

This past Sunday was a wonderful experience as we returned to in-person worship. It has been far too long. The music, congregational responses, and *people* present in the sanctuary as well as receiving communion offered hope and optimism that we are moving in the right direction. May we continue to find our way together through the pandemic, and thank you to everyone for your faithfulness and generosity over the past 15 months. I feel extremely blessed to be a part of the St. Francis community. Blessings on you all.

With such a start, the focus of this reflection will take a sharp turn very quickly. You'll see what I mean. A few weeks ago Peter Wehner wrote the following New York Times op-ed:

[Will Christian America Withstand the Pull of QAnon?](#) While the issue may not be a surprise to many given the polarizing nature of our political discourse over the past few years, the subject is downright depressing. There are a number of critics of religion who scorn faith as the bastion of irrationality and delusion. However, throughout the centuries, religions in general and Christianity in particular have reflected how religion and reason, faith and science, and belief and scholarship need not be diametrically opposed. Rather, they are partners in our engagement with and understanding of the world. Indeed, many of the top institutions of higher learning in our country owe their origins to the commitment of people of faith who valued the rigors of reason and knowledge.

Thus, it is troubling to see how easily people who claim the mantle of Christian--followers of Jesus--espouse beliefs that have no grounding in reality at all, are situated amidst the bizarre at best and the insidious at worst, and reflect nothing of the nature or ministry of Jesus. While this is deeply troubling, it should be noted that it is not new. Religions and Christianity have always struggled with fringe elements that draw people away from the core tenets of the tradition and focus on peripheral fantasies that seemingly never fail to entice a certain sector of the society. Indeed, the very character of QAnon--wild claims from a mysterious (possibly Messianic?) source--was a feature in one of the early heresies of the Church: Gnosticism. And this fascination with special knowledge, inside information, access to the *real* truth has plagued human communities down through the ages.

However, Wehner expresses how the pull by QAnon does not impact a fringe minority. Rather it is gaining a foothold within the mainstream of some denominations of Christianity. Furthermore, this movement is aligned with a further movement rightward in this country and elsewhere. (A deeply troubling podcast from the New York Times--[Day X](#)-- raises the very real concerns of the rise of right wing extremists in Germany.) It is difficult to understand the attraction to such movements. Of course, there are the constant influences of marginalization on one hand and membership in a perceived community that offers meaning on the other that draw some to these movements. And, there are those who will profit off the movement. Yet, there certainly must be other influences that draw people ironically away from exactly what Jesus offers in John 8:32, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free."

Regardless of the reasons why people are drawn to lies, it is timely and apt that on this 4th of July weekend we not only give thanks for our rights and freedoms as Americans, but we also redouble our commitment to engagement in the larger public discourse as people of faith who utilize reason and science to enrich our spiritual lives as well as allow for a richer, more diverse, inclusive, and compassionate community of fellow believers as well as a nation. It is also important for us as people of faith to articulate what is true, verifiable, and known to inform our belief and our civic engagement.

While I often disdained the adage, “What would Jesus do?” as a simplistic way of understanding the complexity of God revealed in Jesus, I find now that such a question is, perhaps, the most pertinent in our time if we are to be faithful. The Jesus conveyed in the gospels was all about pushing the boundaries to welcome more people, challenging the powers of the world to be more compassionate, and giving of himself for the life of others. His eyes were focused squarely on the reality of the world. He did not dabble in delusion, and even when he was tempted to utilize power and force as a way out of potential suffering or trouble, he eschewed it in favor of faithfulness to what he trusted God desired. May that be our model for engagement with the world, our lens through which we interpret what we are called to do, and our Lord who leads us more fully into life.