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(Unsplash/Gary Bendig)



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With the exception of American football, I'm a very casual sports fan. When a local team is playing and it's playoff time, I may start to pay attention. But in early May every year I watch the Kentucky Derby, often referred to as "the fastest two minutes in sports." I will watch some of the prerace broadcasts for the backstories about the horses — such majestic and beautiful animals.

2022 was a race to remember. [Rich Strike](#) won the Kentucky Derby. It was big news because he wasn't supposed to be there and the odds of him winning were astronomical (80-1). He was a late add to the field of horses, filling a vacancy just shy of 48 hours before the race, and he had a mediocre winning record. Yet, this beautiful red-tinted horse calmly worked his way through the field and won the first leg of the Triple Crown. Broadcasters and pundits were beside themselves with stunned excitement; the scramble was on to find out about this horse, his trainer, his owner, and any other detail that could be found. The race was rebroadcast for days and still lives on in the internet.



The bunny (center, underneath the sticks) in my backyard window well (Jane Marie Bradish)

A few days after the Derby I was puttering around the yard, looking to see what was sprouting and what may have died over the winter. In the back window well, I found baby bunnies. Momma Bunny had nested under the drainage rock and a very small set of eyes was looking out at me. Of the two of us I don't know who was more startled. The bunnies continue to nest there, much to the frustration of the resident dog, Oreo Cookie Monster.

Moving into the front yard I was met with loud squawks. A pair of ducks were nesting under a bush. Momma didn't move so I know there are eggs. Daddy [Mallard](#) let me know in no uncertain terms that I needed to get away — he literally came stomping toward me.

Three times within a week I encountered things that fell into the "You're not supposed to be here" category. Rich Strike wasn't supposed to be at the Derby; he definitely was not supposed to win. Bunnies weren't supposed to be in the window well. Ducks weren't supposed to be starting their family in the front yard. I thought of times when I ended up in places I wasn't supposed to be. I started to wonder about other experiences of "What are you doing here?"



The Daddy Mallard protecting his nest in my front yard (Jane Marie Bradish)

During my canonical novitiate year my community had our General Assembly in our international motherhouse where I was living. I was invited to serve on the hospitality committee (to run errands, set up snacks) and jumped at the chance to do so. I saw it as a chance to be a part of our international reality and the first chance to meet my sisters from around the globe. Even though I wasn't privy to anything happening behind closed doors, there were definitely some looks of "What are you doing here?" as I hung around on the outside of things.

Years later I was invited to discern a new ministry in one of our institutions. Of the half dozen of us in the room to begin discussion and discernment I was clearly the outsider, having no administrative experience whatsoever. Some years after that, a very preliminary conversation about helping begin a new mission brought a similar experience. Someone actually laughed in my face when hearing the conversation, stunned that I was being asked. All are my personal examples of experiencing "What are you doing here?"

And like the unexpected Derby winner, there are other modern examples:

- The small market Milwaukee Bucks won the [NBA championship](#) in 2021.
- Women are being appointed to [high-level posts](#) in the Vatican. I didn't think much of it until coworkers and friends began excitedly inquiring: It's a big deal — as many would say women "aren't supposed to be there."
- The [grandson](#) of a Jewish holocaust survivor is leading his country through an invasion by Russia.

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I stumbled upon Scripture stories where the very same question could be asked: "What are you doing here?" Jesus in the temple as a young boy when he was expected to be traveling home with his parents. Jesus appearing in the upper room or cooking breakfast on the shore when he was supposed to be dead. And let's not forget about angels showing up and messing with people's lives (Zachariah and Mary come to mind). I'm sure each of us could come up with our own personal examples.

If you think about it, "What are you doing here?" really isn't a bad question. Corporately or individually, we can ask it of ourselves as we make decisions about ministry, living, investments, and any or all future planning. Early in my community's history our foundresses spoke in terms of responding to the needs of the times, a motto we still follow today nearly 150 years later.

I find myself asking God the same question when I wonder what is happening in these days of war and crime and racial divide and so many other events/ideas I can't wrap my head around.

Even in more mundane activities, reflecting on "What are you doing here?" can help focus our attention. It's a question I find myself asking more and more. "What are you doing here?" when I struggle to focus in prayer. Asking "What are you doing here?" — as I wander through the market — makes purchases more intentional. "What are you doing here?" — as I scroll through social media — helps keep me from "clicking away" for hours. "What are you doing here?" — when the annual ministry review happens.

So I keep asking, "What are we doing here?"