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Easter is a Thin Place

By The Rev Susan D. Parsons

Even as children, my sister and I were fascinated about our family heritage. No one really knew much about it which made it all the more intriguing.

For example, Edward Parsons, my great grandfather, came to America from Ireland in 1877, as part of the great wave of Irish emigration. But no one knew who his parents were or if he had siblings. Maybe he was from an important family or maybe the wayward or an adventurous son of an important Irish family.

Like so many, I began rooting about on one of those Internet sites that allows us to search our genealogies. I did find out more about my paternal grandfather, Robert Earl Parsons, and I was delighted to find just how deep my Dad's family roots are in northern England, Ireland, and Scotland. No wonder I love bagpipes, I thought, and wool, and tartans – and Enya, the Irish singer and songwriter of modern Celtic music. Best of all, what I learned allowed me to indulge in the dreamy side of my spirituality and imagine my Celtic Christian roots.

The Celts, the early Christians of Ireland, Scotland, and England, are understood by many to have lived close to nature and the earth, an earthy spirituality that recognized God in nature and animals. Though the history of Celtic Christianity has been romanticized in recent years, they were a people whose love for God was deep and abiding. Think St. Columba, St. Patrick, and St. Brigid.

Some of these Celtic Christians spoke of "liminal" places in the world, places where the earthly world and the divine seemed very close to one another, where the line between these two places is so thin, that the divine, spiritual world may briefly, suddenly break into our lives to reveal the glory and wonder of God. These thin places are thought to be sacred places. The Old Testament hero Jacob recognized one of these thin places when he woke up from his dream and shouted, "Surely God is in this place. And I did not even know it" (Genesis 28:16).

I have known some thin places, and I imagine you have, too. A quiet, overlooked space where I grew mint was sacred to me as a child, and there was an earthy, cool place under a gigantic lilac bush at my grandmother's house. Now that I am an adult, my "thin" places have been a massive, ancient tree to lie under, a mystical road through a forest, an aircraft flying above the clouds, Tulum on the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico, and graveyards. All these thin, sacred places for me are those places where we can see ourselves and creation as holy and blessed.

I believe the Easter season itself is a thin place. Though it's not a point on the map, it's a moment in which we Christians find ourselves standing between life and death, between grief and hope. This Easter most especially felt that way, not so much because of personal grief, but because the pandemic, climate change, and political rhetoric that distract us. And even more, a tragic war. It was too easy to be in the holy space of Easter, and yet have the brutality of the unholy overwhelm the glory.

It's imperative for us to remember the truth of resurrection as we step forward into these new spring days. Long after this season has come and gone, God will prevail over the ugly brutality of the world, over death itself.

We are called to take what we experience when we stand in liminal spaces
– those places where we experience our world and the spiritual more clearly
– and use that knowledge to do what each of us can do to change the world.

As you ponder where your “thin” places are where you can experience the holy in the midst of this world, hear this music from Enya, [“So I Could Find My Way”](#) to transport you there.