

“Enfolded in Christ”
February 15, 2026
Scripture: Exodus 24:12-19; Matthew 17:1-9

You may remember last week in my sermon I mentioned the concept of “thin places.” It refers to those places in the world where the barrier or veil between the material and spiritual worlds is permeable. It’s a concept that has roots in ancient Celtic spirituality, think of Stonehenge or the Calanais Standing Stones on the Isle of Lewis. But we certainly find it in the Bible as well. What is Mt. Sinai where Moses goes to meet with God if not a thin place? Or the mountain where he encounters the burning bush? Thin places have a long and significant function in our tradition.

Mostly, though, we think of those places literally. A thin place is an actual location, like a physical portal of some kind. But we aren’t limited to the literal. Thin places can also be experienced through prayer or music or even deep conversation. You may not need to climb a mountain to enter the presence of God. It might be enough to change your state of mind or focus your attention in a different direction.

In this scene in Exodus we find Moses called before God. He’s told to leave everything behind, all the responsibilities in the encampment that have occupied his mind for so long, and direct his focus on what God has to tell him. Notice how it’s worded: “Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there.” Moses “waits” for forty days and nights! He goes to commune with the Holy. There’s no dialogue between them, like we find in other encounters. We’re left with a sort of tableau of Moses surrounded by the cloud of God’s presence; he’s enfolded in God.

It’s a peaceful image. One that many of us long for from time to time. When life is out of control or when circumstances threaten to overwhelm us, finding a thin place where we can be at peace, where we can be immersed in God’s presence, can be very hard. Does it require removing ourselves from our day-to-day routine? That can help, certainly. But often we don’t have that option. There is no mountain where we can go to encounter God. Removing ourselves has to happen from within.

In his book *What the Mystics Know*, Father Richard Rohr offers some helpful ways to cultivate that sense of awareness of God’s presence that’s available to all of us. We begin that journey by waking up and becoming conscious of the Center to our lives. We spend most of our time on the circumference, on the edge. We produce and consume; we fret and plan; we become distracted with small annoyances and allow our attention to be diverted away from what gives us pain and what gives us joy. Moses had to leave all that behind for a while. He had to physically remove himself from the demands of his role.

But there are other ways to learn to wait. I find focusing on my breathing, taking good deep breaths when I’m under stress, helps me to re-center my thoughts. That doesn’t mean I’m always serene and unaffected by the nuisances and annoyances around me, but it helps me avoid getting overwhelmed. When I can take just a moment when I’m in traffic or in a tedious meeting,

to take some deep breaths, it can bring me back from the edge of the circle to the Center where I belong.

I admit, it doesn't always work. Sometimes I'm more like Peter with Jesus on the mountaintop, who just wants to build something rather than be still and listen. This story of the Transfiguration is such a powerful illustration of what it means to be at the Center of things. In this thin place reality is revealed in a way the disciples hadn't really understood until then. What they see, I think, is meant to be a lifting of the veil. What they find is Jesus in a very different form and accompanied by a long and deep tradition represented through Moses and Elijah. As I read that story, I'm inclined to think Elijah and Moses don't join Jesus so much as are revealed to have been with him all along.

And all of them, Jesus, Moses and Elijah, the three disciples, all of them are enfolded in that moment in Christ. Christ is the Center and every place we are is a thin place because we are never removed from the presence of Christ. What Peter and the others learn on that mountain is it's possible to live enfolded in Christ. But they have to pay attention; they have to be still and listen. Every one of us is capable of that. It may take more effort for some than others, but we're all connected to the same Divine Presence.

Thomas A. Dorsey, an African-American composer, is credited with creating gospel music in the Black tradition, which marries sacred text with secular blues melodies. He was very well-known on the jazz circuit, performing with the likes of Ma Rainey and her Wild Cats Jazz Band under the name "Georgia Tom" in the late teens and early 1920's. His hectic lifestyle and schedule led him to a mental breakdown at the age of 21, causing his mother to beg him to give up the blues music and focus on religion.

He recovered and continued traveling with Ma Rainey and his then new wife Nettie Harper. But in 1925 he suffered another breakdown, and three years later devoted himself to church music. He became well-known and was in demand. His life was coming together. But in 1932, while he was performing in St. Louis, he received word from Chicago that his wife died giving birth to their son who also didn't make it. Dorsey was overwhelmed with grief. You can imagine how devastated he must have been.

But he didn't suffer a breakdown this time. He looked for comfort through his music. It was during this time that he composed the hymn "Precious Lord." That hymn became a sort of anthem for people who find their backs against the wall. Rather than giving in to frustration or grief or anger, it invites us to focus on the Center of our lives and be enfolded in Christ.

Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, help me stand.
I am tired; I am weak; I am worn.
Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light.
Take my hand, Precious Lord, lead me home.

Dorsey found solace for his grief enfolded in Christ. His hymn acknowledges a reality we can easily forget when we're under stress or living with loss. We are always in the Center with Christ. The disciples were shown that on the mountain with Jesus. They were shown a reality

they couldn't see because of their frenzied need to produce or perform. They're told simply to listen, to be still and wait.

The poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning once wrote, "Earth's crammed with heaven,/And every common bush afire with God,/But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,/The rest sit around and pluck blackberries,/And daub their natural faces unawares." To be enfolded in Christ is to become aware, to be awakened to the reality around us that's so easy to miss.

We are not alone. We are enfolded in Christ, held in compassion. God's presence is all around us when we open our eyes to see it. Transfiguration is the reality we cannot see but lies at the Center of life. And no matter how hard living becomes, no matter what losses or disappointments we endure, we are enfolded in Christ. Take time to breathe. Step back from the edge of producing and performing and consuming. Christ is beside you, before you, within you. Listen to him, and in his presence find your peace.

Amen