

Spirituality



A person is pictured in a file photo holding a crucifix. (Reuters/OSV/Vasily Fedosenko)



by Jim McDermott

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

April 19, 2025

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

You never know what's going to happen on a New York City subway. Maybe you'll have a quiet ride; or maybe you'll be serenaded by a mariachi band, be crammed into a car full of high schoolers visiting from upstate or have to climb over a delivery person's bike to get out.

A few weeks ago, I was traveling on the 1 train. For those unfamiliar with its charms, the 1 train is a local line through the Upper West Side of Manhattan, which is definitely in its flop era. More than any other line I've ever ridden, there seem to be endless delays, construction or strange emergencies on the 1.

On this particular day, the train came to a halt between the 86th and 79th Street stops. A voice on the intercom informed us there had been an emergency elsewhere on the train. (My friends familiar with transport apps later told me it was yet another in what has become a troubling series of incidents of someone pulling the emergency break.) The news did not immediately cause a stir, but it wasn't long before I started to hear some not-so-sotto voce grumbling from a lady in our car.

As if having heard her, the conductor announced on the intercom that if we didn't want to wait, we could file forward to the front of the train and step off onto the 79th Street station. Though I had never seen such a thing happen on the subway, immediately everyone got up and into line like it was commonplace. New Yorkers, they know how to adapt.

But then, nothing happened. We all just stood there. And though there were plausible reasons for this — us being at the very back of the train, we weren't going to move quickly; some kind of obstacle or delay — the loudly grumbling lady started screaming at the people in front of her to get moving. That it had no effect only made her angrier.

As it turns out, we were actually not at the 79th Street station as the conductor had thought, and therefore, no one could get off the train after all. We just had to sit and wait, during which a couple of other people started occasionally yelling, as well. It was, as half-hours go, a little intense.

Advertisement

I wonder if the train shouters aren't akin to many of us right now, bombarded by a lot of big, uncomfortable feelings with no clear place to put them or easy means of release. Is a commuter shouting at the MTA really all that different from the screeds, the outrage, the fights on social media, or the hairpin-trigger fury that can erupt in us out of nowhere?

I imagine Jesus' disciples and friends had a similar hurricane of feelings in those brutal days between his arrest and crucifixion and his resurrection. Trapped in a country occupied by foreign invaders, their own community dominated by religious leaders who had actively sought Jesus' death, where could they put those feelings? How were they to process them?

I was at a bar with friends a few weeks ago. A stranger came up and started talking to us. Almost immediately, he mentioned, for no apparent reason, that he had not voted for the Democrats in the federal election. We ignored this, but he just kept bringing it up, always with a little giggle. Suddenly, I was shouting at him to go away, with no sense of the rage within me.

We're in a national moment calling us to action, to stand up for human rights and the preservation of our institutions. But when it comes to dealing with each other, maybe it's also a moment for gentleness. Why are people in New York pulling all these emergency brakes in the first place? Maybe, on some level, they feel a sense of emergency within themselves. Maybe instinctively, they're looking for a way to get off.

It's a huge challenge to be kind or understanding toward people when they're acting out. Fury is like a forest fire; it has a tendency to leap.

It's also frightening. I'll be the first to admit when those in my train car started shouting at the universe, I headed for another car. If they're behaving like this, what else might they do?

But there's so much around us seeking to divide, starting with our political leaders. Maybe our first and most fundamental act of resistance to their program is the refusal to reject others. If we step back instead of just sensing possible danger, maybe we will get a glimpse of others' pain, as well as the struggle we share. We're all trapped on this same train, looking for some kind of escape or relief. And as we remember at Easter, God is present here with us, in our community.