

A Reflection on Eucharistic Celebration by Means of Zoom
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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the Church into new places and raised questions for us to consider from new vantage points. I offer this reflection as one piece of an ongoing, and quite lively, conversation about the place of the Eucharist and *how* we might celebrate the Eucharist in a time when care of the community dictates we maintain social distance. Many people have written eloquently on this topic from a variety of perspectives reaching a variety of conclusions, including the following:

- [A Eucharistic Proposal for a Time of Pandemic by Aidan Luke Stoddart, The Episcopal Chaplaincy at Harvard, March 2020](#)
- [A Reflection on the Eucharist During the time of COVID-19: A Pastoral Letter From The Rt. Rev. C. Andrew Doyle, Diocese of Texas, April 2020](#)
- [On Hoarding Eucharist in a Hungry World by Diana Butler Bass, May 1, 2020](#)

I do not seek to answer all the questions these writings raise, but rather to reflect upon the questions COVID-19 is raising from the vantage point of Richard Hooker's thought, as well as from my experience as a parish priest and that of the community I serve, St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Boone, North Carolina.

Experience Shaping My Perspective

First, a bit about what has shaped my perspective. I write as a priest of 25 years having served St. Luke's for the last 16 years as Rector. I did my seminary training at General Theological Seminary and discovered there a rich and deeply sacramental life, partaking of daily Eucharist. This was new to me having grown up in a Morning Prayer "low church" tradition. I can remember Eucharist once a month, and my home parish did not make the switch to Eucharist every Sunday until I was in seminary. A deep rhythm in the sacraments has sustained me in my adult life, and on the Protestant/Reformed-Catholic spectrum, I consider myself to lean more toward the Catholic end. While in seminary, I also did a deep dive into Richard Hooker's thought writing my Master's Thesis, *Holy Scripture: The Word of God*, April 1994, on his work. In our current time, I have returned to Hooker and his understanding of law to think through the questions currently stirring the Church. I also write as a priest whose second call was as a Mission Developer sent to start an Episcopal-Lutheran Church in rural Kentucky. In that ministry, I was trained by the Lutherans,

and, at that time, we were not permitted to celebrate the Eucharist until we had gathered 100 people. We never achieved that mark in the year and a half I served that community, but during that season, our community discovered what it means to feast together and share communion in a whole host of ways. Chief among those ways was feasting on the Word. In other words, I am no stranger to a deep and prolonged experience of fasting from the Eucharist and feasting on the Word.

Rethinking “Virtual Eucharist”

When I first heard about “virtual Eucharist” several years ago, I was highly skeptical of its validity and dismissed it out of hand. The COVID-19 pandemic has humbled us in so many ways, laying bare things we had not seen before and inviting us to rethink our assumptions about so many things. Beginning March 15, 2020, St. Luke’s and I began a journey of gathering together in a Zoom meeting for worship. We have continued our Glad News/Sad News tradition prior to our formal service, sharing our joys and moments closest to Christ as we have always done. Our members have read the lessons and opened their mic’s for congregational responses and prayers. We have shared our intercessions during the Prayers of the People, and wished one another peace. We have had choir members lead us in singing and had instrumentalists play Preludes and Gospel Hymns. We have enjoyed coffee hour in small groups. Week after week, 70-100 of us have gathered this way. We *are* the gathered community sharing in the liturgy as priest, deacon, and laity. Zoom is merely the *means* by which we are gathering.

Can We Stop Referring to It as “Virtual Worship”—It’s Worship

I had a conversation this summer with the Director of Career Development at Appalachian State University. She spoke of how all their appointments with students had moved on-line. Recently, she was in a webinar with colleagues, when one of them said, “*If we get to the fall and we are still talking about virtual appointments, then we have missed the point. It’s just one more way that we meet with students.*” A light bulb went off for me, and from that moment on, I stopped referring to “virtual worship” or “the link to virtual worship” in all my communications; it’s simply “worship” or “the link to worship.” This has been an important shift for our community. “Virtual” carries a sense of “not-quite-real,” but what we are experiencing is most definitely *real*. When our community looks upon one each other’s faces and hears one another’s voices, each in our own

context, we are seeing and hearing one another in a new way. I wonder, in some ways, if these new windows into one another have actually expanded what we know of each other. It is easy to be anonymous in a sanctuary, especially when the congregation is all facing forward mostly seeing the back of one another's heads. As Aidan Luke Stoddart points out in *A Eucharistic Proposal for a Time of Pandemic*:

Surely spiritual presence is not primarily concerned with proximity, but rather grounded in an orientation of the heart and soul. I may be standing next to you in a pew, but that does not mean that I am present to you; or that my heart is open to you, ready to practice compassion, welcome, and mercy; or that my ears are open to you, prepared to receive that which you might want to share with me. On the other hand, you and I could be engaged in a conversation over Zoom or FaceTime, and I could be deeply present to you and to God, even in that context.

