

When Heaven Feels a Little Closer

Scriptures: Joshua 3:7–17 and Matthew 23:1–12

There's an old belief that during this particular week of the year, the veil separating our earthly world from the spiritual world becomes thinner. Some ancient Celtic traditions held that as autumn faded and winter approached, the boundary between the living and the dead became easier to cross. Now, I'm not suggesting your dearly departed Aunt Mildred is floating around your kitchen checking to see if you're still using her biscuit recipe. Although, knowing Aunt Mildred, she'd probably be mighty disappointed if you weren't!

But there's something beautiful about this ancient belief, especially as we approach All Saints Day on November 1. What if heaven isn't nearly as far away as we think? What if the distance between this world and eternity is thinner than our fears, our doubts, and our busy lives allow us to recognize?

In Joshua 3, the Israelites stand before the Jordan River, facing an impossible crossing. But God tells the priests to step into the water, carrying the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's holy presence. And when their feet touch the river, the waters stop flowing! Suddenly, what separated them from God's promise becomes a pathway into it.

Now, wouldn't that be something? Most of us won't even step into a puddle without checking whether our shoes are waterproof! Yet those priests trusted that God's presence was closer and more powerful than the obstacle before them.

Then Jesus comes along in Matthew 23 and reminds us that true spiritual greatness isn't found in fancy titles, impressive clothing, or sitting in the best pew on Sunday morning. It's found in humility, love, and serving others. Apparently, heaven isn't particularly impressed by how important we think we are. That's bad news for anybody who thinks their name ought to be engraved on their church parking space!

And here's where these scriptures meet that ancient belief about the thinning veil. Maybe the spiritual world doesn't actually move closer to us this week. Maybe this is simply the week when we finally slow down enough to notice how close God has been all along.

Think about those saints who have gone before us. The grandmother who taught us to pray. The father whose hands worked tirelessly for his family. The church member who always saved us a seat. Their earthly lives have ended, but their faith, kindness, and love continue flowing through ours.

All Saints Day reminds us that death does not have the final word. Through Christ's resurrection, we trust that those who have died in faith are held in God's eternal care. We don't need to summon spirits or search for mysterious signs. We need only remember, give thanks, and recognize that God's love reaches beyond the grave.

So here's my challenge this week: Make that veil a little thinner—not by searching for ghosts, but by becoming a living reminder of heaven. Forgive somebody. Visit someone lonely. Tell a grieving friend you remember their loved one. Carry forward one beautiful act of kindness that someone who has passed away once showed you.

Because perhaps the greatest mystery isn't whether heaven comes closer to earth this week.

Perhaps it's whether we are willing to bring a little more heaven into somebody else's life.

And if Aunt Mildred really is watching, for goodness' sake, make those biscuits from scratch!

Amen.