

A writer named Walter Kirn met a friend at an art gallery in Hollywood, his first visit to a gallery in many years. The next morning, in his email inbox, he found several ads urging him to invest in art. Coincidence? Probably not. Then he consulted an online calendar of Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in the Los Angeles area. He was annoyed when he began to receive invitations to drug and alcohol rehab centers. How could these centers know that he might need them? Membership in AA is supposed to be confidential.

But things got really bad when he saw, on his Facebook page, the name and picture of a California musician. He had bumped into the man several times at AA meetings in a private home, but in accordance with AA custom, *the man had never told him his name*. Facebook revealed the man's identity by connecting his name and picture with his phone number -- which was the only piece of information that had been shared.

Walter Kirn discovered that he is being watched. And so are you. Be afraid be very afraid! Kirn is the author of "If you're not paranoid, you're crazy: Life in the surveillance society." It appeared in an issue of *The Atlantic*. On the cover is a man covered completely in tin foil -- a popular stereotype for people who want to protect themselves from electromagnetic fields, mind control and mind reading. We used to think of such people as delusional. But maybe they are on to something. A T-shirt with a tin foil hat on it says, "Just because you're paranoid, it doesn't mean they're not out to get you!"

Kirn says that government agencies and tech companies are finding ever more intrusive ways to probe our thoughts and our behaviors. From Facebook to the NSA, our activities are being tracked and the details of our lives are being analyzed. Usually, we are unaware of this surveillance. But sometimes we ask for it. Kirn reports that the Progressive car-insurance company is now offering discounts to some drivers who agree to fit their cars with a tracking device called

Snapshot. Big Brother is watching. And sometimes, we give him permission to do so.

In our Gospel this morning from John, the disciple Philip says to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." It sounds as though Philip wants to do some surveillance on God, and get a clear picture of what God is doing. Philip is aware that God can be "a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents," but can also be a God who shows "steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love [Him] and keep [His] commandments."

Jealous or loving? Punishing or praising. Philip wants to see what God is doing. Jesus responds that Philip doesn't have to do any spying, because Jesus himself has been with his disciples for years. "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father," says Jesus. "How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?" Jesus shows his followers the clearest possible picture of what God is doing.

What a gift that is! The information revealed by Jesus leaves us with a deep sense of security and peace. Government surveillance is designed to uncover malicious plots, evil secrets and subversive acts -- all in the interest of national security. But, Jesus reveals to us that God has no nasty plots, secrets or acts. Instead, God is all grace, truth and steadfast love. Jesus concludes with the words, "Peace I leave with you ... Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." With God, we have nothing to fear. Jesus reveals God's glory, "the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." The bottom line is that we don't have to do any surveillance on God, because Jesus freely shows the Father to us.

But this is Pentecost Sunday, the day in which the gift of the Holy Spirit reveals a different kind of surveillance. Jesus tells us that God reaches down to us through "the Spirit of truth," a Spirit that the world cannot see or know. The word

"surveillance" comes from the French *sur* plus *veiller*, meaning "to watch over," and this is surely what God does through the Holy Spirit. God is always watching over us through the Spirit -- teaching us everything, reminding us of what Jesus has said to us, and giving us peace!

In God's surveillance society, communication is constant between God the Father, Jesus, the Spirit and us, resulting in great works that reveal the power of God. Jesus promises that "if in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it." The work of God continues through us if we trust and allow God to watch over us.

We don't like surveillance when Facebook or the government is doing it, but we love it when God is doing it. Most of us want God to keep an eye on us, and offer us deep peace, clear guidance, and gentle reminders of the teachings of Jesus. That's the promise of Pentecost -- that God is active in our lives through the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Michelle Adams discovered the truth of this when she decided to go fishing with her husband Jeff one afternoon. The day was beautiful and they were excited to take off for a lake in Indiana to catch some bass. But, after being on the highway for about 10 minutes, they began to hear a loud thumping noise. Jeff glanced into the rearview mirror and saw a shredded tire on the boat trailer. He quickly steered to the side of the road, pulled out the spare tire, and discovered that it was deflated. Bummer. It looked like they were out of options.

Fortunately, God was surveilling the situation. As Michelle and Jeff were trying to figure out what to do, a group of construction workers from a nearby bridge project stopped to help. They quickly pumped up the spare and helped Jeff to secure the wheel.

Michelle said to the crew, "If we had to break down, this sure was a good spot for it." She knew that if they had blown their tire anywhere else on that stretch of road, they would not have had a highway crew on the spot, complete with tools,

ready to lend a hand. Although she and Jeff didn't get to go fishing that afternoon, they did get to see God in action.

Then, as they were driving home, the clear blue sky turned eerie and dark. There had been only a slight chance of rain that day, but suddenly a huge storm blew in -- complete with thunder and lightning. Michelle and Jeff knew that if they had made it to the lake, they'd be on the water in the middle of the storm. "Once again," concludes Michelle, "God had our backs."

When we are part of God's surveillance society, we don't always enjoy lives of endless happiness, however. We still have blowouts on the highway, failed fishing expeditions and dark, stormy days. But we also catch glimpses of God's goodness and signs of God's involvement in our daily lives. We discover the truth of what God said to Jacob in Genesis, "Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go."

God promises to keep an eye on us, and to be at work in us through the power of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit is an Advocate, according to Jesus -- a helper who will be with us forever. This help comes to us when we are tempted to cheat on a test in school, tell a lie in a business transaction, or betray a friend. The Spirit speaks directly to our hearts, and pushes us back toward the path of God.

"You know him," says Jesus to the disciples, "because he abides with you, and he will be in you." The Spirit is closer to us than the NSA, more intimate than the Internet, more focused on our personal lives than Facebook. But don't be paranoid -- instead, be grateful. The Spirit helps us in our weakness, and inspires us to love God and keep his commandments. The Spirit teaches us everything, and reminds us of all that Jesus has said to us. The Spirit gives us a peace that is greater than anything that the world gives, a peace that prevents our hearts from being troubled and afraid.

Such spiritual surveillance is good news when tires blow out and storms roll in. It offers us peace when jobs are lost, when relationships shatter, when dreams are dashed and when illness strikes. The power and presence of the Holy Spirit guarantees that neither death nor life "nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." So put away your foil hat. In God's surveillance society, you have nothing to fear.