

Whenever I have a wedding rehearsal, I include a two-part Bible quiz. The first part of this quiz is this question: When is the first time in the Bible where it says that something is not good? Most of the time people will go to the tree in the middle of the garden and the fruit eating incident, but it happened before then. After God formed Adam from the earth and put him in this beautiful garden, God noticed something was missing, and said, "It is not good that the man is alone." God then creates all the other critters of the planet, but none of them was found to be a suitable companion for the man. So God creates another human being whom Adam names woman.

We are hard wired for community. It is not good for any of us to be alone. And yet here we are, deprived of the deep comfort that comes from gathering together in Jesus' name, to hear the gospel proclaimed and share in the body and blood of Christ. Out of love for our neighbor we are fasting from physically gathering together.

This does not mean that we do not gather together, however. We gather together in phone conversations, through social media and through video – live-stream and recorded – of worship and meditations. On the one hand, we are so very alone and lonely these days. On the other hand, we are more connected than ever through the gift of technology. It is not ideal and it is not forever, but that is our reality for now.

This presents a challenge for the church. The Augsburg Confession defines the church as the *gathering of all believers, among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered in accordance with the gospel.* (Article VII). Since we cannot gather together physically, does this mean that the church does not exist now? While I have not heard anyone making that argument, the question of whether we can share in Holy Communion without this physical gathering has been raised. Some have suggested that we should simply take a fast from the Sacrament until we can gather again; others have taken the view that God is fully able to work with the virtual communities technology affords us.

I am among those who believe that God can work with what we have available to us today. I think that the reason Jesus used bread, wine and water as physical means of grace in the Sacraments is because they were what was readily available on everyone's tables. The basic things that we gather around when nourishing and cleaning our bodies, those common things that bring us together in community. Today that is the technology that we use to remain a community until we can gather together in person. If Jesus had come in these days we are living through right now, I believe he would have used what was available to bind us together in his grace, not the things we do not have available.

The way that we will celebrate the Eucharist during Holy Week is as follows. At the end of Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion, Maundy Thursday and Easter Sunday, you will be directed to the St. Thomas YouTube channel, where I will be waiting for you. We will have a few minutes of welcoming people to the "room" and then we will begin a brief Holy Communion service. When I say the Words of Institution, I invite you to raise the bread and the wine with me. After we pray the Lord's Prayer, I will take bread the wine and instruct you to take and eat, to take and drink.

Before the services begin, I invite you to make your own home altar. This is a pretty important meal, with a mighty important Host and guest. How would you prepare your dining room table for this event? A tablecloth and candles might be nice but suit yourself; it's your house and your table. Will you use your best stemware and plate for the wine and the bread? Or are you more of a red solo cup and a piece of paper towel person? Have fun with this, especially if you have kids in your house. I'd involve them as much as I could with this process.

You will also want to have the Communion elements ready, but don't worry if you don't have a bottle of fine wine and freshly baked bread on hand. Use what you have. Bread, tortillas, crackers, rice cakes, twinkies are all fine. Wine would be the beverage of choice for this meal, but grape juice is fine. If you don't have those, maybe some grapes or even a dollop of grape jelly will do. Whatever you have is fine.

I long to share in the Lord's Supper with you again, my sisters and brothers, however "virtual" it may be. It is what we can do in these extraordinary times. I know Jesus can make do with what we have, not what we don't have.

Joy and peace in Christ,

*Pastor Darby*

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