

Elizabeth Taylor, Faith Story

I'm a cradle Episcopalian, which for me meant attending a church in Raleigh, North Carolina that had no life at all. When I was about 12, my mother developed breast cancer. She was terrified and found her way into a fundamentalist evangelical prayer group. When it met at our house, I joined. That led me into evangelical youth groups, which I attended through high school and into college, but long before graduation, I had tired of being told that I couldn't speak in church because I am a woman and that I just needed to accept the evangelical articulation of faith without asking any questions. I also was studying English with a wonderful Jesuit professor, who taught classes like "Man's Argument with God in Modern Fiction," where we dealt with hard questions of evil and pain in a world that God created.

I decided that I wanted a chance to throw everything I thought I believed up in the air and see what filtered down. I was awarded a scholarship to attend Yale Divinity School, where I spent two wonderful years. I studied the unsuccessful efforts of brilliant people over the centuries to prove the existence of God and to prove that the historical Jesus was divine. I also read everything I could get my hands on of Soren Kierkegaard, an existential philosopher. He made sense to me – the gospel is absurd and irrational and we are never going to prove it true, either historically or theologically. But a leap of faith makes sense of our human existence. I also read a lot of C.S. Lewis, who describes the discipline of discipleship – just showing up and carrying out the disciplines of faith goes a long way toward faith.

So I (with my wonderful husband David) have practiced that discipline, not always in our private devotions, but at least in showing up here, worshiping in community and raising our children here. Many times I couldn't tell you with certainty whether there is a "there" there or not. But I have been blessed with a handful of experiences of the divine breaking into my far too rational world. One was at my father's deathbed. I sat with him for his last hours and I had a palpable sense that there was a curtain being drawn back for my dad and that the dividing line between this world and the next was very thin. When I described this to Rosemary Dickerson, she told me about the Celtic idea of the thin place, where

the veil that separates heaven and earth is lifted and one is able to receive a glimpse of the glory of God. I was in that thin place.

I have also experienced grace in times when I know that God was lifting up our poor efforts to do something in his Name. Some years ago, David and I led the effort to furnish an apartment at Partner Arms, transitional housing for people moving out of homelessness. We spent a few weeks getting parishioners to offer to donate all of the furniture we needed and then on a Saturday, we got trucks and drove around collecting the motley array of donations. There were probably 10 of us from St. Cs in the apartment at the end of the day when we finished. We looked up and it was perfect. Everything fit. It was cozy and inviting. The colors even matched. We knew that God had graced our efforts and we gave thanks.

That's my story. I give thanks for all of you and for this community that means so much to my faith.