

I Never Would Have Done It That Way

Come on, God, there has to be a better way to show your love than a bloody crucifixion—and coming as a helpless infant to seemingly insignificant parents in a smelly stable surrounded by farm animals doesn't seem one bit almighty.

Take a deep breath, God seems to say. Look at it through my eyes. I love you and want to be with you not just in "holy" moments but in the ordinariness and pain of your daily life. And I want you to be with others as I am with you. Things are not often as they appear. Look for my gifts in unexpected places.

As a chemical dependency counselor I've had the opportunity to be with people at their worst and discover that behind the often terrible choices they've made and the chaos they've caused are gentle fragile spirits just struggling to survive. People would often ask me, "How can you work with 'those' people? They're criminals who risked their own and others' lives. They're shady characters who look scary. They're not going to change. Why waste your time with them?" I'd tell them that it's a privilege to walk with them on their journey. There's so much good in each person and I got to see it—what a blessing!

So often our human expectations interfere with seeing God at work in our lives. It's really hard to get out of the way, let go of our own ways of thinking and expectations about how things "should be" and be open to the unexpected—to find God's gifts even in the midst of our own selfishness and brokenness.

One birthday when my husband was still alive he asked what gift I wanted. I was working in a counseling agency and "needed" a professional style rain coat. Looking forward to snappy new rain wear when I took off the wrappings I instead discovered a sporty nylon salmon-colored hoodie. I couldn't hide my disappointment. "But I shopped for it," he said.



Knowing that he hated shopping so much that he once bought a green blazer because he had a color blind salesman who mistook green for navy. I softened some and realized that the gift was not the jacket, but his willingness to go into a department store and shop. Nearly 20 years after his death, I wear that jacket when the weather gets cool in spring and fall and remember his real gift.

Recently I've been taking a class on Franciscan spirituality and it's changing my way of thinking about what really is of value and especially my perceptions about the way God "ought" to be doing things. Studying Francis has turned my view of holiness on its head. In many ways Francis never lived up to respectable images of followers of Jesus. He stood naked before his father as a sign that material success and acceptance were unimportant to him. He embraced and kissed the leper knowing that God's glory was inside. He wore patches on the outside of his garment as a sign that inside he was broken and in need of mending. He saw and celebrated God's goodness in all of creation not just the "sacred." He called animals and plants and sun and moon his brothers and sisters. He definitely didn't fit the mold of "saintly" people.

Back to the bloody crucifixion...What if instead of a price God exacted from Jesus to reconcile humans to God, God had always stayed in relationship with us? What if Jesus' death was more a proof that God who took on our flesh and entered into the messiness of our lives wanted to show us that God desires to love and be with us in and through all of life's pain and chaos? No matter how horrible they are evil and death never win. There is always resurrection and new life and love beyond our imaginings.

Maybe, just maybe, I would have done it God's way after all.

—Angela Anno

"Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

Jesus' life, especially in the three years of His public ministry, was an incessant encounter with individuals. Among these, the sick had a special place. How many pages of the Gospel talk about these encounters! The paralytic, the blind, the leper, the possessed, the epileptic, and innumerable sick of all sorts ... Jesus made Himself close to each one of them, and He healed them with His presence and the power of His healing strength. Therefore, among the works of mercy, to visit and assist the sick cannot be lacking."

--Pope Francis

