

Langlois: What happens when Jesus breaks in

On Holy Saturday of this year, our convent had an unexpected visitor. A young man kicked in the back door with a loud noise that reverberated throughout our house.

He entered, hammer in hand, mumbling to the Faithful Companions of Jesus Sisters that met him near the door about needing to find a way through. He was told, firmly, that he could not get through and so he ran back out the way he'd come in. The police arrested him a short time after that and we were left with a shattered door to fix and a mixture of feelings to process.

It was with new eyes that I read again the words from the Gospel of St. John the next day. Disciples in a locked room? A man appearing unexpectedly in the midst of them? That sounded eerily familiar, all right.

However, Jesus' visit elicited very different reactions from his disciples: joy, reassurance, peace. Perhaps it was the violence of our unwelcome intruder that prompted me to spend some extra time reflecting on this particular account of Easter Sunday: How had Jesus breached the locked doors of my home during these days of Covid-19? Where had the presence of the Risen Christ brought joy, peace and reassurance as I grappled with living in a pandemic-stricken world?

For me, the face of Jesus has appeared repeatedly through the laptop which I use to virtually teach my junior high students from our convent. These past weeks I have chatted with young people sporting unkempt hair and patterned pajamas speaking to me from cluttered bedrooms with unmade beds.

I've had the opportunity to get to know more about the day-to-day existence of my students than I could have done within the walls of a school: I've heard the hungry cries of baby brothers, the shenanigans of younger sisters, the songs of pet birds and seen some interesting home decor choices.

There is something about working from our homes that seems to give us all permission to put on less of a persona and to present to our friends, colleagues and teachers more of the grittiness of who we are. It's unavoidable, really. To me, there is something lovely and reassuring about this. We are united in our ordinariness and humanity. There are no Snapchat filters or carefully worded Facebook posts to disguise the genuine Body of Christ.

On another level, our vulnerabilities emerge in ways we may not be used to. We miss the physical presence of each other, and so we make contact in the ways that we are able. Students message teachers, just to reassure themselves that there's someone who will answer. Colleagues initiate video conferences for no other reason than to chat and catch up at the end of a virtual day of teaching.

These moments where we become aware of our need and reach out, seeking connection and intimacy with each other, but at a distance, have touched me.

In these instances of yearning for human contact, we are the human face of Jesus, the broken Jesus who whispers "I thirst" from the agony of the Cross. And when we respond to this need for companionship from our students, friends, families and colleagues, we resemble the Risen Christ, breaking through walls and crossing vast distances (via Wi-Fi) to share the reassuring presence of God.

Sometimes, it seems there is so much to fear in this time of pandemic and there are good reasons for us to spend more time in the relative safety of our homes. Yet, Christ still comes in unexpected ways, breaching our locked doors and bringing us peace and love that shine through in the humanity of others. Let us pray that we don't allow our fears to hide these Christ-moments from our awareness. Alleluia, He is Risen! He is Risen, indeed!

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