

*Lucy Sieger*

## **A Greater Mosaic**

I'm afflicted with spiritual polygamy. I've kept Easter Vigil with the Episcopalians, sat in sun-drenched silence with the Quakers, chanted vibrating Oms with the Hindus, meditated with a Zen priestess, and caroled with the Methodists. One Friday night, at a Jewish temple, I embraced a Shabbat I would not keep.

A few years ago, I began visiting a progressive Catholic Church, John XXIII, on a university campus near my home. For a while, every Mass made me cry, unobtrusively and gently, like a rainy reunion. My family's long Catholic heritage was diluted by the time I grew up in the '70s, so perhaps I was channeling my great-grandmothers' tears of joy that I was back in the fold. Despite profound, painful differences with the Vatican, differences shared by many fellow parishioners, I settled into an uneasy, compartmentalized worship. Being a liberal Catholic woman meant compromising political principles for sustenance of the soul.

Not surprisingly, I've been wandering again, occasionally skipping Mass for stealth forays to other ecclesiastical pastures. One Sunday, I attended a service at the local Unitarian Universalist church. The music was rousing, the sermon provocative, but I grew frustrated as we praised "the weaver of our lives." This coy higher power dissatisfied me. I craved God, a loving, personal God, a politically correct version of the tangible Holy Spirit that infused me at John XXIII.

The following Tuesday, I taught the gospel lesson at our weekly class for incoming Catholics. As we discussed Jesus luring Peter and Andrew away from their fishing nets, I wondered if anyone could tell I had strayed. Was I the unwitting bearer of a theological hickey?

It wouldn't be the first time. I belonged to a small ministry group of six Catholics, mostly ornery Catholics of liberal bent, who had returned to the church after years away. Our meetings revolved around food and wine – Catholics love wine. After all, it's a sacrament. At one dinner party, in a blush of honest faith-sharing, I asked, "Okay, do you all

*A Tapestry of Voices*

*really* believe that Jesus was literally raised from the dead? Or is the resurrection a metaphor for redemption?" To a person, they answered: Jesus died for our sins, was raised from the dead, and sits at the right hand of the Father. No doubts. I was not condemned for the question, but the pity in their voices stung.

I accept the resurrection of Jesus as the cornerstone of Christianity. But accepting a tenet out of obedience and deeply believing it are two different constructs. I consider the scripture verse I whisper when facing a daunting task: I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13). This precious mantra always calms me, always empowers me. If Christ is in each of us, then perhaps his energy is manifested in my most courageous self. I can grasp that sort of theology for a few seconds, before it twists into a pretzel of rationalist doubt. Is it Christ, or my belief in Christ, that gives me strength?

At times, I spend too much time pondering this, and my head throbs. I know and love many good people who live decent, even divine lives without needing a religion to codify them. They don't devour books and scour the Internet looking for clues as to who Jesus was and was not; they don't hunt for the perfect theology that heals every gaping crevice in their psyches.

As it happens, I'm married to such a contented spirit. While I navigate another unfamiliar pew on another Sunday morning, Mark worships at the park down the street, ambling with our dogs along a luminous trail bordering an oblique river. He wouldn't frame it this way, but his religion is as simple as being present. I wish I could attain so much, and be satisfied with so little.

Instead, I try to know God, which is a slippery concept, like infinity. My mortal brain cannot conceive of a universe with no end, but my spirit soars at the possibility. In a moment of clarity, I realize that infinity lets me off the hook. If I'm inspired by the absence of cosmic boundaries, why search for the perfect doctrinal fence to restrain me? Why subject my own ideology to a constricted hypothesis if the expansive dimensions of the heavens themselves are inexplicable? Why

*A Tapestry of Voices*

not allow my faith, my powerful yearning for palpable yet unseen transcendence, this same roaming freedom and consummate mystery?

I've been living a Zen koan. I may worship at a Catholic church, yet I'm more than one faith, and not fully any faith. In the eyes of organized religion, I will always be a theological misfit, but I have the world's abundant spiritual wisdom as solace. As fervently as my Catholic friends believe in the literal resurrection of Jesus, I believe that my fragmented soul is part of a greater mosaic. This mosaic spans creeds and cultures and planets and time, and will fascinate me until my last breath.