



The Last Time I was in the Sanctuary

by Jacquie Lois

I have, like many people, a feature on my phone with the Camera App that sends you alerts of what happened on that date in previous years. I often threaten to delete the app and its thousands of photos, but then something pops up and it carries me away instantly to memories of that day or the image sparks an idea that I am now ready to dig deeper.

Invariably I see things differently. I also have learned that without that photo reminder, I would not have realized that I can't go back in time and I didn't know that at the time that might be the last time I would have that experience. This is where I associate as great Buddhist teachings the admonishment to stay in the moment.



As I scan the photo, I see the picture as not just a snapshot of the **place**, but also what happened that day and all the individuals and objects that also invoke memories. I can't quite believe that it's been a year since I set foot in the physical sanctuary of my church; my spiritual home on a Sunday morning for worship. While I was there briefly in May for a "quickie" for noon time prayer and a virtual fist bump. A place that I frequented with my own key card several times a week for many hours is no longer a part of my regular rotation. I like many "do church" differently now. I am both an experiment and am experimenting with being a member of virtual church. What does belonging look like and feel like? It certainly doesn't feel the same or replace what I once had. Some days, I realize that it has morphed into something new that I create each day. I am engaged and there is a new intimacy that I did not have before. I do a fair amount of whining and mourning, but I am usually too busy with the new rituals I have and am much more selective in how I want to connect. I am also more honest about what works for me and what does not. My pastor often says in some form that it is alright to say "NO" to something to say "YES!" I am still not good at that spiritual practice, but I am getting a lot of practice. It still depends quite often on who is doing the asking.

I have also had to redefine what I call faithfulness and who and what I am faithful to. I have had no desire to join a new church or to tithe to a new place as my spiritual home. It still feels like cheating, and it also speaks to the reality that no place or community quite feels like the spiritual force and community I have found here in this place both virtual and physical. Still too vulnerable and still not feeling the passion or desire to move on.

Now on the other hand, now that I have the practice of not going out and doing virtual church I am flooded with choices and am open to new ministries, spiritual practices, and teachers. I fit in easily in the back of the room and can listen and respond and read and write and to be stimulated in ways that are new and exciting and fresh for me. Between Sunday and Monday not counting bible study, yoga masters, astrologers, and spirit guides to prepare for the week or to spur my dog walking and getting my audio listening time in. I usually hit at least 2-3 different sermons or worship services to start my week it shapes my sabbath accordingly.

The world wide web offers church and spiritual instruction and ranting on demand, just like the 24-hour cable news cycle. If you type in a topic, the computer will send you more of the same or something to counter the culture. Being raised catholic when we were kind of taught that there may be a sin in going to another church or even listening in or associating with the heathens or unsaved or unwashed, the not true believers. Days of obligation did not provide time or space for welcoming or visiting the other unless of course your ultimate goal was to proselytize.

So, for me the polls are dead wrong: **Christianity and church going is not dead, it just looks and feels very very different.** Having a web presence, good audio is crucial, and I am also much more likely to get a taste of listening to the enemy so I can hear what others are thinking and feeling who are different than me for when I might be called to engage. I feel ready.

My sanctuary is my heart, it is open to love. You have taught me this and honored my heart. I carry it with me always. You are my spiritual home; you feed my soul and make me brave and comfort me. I am grateful and full of Devotion and Delight.

Advent Scripture Reference Lectionary
[Luke 1:46b-55](#); [2 Samuel 7:18, 23-29](#); [Galatians 3:6-14](#)

Advent Hymn Reflection
“[Mary's Boy Child](#)”
performed by Harry Belafonte



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