



Poland Presbyterian Church

At the Green since 1802

2 Poland Manor
Poland, Ohio 44514
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August 10, 2014

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Revelation 7:9-17

The Rev. Robbin Del Nagro

Thin Places

The afternoon is warm and temperate. The garden is lush with green and flowers: daffodils and bluebells and the heady smell of roses and lilies seems to hang in the air just so. An ever so gentle breeze blows across the landscape as they begin to arrive. Look, there's John Weed Powers, smiling broadly and walking briskly to the center of the square. He must have some little joke up his sleeve. And from the other direction I see Alex George. He has a brush and a blow dryer in his hand. Wonder what he is up to and whose hair needs to be styled before the big event. And there are Graceanne and Jer Fennell, walking hand in hand, an inspiration to everyone around them of the power of kindness. Bob Zedeker is just in from a walk in the woods. He has a group of boyscouts with him and he's telling them how to be of service, even in heaven. I see Anne Shepherd, looking radiant and speaking to Bob in her Scottish brogue. Clarence Hartman isn't working on the railroad anymore, here he is lounging on a bench. And young Michael Hirschbeck grins down at him. Shirley Fender is sitting there on another bench, just watching all the people gather and listening as Melvin Weaver tells her about the fish he caught, just after his last round of golf. Janet Hutchison has been in the kitchen all day making a marvelous meal for everyone to enjoy later in the evening. And Susie Phalen comes dancing across the grass like a blonde fairy.

And that's not all. There are others gathering now. Anna Louise and Jeanne, Dot and Edward and Leo and Helen. Sharon is there with her bell, ready to make beautiful music. Betty and Donna appear along with Bunte and the two Bobs. Florence and Charles, Helen and Katherine, Ina Mae and Timothy and James. I see Jane Evans and Olive, Ralph and Marshall, Jeannette and William and even Kristi. Edith and Wally are there as well, standing with their arms around one another. There is Doris and Edwin, Muriel and Lee, Edna and Wiley and Susan and Henry and Barb. The crowd is getting larger. Here comes Jean and Wayne and George and Violet, Reva and Donald and Gus and Clara, Mariam and Veronica and Alberta and Bill. I cannot name them all but they are all there, along with saints from long ago, Abraham Lincoln and Clara Barton, Joan of Arc and John Calvin, John Wesley and Madam Currie, Sarah and her son Issac, David and his son Solomon. They are all gathering here for something big, something right in the center of the square. There must be thousands gathering, too many to name, faces

familiar and faces unknown.

Everyone picks up an instrument or begins to sing. The heavenly choir is glorious. They are singing praise and glory and honor to God and to the Lamb. The sound of their music raises and becomes deafening. In fact, I think I hear it now and I think I see the crowd of saints gathered around the throne. There are all the white robed martyrs and all the apostles, Paul and Peter, and Mary Magdelene. I can't count them all because there are so many. Thousands upon thousands of saints, all gathered together in that garden with the ones we know so well. Some have been there for centuries while others have just arrived.

There are times when the distance between earth and heaven becomes small, when the veil between this life and the next becomes thin. In Celtic tradition they are called the thin places, places where we can almost reach out and touch the ones we love who are on the other side now. They are sacred and holy, those thin places. And we know that our spirit is caught up in the Holy Spirit and in the spirit of the saints who have gone before and we know that life is not just an illusion, fleeing from our grasp, but is eternal, for always. And we know that this is the beauty and the loveliness that we should know, not only after death but here, now, while we are still on earth. It is our foretaste of the heavenly glory as our communion bread is our foretaste of that heavenly banquet where the saints feast day and night. In the thin places we get only a glimpse but that is enough to know the love that binds us all together and joins us with the saints for time eternal.

In thin places we move into liminal space where it seems we can reach out and touch God's presence with us and time seems to stand still. Thin places are places that disorient us and change our perspectives. We have all experienced this although maybe we didn't have a name to call it. Not only do our loved ones departed seem near again but the distance between us and God seems somehow to diminish. Sometimes people come to this church building because here they can experience being in a thin place. Sometimes our worship or our music sweeps us away into that place. Other times we find it on a walk through Poland woods or sitting quietly in nature. Jesus seemed to know how to find thin places when he went off alone to pray. Sometimes they come upon us suddenly and unexpectedly.

Today we celebrate, not only the saints departed but the thin places where we can experience them with us once again. If only they can be remembered even once a year, by those to whom they meant so much, they live on eternally in our hearts. We can only hope that we are remembered as fondly after we have left this earth. One day we saints on earth shall also see God face to face and we shall also know the bliss that those who have gone before us know this day. One day, we, too, will take up instruments and raise our voices in strains too beautiful for words. This is the good news that in life or in death, we belong to God. It is not a dream, it is the hope of the resurrection. It is our hope.