

## Walking to the Office on a Cold Winter Morning

*To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna..." -Revelation 2:17*

If I leave a little later than usual, as very cold weather sometimes makes me do, I encounter young children and parents in the school zone near my home. I like hearing their laughter, their excited "Goodbye mom!" "Thanks dad!" but when I am face to face with a parent on the sidewalk, I don't know what to do. I wish I were a young parent, with energy and enthusiasm to face this new world. But I am not. "I'll just step over this way," the mom says and detours through a driveway while I pass by on the other side... I'm not a Good Samaritan either, am I? "Thanks," I say, "I appreciate it!"

My route goes past the glass front of St. Francis Xavier Roman Catholic Church. Early in the pandemic, they had the tabernacle set up just inside those doors so the faithful could kneel on the step and pray for strength before the Sacrament. Now their church is open every Wednesday morning for Mass. People are waiting for the doors to open. I pause on the sidewalk about ten feet away as an older woman leaves her car. "How many people are coming to morning Mass?" I ask. "We're allowed thirty," she answers. "Do you have thirty?" She hesitates. "Including the priest," she laughs and goes into the church for Holy Communion. And I wish I were a Catholic. But I am not.

Nor am I a member of the Orthodox Church. A young man on my route to the office is sweeping snow away from the door at Holy Resurrection. He looks up from his work when I greet him. "Are you having services again now?" He looks puzzled. "In person, in the church," I add. Then he smiles. "Oh. We never stopped having in person services in the church." I wish I were Orthodox. But I am not.

As I turn to go, a recent conversation with a friend comes to mind. "I've been going to church on Sundays at the Galaxy. The police chaplains have been holding services in three different theatres. We have 90 people every Sunday. They are communion services too!" I wish I were a non-denominational evangelical, but I am not.

I am a Lutheran. I am a grandfather. I am anxious about contamination. I am hungry for the Sacrament, longing for the close community of the faithful, uncertain of my place in the wider church. I am wistful and bruised as I affirm these truths of my identity. God seems to know. There is a purpose, there is a divine plan. I walk alone, but I am not alone.

This morning my route to the office has to pass through the sanctuary—I have forgotten my mask and our admin assistant is already in her office. As I pass under the pulpit, I notice that the Epiphany parament is glowing. The golds are more gold than real gold could ever be, the greens brighter than any spring grass. The browns and tans of the wheat sheaves richer than they have ever been. I am struck by awe at the beauty, the unexpected transcendence. My eye searches for the light—a bright beam is shining through the little window just to the right of Luther's Rose on the narthex wall... A few seconds one way or the other and I would have missed this little sign of transfiguration glory! The Spirit of prayer fills my soul. "Thank you, Lord," I pray. "Now please guide me through the rest of the day! In Jesus' Name, Amen."

Walking in the Light of Christ,

Pastor Ron