

Don't look up, look
out

Religion



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Once heard the difference between a historian and a Christian is that the historian looks for Jesus of Nazareth the man who lived and died nearly two millennia ago, and Christian looks for the Christ who continues to live among us. This is why the resurrection accounts of the Gospels and the account of the Ascension which Luke provides through the Book of Acts are so important. They serve to remind the church that we believe in a living Christ, one who is still active and living amongst us here on earth. This one tenant of Christian faith is hard for many of us to comprehend, let alone accept. And let's be honest with ourselves, it was hard for the Apostles to comprehend the resurrection as we heard Thomas confess the Sunday after Easter. But Christ, as the great Easter Hymn states, is alive and we live in the expectation that we will encounter the risen Christ in our daily lives.

As I discuss the risen Christ this morning and the difficulty many of us have in believing people still encounter the risen in their daily lives, I am reminded of a beloved former parishioner. When I met Art he was well into his seventies, during his four decades with St. Luke's he had served in many leadership capacities including that of Sr. Warden. During my early years at St. Luke's, Art and I became very close. As an older and long term member of the parish, Art kept me advised of St. Luke's history and would often warn me when I was about to step into one of their historic hornets nests. As a graphic designer, we worked closely to update the newsletter and then he served as editor until his death four years later.

As our relationship and mutual work grew, we would often have long conversations about faith. It was in the midst of one of our monthly conversations when planning the newsletter he told me he wasn't sure he

really believed in a living Christ. The concept was something well beyond his ability to accept. This was not to say Art did not believe in Jesus and all the wonderful things Christianity taught. But when it came to the mysteries of our faith, he struggled.

I suspect Art was surprised when I didn't sound shocked by his "confession." Art was a brilliant man who was very precise in his thinking and how he approached the world. He was also a man of reason who, like so many of us, functioned primarily from his head and rarely from the heart. So when I explained to him that I was not surprised because the areas of faith he struggled with required him to listen with his heart and not his head, I think he was relieved.

This is where Art's faith remained until cancer entered his life. With the cancer, in this case, came aggressive chemo therapy. And with the aggressive chemo therapy came all the horrible side effects we so often hear about. The chemo, at times, left Art weakened and struggling for life and required periodic hospitalizations. It was towards the end of his first hospitalization that Art and I had one of our "talks." Now on the other side of a few rounds of chemo, Art looked at me with a smile on his face and told me, "I now believe Christ is among us." Then he went on to tell me about the nurses who looked after him when he couldn't even lift his head. Who supported him when he would complain that death would be better than what he was experiencing. Finally, what sealed the deal for Art was the compassion they offered to him, a stranger in their midst.

I could only affirm Art's experience and conclusions. Just prior to leaving Boston I witnessed the same thing while tending to a parishioner's frail and aging mother who lived in a local nursing home. Right after we had finished praying the rosary together, her nurse's aide came into the room, climbed up next to her on the bed and placed her face within inches of the woman's so she could see and hear her. The aide told her she was leaving for the night, she hoped the woman would still be there in the morning. Then she gave her a warm hug, kissed her and bid her a good night. I can't tell you what it was exactly about what I had witnessed that felt so sacred or so holy, all I can tell you is, as I left this woman's room I knew in my heart that Christ had been fully present in that nurse's aide.

More often than not we look for the risen Christ in all the wrong places. If you are anything like me, I still hope I will encounter Christ in the same way St. Paul did on the road to Damascus, or in the form of a vision as the great mystics did during medieval times. And while those things still happen, I find the risen Christ is more often found in ordinary, everyday encounters and through each of us. St. Ignatius taught his disciples to make time every day to reflect over the course of the last twenty-four hours and ask how they have experienced Christ in that time and then how they had served Christ. St. Francis taught his disciples to preach the Gospel often but to use words rarely. What both saints taught their disciples to live, is little more than an expounding on our baptismal vow which calls us to proclaim the Good News of God in Christ through word and deed. Today when asked where I experience the living Christ, I tell them all over St. Peter's and Rhode Island. Whether it is through the actions of our Pastoral Care team who look after

the spiritual needs of our elderly as if they are caring for their own parents, or in the invitation and hospitality we offer the community at large or the stranger who visits on Sunday morning, or through the warm, safe, welcoming and fun environment our Sunday School offers our children each week, or the compassion and concern our guests receive from or myriad of volunteers who help at the Community Market, I tell people this is where I often encounter Christ.

As we approach next week's celebration of Pentecost, we will once again be assured the living Christ is among us in the form of the Holy Spirit, and we will find that the Holy Spirit resides among us and within us. So look closely and find, whenever you experience the compassion of another know Christ is there. And, whenever you choose to do the work of Christ, others experience the living Christ through you. . . People why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.