

I can't find Jesus

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church
April 2, 2023 – Easter Sunday
by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Where is the Risen Christ? That is a good question – we consider how we heal from our systemic “isms” like colonialism and racism, and the tragically mistaken notion that took hold of the western brand of Christianity that our call was to manage the world. There are fewer of us who claim that label of Christian in North America, and I think that many of us ARE looking for Jesus.

Don't we feel a little bit at a disadvantage, we modern Christians, that we were not *there* to experience Jesus, hearing his teachings, witnessing his miracles, and getting to race to the empty tomb after Mary's proclamation that death could not keep Christ down? Maybe some of us resonate with Mary's confusion at the tomb, she and we asking, “Do you know where Jesus is?”

Some are blessed to have had an intimate Christ encounter. I confess that I have not, but I am waiting expectantly. In the meantime, I enthusiastically utter those words of tradition: *Christ is Risen. Christ is Risen Indeed!* Perhaps we can take comfort in those words of Jesus when Jesus appears in the Upper Room, his friends huddled, scared after the crucifixion. Thomas, somehow was not there, but he comes back, and is gobsmacked to see Jesus was alive. But he needs to touch Jesus, to believe.

We, 2,000 years later, don't have that luxury of Thomas, to touch Jesus, so those words of the resurrected Christ might speak to us:

Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.

John's Gospel, written 100 years after Jesus, spoke to the dilemma of people trying to feel that resurrection wonder, but so many years after Jesus was gone. How can we, each of us in unique and wonderful ways, experience Christ in our modern, skeptical, scientific world?

Have you ever heard a person recount a powerful encounter with Christ or the Holy? In my experience being with people in times of crisis, facing one's own death or another's up close and personal creates fertile ground for a powerful spiritual moment. Most of us wish for such powerful encounters with the holy, as we face the pressures of life and its background noise that can drown out the Holy. Let me say it again, I am *still* looking for Jesus. How about you?



I am a fan of modern television and movies that explore *who* Jesus is, in our modern culture. *Dogma*, a movie that came out in 1999, offered a wonderful satire of modern religious leaders trying to present a compelling image of Christ, and, presto, the Bishop (played by the late great, provocative, comedian George Carlin) unveils, “Buddy Jesus.” I can't show you an image because it is copyrighted, but imagine a cool dude Jesus, with a big smile and thumbs up.

We do candy-coat Jesus. He can become a projection of our wants and desires. My buddy Stewart gave me this Action Figure Jesus on the night before Tracey and I were married. I have loved it. It has moveable arms and wheels under him so he glides – like he is walking gracefully over water.

Searching for Christ. Who is he? How do we peel away the layers of our experiences that we have projected onto him – our desires, The sanitized Jesus that is too often preached.

Perhaps we let Christ find us. Unawares. Unfiltered.

Click on this link:

<https://digilib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=59213>

This artwork entitled *Easter Morning* was painted by Frank Wesley, a 5th generation Christian in India. His artwork wonderfully reflects his cultural reality: The women are not peaceful. Pressing forward in her anxiety to reach the grave, Mary Magdalene has an eyebrow curled in pain and a line of stress from nose to mouth. In the lobe of her ear, a tiny red jewel duplicates in miniature the mark of the nail in the hands of her Lord. The other Mary is more self-possessed, and one arm encircles her friend in a comforting manner.

The rocky cliff at the right speaks of... suffering and death. Gracefully framing the rock is the flowering branch of a tree symbolising new life. This is the moment before the revelation of new life. This is the dawn of a new era.¹

Understanding Jesus as controlled, polite, meek, and mild, has long been a projection of White European theology. You may notice that I often try to show many diverse cultural depictions of Jesus. So, how do we find Jesus? Perhaps we can first consider changing our faith lenses, to be open to an experience of the Risen Christ on the road (who is angry, or homeless). Or perhaps in a moment of surprise, a moment of crisis, we might experience Christ in the face of the very last person we would expect to offer us help, asking us, “Who are you looking for?”

Our Moderator, Carmen Lansdowne, wrote a powerful Easter article in the recent issue of Broadview magazine. She talked about how challenging it is for us, modern friends of Jesus, to stay positive, to wake up each morning and consider: How can I make the world better today? With the ruthless invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Climate Change prophets warn that we are closer to disaster. LGBTQ 2+ justice has been rolled back in many American States as well as, we hear, in Quebec and other provinces.

Dr. Lansdowne proclaims that the story of Easter reveals that God can do so much more than we can even imagine – even overcoming death. With God, our dreams can be much bigger than we can fathom.²

Perhaps we can't find Christ, face-to-face, up close and personal, but maybe, just maybe, Christ's resurrection is found In our remembering to be bold disciples, remembering Jesus; being the Body of Christ and agents of healing one dilemma at a time. Amen.

¹ Frank Wesley: *Exploring faith with a brush*, p38 Naomi Wray © 1993 Pace publishing, Auckland NZ

² Broadview Magazine, April 4, 2023. Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne, “Easter calls us to change the world: United Church moderator Carmen Lansdowne on why the hope of the Resurrection should spur us to envision a more just reality.” <https://broadview.org/carmen-lansdowne-easter-message/>