

Sunday, November 3, 2019

Rev. Robert W. Brown

SERMON

## **The THIN Space Between**

Revelation 21:1-6a & John 11:32-44

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Our first reading today is an emotional and dramatic moment recorded in the Gospel of John. On his way into Jerusalem, Jesus returns to visit his dear friends Mary and Martha. He finds them deeply troubled, tearfully grieving the recent death of their brother Lazarus. What happens next, no one could have imagined and to this day and beyond, no one will ever forget. Hear the Gospel of John, chapter 11, verses 32 through 44...



### **SCRIPTURE:** John 11:32-44

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him! "But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus... again greatly disturbed... came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

## 2<sup>nd</sup> SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION

As human beings we are bound in time and space. There is birth and there is death. But eternity has no beginning or ending, time is factored out of the equation. How can we, whose reality is framed in time and space, begin to even comprehend a different reality? The apostle John saw a vision of this altered eternal reality and wrote down what he saw. This became the final book in our Bible, *The Book of Revelation*. Toward the end of his astounding vision, John describes a new and wondrous reality. For us in this time and place, the fulfillment of this promise has yet to come, but in the eternal dimension, John's vision is already happening.

Hear these words of the Apostle John written in chapter 21 of Revelation...



### **SCRIPTURE:** Revelation 21:1-6a

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth;  
for the **first** heaven and the **first** earth had passed away,  
and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming  
down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.  
And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of **God** is  
among mortals. **God** will dwell with them; they will be his people, and **God's**  
presence will be with them; every tear will be wiped from their eyes. Death  
will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first  
things have passed away." And the one who was seated on the throne said,  
"See, I am making all things new." Also, he said, "Write this, for these words  
are trustworthy and true." Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and  
the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift  
from the spring of the water of life."



The Word of God leading us to be a people of God...

## SERMON

These two stories vividly point to a reality that is beyond the grave. Something more than the visible, physical dimension is flowing through the cosmos. Dancing all around us in this physical world are billions of clues, all pointing to an invisible Mystical Wonder. As we learn to notice the Mystical Wonder & hold onto our spiritual experience as valid experience our existential journey to find purpose, meaning, and place begins to take shape. To notice these moments of Mystical Wonder is to be in what is called by some the THIN SPACE between what is seen and what is not seen. In the THIN SPACE, Divine Mystery is reimagined from an unknowable, abstract enigma into a lived experience of Mystery as the endlessly unfolding journey into greater and greater knowing, and deeper understanding of the mystery of God among us, God dwelling with us. God loving the world.

Please pray with me...

God beyond God, you dwell with us, among us, between us, and weave us together with all the saints. Grant us a vision that sees into this Grand Mystery. Give us hearts and minds that yearn to draw closer still to the One who is only Love and calls us into the THIN PLACE. Amen...

All across the world on All Saints Day, many people travel to cemeteries to adorn quiet gravestones with plants and flowers, trees and flags, mementoes and framed photographs. It is a ritual of remembrance, a solemn, holy occasion - NOT to commemorate death as much as to connect to the communion of LIFE and LEGACY.

From generation to generation, we are all interconnected threads woven into this ongoing, eternal tapestry of life. We are each formed and shaped by the people who have gone before and we are shaping what will come after us.

As the Church universal, we stand firmly on the shoulders of all those who have come before us, from Adam & Eve to Sarah and Abraham, From Jacob to King David. We owe a debt of gratitude to, Isaiah and all the prophets, Mary and Joseph, Jesus and all the Apostles who followed him and formed the faith we follow still.

Even if you never read a word of the Bible, what we do as a church today is only because of them. And think of the thousands who built this very church. For 193 years, Trinitarian Congregational Church has been worshiping God with a rich and robust tradition of outreach to those in need, offering hospitality and comfort to the one's on the margins, comforting and advocating for victims of injustice, supporting one another in strength and weakness. We continue to do this today because they taught us that this is the Way of Jesus and this is how to be church.

And they knew what they were doing. Listen to this message, written to us, from our forefathers and foremothers on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the church in 1901

“To you, the coming generations, in whom the succession of this church shall be maintained and enlarged, we give, in the full confidence of your coming, our word of greeting and of hope.

You shall enter into our labors and carry them forward to yet larger fruition. We welcome you in your respective turns to the possession & protection of the ‘goodly heritage’ which has come to us ... that of the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, which is committed to our trust; and to each to transmit it to the next, as would we, in its full integrity and power.”

We need to remember these words written to us, and when we celebrate our 200th anniversary in 2026, I wonder what we might write to those who will worship here in 2126.

It’s our turn now to carry forward this tradition, not as an obligation but as a vibrant testimony of what it’s like to live a life of meaning and purpose, in a sacred community, woven together from generation to generation by extravagant grace, and faith in action.

It is written in the Book of Hebrews, that “we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses.” This “cloud” is also known as the THIN PLACE, a mystical merging between the eternal invisible world and this physical world. It is the THIN SPACE Between where the veil between time and eternity meet and mingle. If you’ve ever witnessed birth or been present as someone exhaled their last breath, you’ve been in the THIN SPACE.

Maybe you’ve sat on a beach at sunrise, or stared deeply into the cosmos late at night and sensed the presence of something greater. This too is the THIN PLACE where the gap between the eternal and temporal is THIN. In these THIN SPACES we realize with shocking clarity that we are all woven in to this ongoing, complex tapestry of life; an interconnected tapestry that is woven through time, depicting the enduring and eternal story of God loving humanity.

The Apostle John’s vision vividly articulates the THIN PLACE. He saw the fulfillment of God’s dream, a new heaven and a new earth where we will all merge into one timeless eternal flow. Past, present and future united and one, flowing effortlessly in the Divine Presence.

Today, on All Saints Sunday, we remember that even now we are already one, connected together beyond time and space by the One who is the very connective tissue that holds all things in place.

I want to take a moment now for us to reflect on this idea of the THIN SPACE BETWEEN  
Who wove you to this tapestry? Who are the ones who influenced you and helped shape you into the person you are today?

Let us ponder and remember the ones who have gone before, the ones named and unnamed who have transitioned from this life into more life, yet now dwell in this cloud of witnesses where the space between us and them is thin. And also, who are the saints that are still living in this life, guiding you toward goodness.

Let us sit comfortably in the presence of Mystical Wonder and Divine Mystery that is the Thin Space Between.