

As we begin the new program year at St. Francis, I invite you to respond to a recent tweet about those places we experience God in the world. Respond to: #Godactiveintheworld
Here is one image. . .

This past week Nicholas Kristof wrote an engaging opinion piece in the New York Times entitled *What Religion Would Jesus Belong To?* The following quote from Kristof's piece (citing Brian McLaren) gets to the heart of what the original Jesus movement was about and how that movement has been transformed into something wholly unrecognizable in too many Christian circles today. Here's Kristof:

What would it mean for Christians to rediscover their faith not as a problematic system of beliefs but as a just and generous way of life, rooted in contemplation and expressed in compassion?" [Brian]McLaren asks in "The Great Spiritual Migration." "Could Christians migrate from defining their faith as a system of beliefs to expressing it as a loving way of life?"

For many at St. Francis, I think what he has to say is preaching to the choir. Yet, it is always good to be reminded of what is central and important, and clearly the movement toward compassion and away from dogmatism is a critical element of embodying the love of God in Christ and engaging an ever-more-secular world. Indeed, Aristotle opined, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." And, to a certain extent, faith is exercising that muscle of our being that moves us more toward compassion and grace and away from hatred and fear.

I realize that such practice is hard work. In a world that is filled with all sorts of news and activities that can so easily prey upon our predilection for seeing the glass as half empty or to engage the demons of doubt and dread, it is not easy to settle into grace. Yet, that seems so much a part of our calling: to settle into grace. Jesus' words are vital to this understanding, "Peace I leave with you. My own peace give you (John 14.27)," or, "Fear not (3 times in Matthew and 5 times in Luke)". Jesus also invites us again and again to enter into the fullness of God's love that is present here and now for each of us in a myriad different ways. We are connected to something greater than ourselves, and Jesus' prayer is that we may come to recognize this and be strengthened and supported by it.

As we begin this new program year at St. Francis, it takes all of us to remember—and to remind each other from time to time—that our work together is settling into grace, so that we can live more fully into the life that God has given us. Such a posture also allows us to live with others in a more grace-filled way, and, ultimately, offers a fuller life to the world around us. The little hashtag invitation at the beginning of this note is intended to engage us all on another platform, and it is intended as an opportunity for each person in his or her own way to remind us all of where it is that we see God active in the world (and there are many places) and hopefully to inspire us to keep settling in, settling in, settling into grace, and express our Christianity as a loving way of life.

Never a better time than the right now, eh? Thank you for your part in the journey together.

