories. We may never have seen fire and smoke, but like them it usually takes something quite out of the ordinary to get our attention; something arresting to quiet us long enough to hear the voice of the God who has never stopped speaking.

And we see what they saw. No, we may not have seen the Resurrected Jesus or boatloads of fish, but we have all had moments in which we were convinced that we had caught a glimpse of the glory of God.

Perhaps it has happened for you in this room when worship seems to crack the wall between the temporal and the eternal. Or maybe you've been struck speechless by the incredible beauty of the natural world; or a piece of music that lifts your hearts right out of your chest; or the unspeakable beauty of a lover's body or a baby's face. There is just as much fire and smoke in those moments as there ever was in Isaiah's vision, if we would but have eyes to see and ears to hear. The problem is that we rush by them with barely a nod. We don't listen and our lives are not changed and we wonder why.

But our lives could be changed. Our lives would be changed if we would but open our eyes and our minds and our hearts to see the truth: that there is wonder and beauty and joy and divinity all around us. It's in the night sky that soon will cover us. It's sitting next to you in the pew. And it's on this table, where a simple piece of bread and a simple cup and a heart of faith connect earth to heaven. Thanks be to God. Amen.