

MINISTER'S LETTER

Thin Places

So let me start by saying 'thin places' is NOT a new diet that is taking off and reducing the overweight by 10s of kilos in the space of a couple of months. Nor is the sort of thin place I am thinking of like that of the (true) story of a young man who got crushed by a falling boulder when he was canyoning in the (very narrow) canyons in the deserts of Utah in the USA. After several days with his wrist caught and crushed between a fallen, large rock and the canyon wall (three quarters of a metre wide at that point), he took the extremely courageous decision to cut off his hand to free himself. He survived and, believe it or not, flourished in his chosen career of rock and mountain climbing!

Actually, I think this IS closer to what I mean by 'thin places!' That is, this young man sat on the thin edge/gap between life and death. He chose life and then seized the day!

Eric Weiner, a New York Times journalist wrote an article about 'Thin Places,' in March (9th) 2012. He wrote:

It is, admittedly, an odd term. One could be forgiven for thinking that thin places describe skinny nations (see Chile) or perhaps cities populated by thin people (see Los Angeles). No, thin places are much deeper than that. They are locales where the distance between heaven and earth collapses and we're able to catch glimpses of the divine, or the transcendent or, as I like to think of it, the Infinite Whatever.

I like that!

Locales where the distance between heaven and earth 'collapse,' and we see, sense, know we have been in the presence of the 'Infinite Whatever!'

Thin Places:

Weiner suggests that thin places '*relax us, yes, but they also transform us — or, more accurately, unmask us. In thin places, we become our more essential selves.*'

Thin Places do not have to be religious, although they often are. I remember walking into the almost finished Gaudi Cathedral in Barcelona, Sagrada Familia. I literally gasped as I looked around, staggered by 'something deep' within me, a wondrous connection between the Infinite and myself – God felt

extraordinarily close – even though 1000s were busily taking photos and doing the tourist thing in the Cathedral.

I have also found myself in an unwanted, Lenten, thin place. As I have watched the war in Gaza explode, on several occasions I have viewed footage of Palestinian children crying and imploring whoever would listen, with their hurt and grief, as their homes are bombed and families killed. Here there truly is a thin place, where the suffering Christ cries in agony and I see the depth of our God-of-Love's helpless distress in the children. Heaven and earth so close in suffering and loss. Hard to stomach, but inexorably transformational!!

Michael McGirr (This Cup We Bless -page 40) shares the story of the Woman at the Well encounter between Jesus and this Samaritan Woman – it is a thin place for her too. In a state of complete and total transformation, she screams to her community and the world, 'come and see a man who told me everything I ever did.' McGirr suggests Jesus enables this broken soul to find, 'her place in community by accepting her own unique and painful story.'

Thin places.

Where are your thin places?

In particular, where are the 'thin places' in your, and our, Lenten journeys to the Cross?

Keep looking and praying to see, visit and be transformed in these thin places because the Suffering, Dying God of Jesus is ever so close!

Much love

Ron

