

**Homily – A Virtual Eucharist**

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**Today** we are joining with many others  
to do something new.

**This** wasn't supposed to happen  
for another one hundred years,  
but here we are doing it.

**We** are all experiencing  
a virtual Eucharist for the first time.

**Now**, this is not the sermon that I expected to be sharing today.

**I initially** planned to preach on the poem  
that is on page two of your bulletin.

**This** is a poem by Lynn Unger called Pandemic.

*What if you thought of it  
As the Jews consider the Sabbath –  
the most sacred of times?  
Cease from travel.  
Cease from buying and selling.  
Give up, just for now,  
on trying to make the world  
different than it is.  
Sing. Pray. Touch only those  
to whom you commit your life.*

**Center** down.

**And** when your body has become still,  
**reach** out your heart.

**Know** that we are connected  
**in** ways that are terrifying and beautiful.  
(**You** could hardly deny it now.)

**Know** that our lives are in one another's hands.  
(**Surely**, that has come clear.)

**Do** not reach out your hands.

**Reach** out your heart.

**Reach** out your words.

**Reach** out all the tendrils of compassion that move, invisibly,  
**where** we cannot touch.

**Promise** this world your love –  
**for** better or for worse,  
**in** sickness and in health,  
**so** long as we all shall live.

**This** is a beautiful poem  
about making lemonade out of lemons.

**It** is making something good  
out of what we have been dealt in life.

**Now** I admit that it is easy for me to embrace this poem.

**But** in the last week  
some of you have lost jobs or sources of income.

**With** school closed,  
some of you have a household of children  
with you twenty four, seven.

**And**, it may be this way until August.

**And**, some of you have underlying health issues,  
and you have started fearing for your health and safety.

**Sabbath** is good, but God,  
how long will this one be?

**And**, then  
as I read this week's Gospel reading  
I thought I would be preaching  
about the story of the blind man at the pool  
who is healed by Jesus.

**I thought** I would be preaching about our human propensity  
to place blame.

**When** something goes wrong  
we always want to know who is at fault.

**With** whom can we be angry?

**We** want someone to punish.

**In** today's Gospel reading,  
Jesus was asked by his disciples

*"who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"*

**And**, Jesus replies  
that there is no one to blame.

**He** says this is the wrong question.

**Instead**, the disciples should have been asking  
how God is going to be revealed  
through the life of the blind man.

**Sometimes** I think our need to blame  
is another way for us to control things.

**If** we have someone to blame,  
if we know the cause of something bad,  
then we can have some control.

**We** can keep something from happening again.

**However**, I've said it before,  
and I'm sure I will say it again many times,  
we need to let go of our need for control.

**And** by extension,  
we need to let go of our need to blame.

**That** is a message  
that is very relevant in these uncertain times.

**We** need to let go of our need to blame.

**But**, this past week continued to evolve.

**I said** last week  
that it had been a week unlike any other week.

**And** this is true again this week.

**I wonder** if next week  
will be a week unlike any other week.

**I expect** that it will.

**That** makes me sigh.

**But** this past week,

I had to set these first two sermon themes aside.

**I ended** up having several meeting

with the Bishop and some of my clergy colleagues

as we tried to figure out

what to do about virtual worship.

**On** Monday,

I could see the writing on the wall,

and by Tuesday

the Bishop had notified us that we were to fast

from in-person worship in this time of uncertainty.

**And**, instead of just shifting to virtual worship,

she asked us to work with her

to understand the theology and pastoral needs

associated with a virtual Eucharist.

**Our** churches

don't usually move very fast

to embrace something new.

**Our** Roman Catholic brothers and sisters

have moved very slowly on some issues,

but Episcopalians can move slowly too.

**Without** the current pandemic,  
I think it would have been another hundred years  
before our church moved  
to allow a virtual Eucharist.

**We** would had long theological debates.

**We** would try to figure out what the Bible said  
and what Jesus would have told us.

**We** would be afraid of schisms and backlash,  
and therefore afraid of change.

**Every** three years we would debate it at General Convention,  
and it would have been decades  
before we accepted a virtual worship.

**Without** a pandemic or other calamity,  
we would have moved very slowly  
in embracing a virtual Eucharist.

**And**, in a flash  
that changed.

**So** that today we are not only doing virtual worship,  
but we will be doing a virtual Sacrament.

**A sacrament**, with a lower case “s”  
is an “outward and visible sign  
of an inward and spiritual grace.”

**God** is around us and in us,  
and a sacrament helps us realize or see  
God's presence.

**A sacrament** is a liminal threshold  
in which we stand between our physical world  
and the spiritual realm.

**And**, this allows us to see in ways  
that are much bigger  
than our worldly ways of seeing.

**And**, Sacraments with a upper case "S"  
are the ritualized and repeatable ways  
that we manifest that liminal threshold  
and view a God who is already around us and in us.

**Some** of our Christian denominations  
recognize two Sacraments, baptism and eucharist,  
but many other churches  
go up to seven official Sacraments.

**Some** would add additional Sacraments  
with the most notable being the addition  
of the ritual of foot washing.

**Now**, a Sacrament reveals  
that the "real presence" of God  
is across all of time and space.

**Christ** is in all

and around all.

**Our** Sacrament and blessing of the bread and wine in the Eucharist  
acknowledges a reality

that already exists in the bread and the wine.

**Our** rituals with their audible words,  
visible movements,  
and touch

help us see or realize this reality.

**Again**, Christ is in all and around all.

**And**, when we move to virtual worship  
we use technology to see and hear  
what is happening in another location.

**From** your home you can see and participate  
in what we are doing here at the church.

**We** are connected.

**One** of the benefits of virtual worship  
is that we understand there are fewer boundaries  
than we often realize.

**God** is in and around all.

**We** are all connected,  
and those that want to partake  
of bread and wine in their home during virtual worship  
can do so with the knowledge  
that others are doing so at the same time.

**This** is a corporate, communal action  
being done by the church  
as an outward sign of the connection  
we have with one another,  
even when we are each in our separate homes.

**Now**, I think our church  
has moved so fast in adding a virtual Eucharist  
because of pastoral reason.

**The** Eucharist is at the center of our worship.  
**All** other parts of our worship  
lead up to and prepare us to share  
the bread and the wine with one another.

**In** sharing the bread and the wine  
we are reconnected back to Jesus,  
and we are reconnected  
to all of those who are participating with us.

**One** might even say  
that we are reconnecting back through time and space  
to all those who have ever taken  
or will take  
of the bread and of the wine.

**Through** the Eucharist,  
we are connected to those  
that are on the other side of the world

and to those that are one hundred years  
in the future.

**In** this time of uncertainty  
we need to feel connected.

**We** need the connection  
of the Eucharist.

**In** this time  
of the coronavirus and the “shelter at home” emergency,  
we need to continue to build our relationships.

**We** need to lessen the sense of isolation.

**The** sharing of a virtual Eucharist  
is one of the most meaningful ways  
for a liturgical church  
to connect people.

**Some** of you may be comfortable  
having some bread and wine in your home.

**Others** may not be ready.

**All** of this is OK.

**You** need to decide for yourself  
so that you can best see our God  
who is already surrounding each and every one of us,  
even when we are not physically together.

**I hope** that we all are able to see God  
reflected to us in our screens  
and with us in our separate homes.