

The existential question of belief in the living or dead christ

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Like the popular “Where’s Waldo” books of the past decade, the earliest followers of Jesus awoke Easter morning asking, “where’s Jesus?” He wasn’t where he was supposed to be, certainly not in the tomb where they expected to find him. The burial cloths were there but the rock used to seal the tomb had been moved and the body that had been laid there less than three days before was missing. I am not convinced the question where’s Jesus is confined to the past. Even today we are forced to grapple with the resurrection.

Do we believe in the living Christ, or does Christ continue to reside in the tomb? The question is an important one and one that only we as individuals can answer. When Mary Magdalene looks into the tomb, she assumes the missing body is the result of grave robbers. Even when looking straight into the eyes of Christ she is unable to recognize him. One has to ask, what was she looking for. What are we looking for? If we came looking for a body or a risen Christ in human form, then we will leave disappointed. Flesh is finite, definable, and predictable. It offers no opportunity for fluidity or change. A flesh and blood resurrection will ultimately leave us stuck in the past with no opportunity for hope, growth or transformation. Mary Magdalene does not recognize Jesus until he calls her name. In the same way, the disciples on the road to Emmaus, fail to recognize the risen Christ until after they have experienced a meal with Jesus. Even Peter, James and Andrew fail to recognize the risen Christ until after he has guided them to catch fish in a new and different way.

The risen Christ we find is not to be found in the reality of the flesh, but through the experience of the heart. This is why so many of us struggle with <https://assignbuster.com/the-existential-question-of-belief-in-the-living-or-dead-christ/>

the resurrection. We seek to find the physical, and fail to look within the context of the experience. As modern day people, living in the context of empirical study and rational thought, allowing ourselves to delve into the mystery of the Divine is often difficult. Allowing ourselves to move with the understanding of the heart, often feels impossible. It feels as impossible as a man rising from the dead three days after his execution. Yet, with God, all things are possible, if we are willing to look where we least expect to find God. If we are willing to open ourselves to the mystery of the Divine by entering into the religious imagination which allows us to understand that bread and wine can become the body and blood of Christ, and that the gathering of the faithful can become the mystical presence of the Body of Christ. It is by opening ourselves to the religious imagination that we can accept that the sacrifice of one man on a cross, can allow us to overcome the boundaries of death and lead us to new life. The religious imagination, allow us to see how the events of the past three days has rebooted all of creation and now this earth can become the second Eden.

All of this is possible when we, like Mary Magdalene, are willing to let go of the Christ we are looking for by opening ourselves to experiencing the resurrected Christ that is. Several years ago the people of St. Luke's offered Vacation Bible School. Each morning during worship time, the children were asked where they had encountered God. We called these moments God sightings. At the beginning of the week, the children were hesitant to share, not sure of what or where to look for God. By the end of the week, as they became more comfortable and expected that they would encounter God in their daily lives, the stories began to flow. God was everywhere, but only

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visible if they were open to looking for and encountering the risen Christ. Where are you looking to find the risen Christ? If it is in the tomb and amongst the dead, you are sorely mistaken as the angel tells Mary and the disciples, for he is not to be found among the dead but among the living. He is to be found in the garden, on the path to life, cooking and dining by the shore, and on the road to conversion and salvation.

As I prepared for this morning's homily, I had to ask, where did I encounter the risen Christ in the past weeks as I have companioned my father on his final journey. I realize had I looked for Christ in the form of a miracle, I would have been sorely disappointed. Miracles do continue to happen, but somehow, this was not the time or the place. Had I expected to experience Christ at the moment of his death, I would have missed out, our timing has never been in sync. Had I only expected to find Christ in the form of those who cared for my father as I have so many times when visiting people in hospital in the form of the nurses and other care takers, I would have only found a portion of the Christ that was around me. In St. Patrick's Breastplate we sing, " Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ within me, Christ around me. It is in all of these places that I found Christ during my father's final hours of life. Just like when I stayed with my Grandmother through her final night on earth, my experience with my father was the same. I felt no fear, no anguish, just confidence. Yes, I knew these were my father's final hours, but the Christ within me, thanks to my Sunday school teachers and spiritual directors, I entered my father's room assured of the new beginning my father was embarking on. So often people will say our loved one's are in a better place, I

know that to be true for this morning assures me that death has been conquered and is no longer the end but a new beginning.

At Baptism we vow to seek and serve Christ in all persons. The statement is clear, Christ resides in each of us and the presence of Christ is most profoundly experienced in the gathering of the faithful, those who have come to believe. Through your hugs, condolences and prayers, I experienced the risen Christ in the same way I witness the embodiment of Christ each Friday afternoon through the love and compassion our volunteers offer our guests at the Community Market and each day in the eyes of our preschoolers. So this morning my friends I beg you, don't make the same mistake Mary and the Disciples made on that first Easter Sunday by looking for the body of Jesus in the tomb. Instead, leave here assured that Christ is alive and inviting each of us to experience him here in the gathering of the faithful and out there, by the shore, on the road, at dinner, and wherever else life will take you. For, yes, Christ is risen, and Christ is alive and well among us today.