

Reflections on Holy Communion during COVID-19

Pastor Amy's First Reflection - Offered on Sunday, December 6, 2020

"The Virtual Body of Christ"

Our Worship and Music committee has been in a time of learning and deep in discernment about communion during this time of COVID. Now I want to share some of the insights of this discernment with you.

Holy Communion is given by our relational Triune God, for the body of Christ, rather than something we do privately as individuals. It is a physical, tangible way for the body of Christ, made up of all of our bodies, to receive God's invisible grace. So, at Good Shepherd we have been refraining from Holy Communion when we can't gather physically as the body of Christ.

However, reflections by Lutheran scholar Dr. Deanna Thompson have been helping us to consider that the body of Christ has always been a virtual body. We confess that we are united with Christians throughout the world and throughout history in the one body of Christ even though we are rarely physically present with most of the members of this body.

In this time of COVID-19, we are gathering in virtual and yet real and powerful ways as the body of Christ. And, as we head into a very difficult winter with COVID, this is the only way many of us can gather. Like the Apostle Paul in his letters, we yearn for the time we can be together in person. Yet, we still honor the ways we can be in community together - in Paul's case through letters, and in our case through YouTube, Zoom, phones and TV.

When we gather in the sanctuary, we trust that Christ comes to us in, with and under the gifts of bread and wine and words of promise in ways we cannot explain. We trust that Christ can also be present in these physical gifts and when words of promise are spoken as we gather virtually in our homes.

Yet, there is a real concern that virtual communion can reinforce the individualistic, consumerist tendencies of contemporary Christianity. As Lutheran scholar Dr. Ben Stewart points out, when we all go to our own pantries and take out something from the abundance of food we already have, this can reinforce our sense that communion is a private, personal act intended to bring us comfort. Holy Communion should remind us that we are all beggars before God. It *should* draw us more fully into communion with others, especially those most in need, and it should send us out to share bread with this broken world.

With all this in mind as we anticipate a Zoom communion service next week, we invite you to pray and prepare in advance for this time together. You're encouraged to prepare simple bread and wine - common elements that connect us to the gift given to the larger body of Christ. You might want to make a simple bread using the Good Shepherd recipe or others shared on the website.

Even as the meal is simple, we invite you to give thought ahead of time to preparing a table as you would prepare to host an honored guest. That guest is actually the host of the meal - Christ who meets us in bread and wine, who feeds and nourishes us and sends us out to offer ourselves as bread for the world. We prepare and find that all our preparations are inadequate as Christ meets and transforms us. All the creative ways of sharing in Holy Communion in this time don't allow us to experience the fullness of communion gathered around bread and the cup together in the sanc-

tuary. They are all a bit like manna in the desert during this time of wilderness and exile - we'll hear more about that next week.

Many will continue to fast from communion during this time which is also a holy and faithful response; we'll also hear more about that the following week. For now, know that God is present with you through the power of the Word of promise now and always. Know that you are part of the body of Christ and you are sent to serve.

Amen.