

June 28, Ordinary 13A (Matthew 10:40–42)

I saw Jesus. It was Easter morning, 1988.

by [Trice Gibbons](#) in the [June 2026](#) issue

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I saw Jesus. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples that whoever welcomes them welcomes him—and that even offering someone a cup of cold water matters in the kingdom of God. Jesus’ words became very clear and real to me one Easter when, just like Mary, I am certain I saw Jesus.

You’re probably starting to feel uncomfortable. Maybe you’re thinking that the stresses of our time have finally affected my mental state to the point that I’m hallucinating. Maybe you’re right, but stick with me. I saw Jesus.

It was Easter morning 1988, at a Presbyterian church in St. Louis where I was a member. The congregation prided itself on both its outreach ministries and its high-church worship services. Every Sunday—not just Easter—worship began with a grand procession and lots of pomp. So formal were these services that the children worshiped separately in another part of the building, so as not to disturb the adults or, heaven forbid, disrupt the formality. It was all very decent and orderly.

Each Easter before the service, the congregation gathered for breakfast in a large fellowship hall. On this particular Easter morning, I joined Wendy, my friend from college and a fellow native New Orleanian, at a table by ourselves toward the back of the fellowship hall. It felt like we were the only two single people there amid the sea of families. We always felt less out of place by sitting together during worship and at church events.

I do not remember seeing him arrive, but suddenly a lanky, awkward young man appeared at our table. Wendy and I, somewhat irritated that our sanctuary had been disturbed, looked up from our plates, and the young man introduced himself as Bill. It was evident from his speech and demeanor that Bill had an intellectual disability of some kind. While Bill filled his bowl with equal parts dry cereal and sugar but no milk, I subtly glanced around to see if anyone was looking at us. We learned that Bill’s legal guardian was a member of the congregation, that the guardian had invited Bill to breakfast, and that Bill had taken a cab from his group home to the church.

I could have reacted with sympathy. This young man apparently had no family with whom to spend Easter, and he was dependent upon his legal guardian for an invitation to church. I could have noted that, like us, he was a single young adult who needed a place to sit.

Instead, I found myself thinking, *Where is this guardian??*

Somehow, during the post-breakfast cleanup process and the migration to the sanctuary, Wendy and I lost track of Bill. We settled into our usual pew—left-hand side, three-quarters of the way to the back—amid the 300 or so fellow worshipers. Then we stood as the trumpets sounded the start of the grand procession. And there was Bill—right in the middle of the center aisle, pacing back and forth. Maybe he was looking for his guardian; maybe he was just looking for a seat in the crowded sanctuary. In any case, he was right where the procession needed to pass.

I couldn’t watch. Surely mayhem was about to transpire. I focused completely on my hymnal, opened to “Jesus Christ Is Risen Today,” so as not to make eye contact with Bill or to witness the pending collision. When I

finally mustered enough courage to look up, the procession had reached the front of the sanctuary without incident. I glanced around—no Bill. The service progressed without disruption, although my anxiety remained high. I didn't see Bill after the service, either.

For the rest of the day, I could not get that gentle soul out of my mind. Had someone offered him a seat? Did he leave without finding one? Had he been literally run over by the procession?

Then it hit me, harder than a slap to the forehead. I remembered words I had sung many times in choirs, from the Gaelic text "The Rune of Hospitality":

I met a stranger yest'-er'en.
I put food in the eating place,
Drink in the drinking place,
Music in the listening place,
And, in the name of the Triune,
He blessed myself and my house.
My cattle and my loved ones, too.
And the lark sang in his song:
Often, often, often goes the Christ in the stranger's guise.

Maybe Bill was a prophet—or an angel. Maybe Bill was just Bill. But I believe I saw Jesus that morning, and I failed to make sure he was welcomed. I was too busy worrying about the disruption to even offer this child of God a cup of cold water. If Christ is present in those we encounter, even those who arrive awkwardly or inconveniently, then the way we receive them is the way we receive Christ. Ever since that Easter day, I have strived to remember that often, often, often goes the Christ in the stranger's guise.