He continues:

*I do not dispute that distinctly physical presence may be more **ideal** or **enjoyable**... But that which is ideal is not necessarily that which is currently possible...But these (rightly) limited physical circumstances should not defeat our capacity to be present to one another, in whatever ways we can. **And these circumstances certainly do not defeat God's capacity to be present to us** (Stoddart).*

Our experience at St. Luke's bears out this truth.

The Questions

As I and St. Luke's have lived into this experience, the following questions have surfaced for me:

- *Why can't I, as priest, pray the words of the Eucharistic prayer and have people raise bread and wine at home?*
- *Why would this Eucharist not be valid?*
- *What is the limit of the Spirit's reach?*
- *Can I not trust the Spirit to move from where I am, as the Celebrant, to where the people are and consecrate, make holy, the material elements of bread and wine?*
- *If I answer 'no,' am I placing constraints on the Spirit's capacity to act, and what would that say about how I understand the Spirit?*

Over these months, parishioners have been asking these questions as well.

Beneath Our Longing—Grief, Reactance, and Holy Desire

In *A Reflection on the Eucharist During the time of COVID-19: A Pastoral Letter*, Bishop Doyle wonders how much of this current desire to engage the Eucharist in new ways is due to *reactance*, defined by Doctors W. J. Brehm and S.S. Brehm as “*a kind of disagreeable feeling that is stimulated when individuals are threatened by a loss of freedom*” (Doyle, 15). Bishop Doyle writes:

I suggest that our particular circumstance of social distancing has taken away our individual freedom of movement and sorting-out of daily routines. I suggest that removal of the cup at first, and now the required virtual worship, has taken away our individual freedoms in and with Church life (Doyle, 15).

He continues:

We are doing everything we can to get what we cannot have...we are doing so because we are struggling to move out of our grief, take action, and claim agency (Doyle, 16).

He concludes:

Our reactance combines with agency, and proposes creative ideas. The virtual Eucharist, and the creation of home communion kits are examples of that creativity. They seek, in all earnestness, to reunite the presently fragmented Eucharistic community online (Doyle, 16).

From there, Bishop Doyle outlines the unintended consequences that might arise from moving forward with these new means of celebrating the Eucharist, chiefly supporting a society of individualism (Doyle, 16-18).

While I appreciate Bishop Doyle’s cautions, I find this approach lacking on two levels. First, on a pastoral level, it doesn’t answer the tremendous hunger in our midst made more acute by all that is upended in the lives of the people of God at this time. In times of great need, whether in the Exodus wilderness (Exodus 16) or by the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14 and 15, Mark 6 and 8, Luke 9, John 6), God has always made provision to feed God’s people crying out in their hunger. Second, Bishop Doyle’s approach lacks any sense that the Holy Spirit might be inviting the Church to a new thing. Yes, it may be the COVID-19 pandemic that has brought these questions forward with power and urgency, but, as with so many other areas of life, the pandemic may well be revealing

concerns that we have not been tending to for some time. In our experience at St. Luke's, we have people participating in worship who have not been able to do so for some time, either by reason of their health, the distance they live from any Episcopal community, or by the pressures of their life which have made Sunday mornings difficult for quite some time now.

In my time as a parish priest, I have seen patterns of attendance shift dramatically from weekly to every other week to once a month or longer. This trend has been at work for a long time now, and those of us in the parish know this. Many worshipping by means of Zoom certainly miss the physical gathering of the community, but it is also true that, for others, it has opened the door to their participation and reengagement with the church. As we feed on one another's presence and on the Word, the hunger for Eucharist also stirs. I do not believe that our longing for the Eucharist is simply a function of *reactance*, but stems from a place of deep longing and desire to feel in our bodies, at the cellular level, the mystical union with Christ and one another that partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ makes known. Richard Hooker and other theologians would remind us that *desire* is positive (Rauh, 10). We have an innate attraction toward the Infinite Good, toward God (Rauh, 26). This holy longing may be in part about grief, but something much deeper is also at work—our desire, at its heart, is pulling us toward God. God is always both the source and end of our desire, and this is true in our longing for Eucharist.

Change is Never Easy

As I have read some of the bishops' reflections on the recently concluded two-day meeting of the House of Bishops, July 28-29, 2020 (Paulsen), I sense a great deal of concern about allowing *any* experiments to move forward with regards to expanding *how* we celebrate the Eucharist. If we are aware that some of our desire to try some new ways of celebrating the Eucharist is stemming from grief, it is equally important to mark that underneath valid concerns about changes being proposed lies a fear of what this change might put into motion. I know fearful questions stir in me:

- *What doors might we be inadvertently opening by admitting these changes, and how might it change the Church?*
- *If we offer Eucharist by means of Zoom, will people ever come back to church?*
- *Conversely, how long will people support an experience of church where we gather online?*

And, for those in leadership, the haunting, but also real and very human question:

- *Will people continue to support these efforts financially that will enable the church to have the resources to continue its ministry and mission?*

Questions also stir in me that come from a more generative and curious place:

- *What is the Spirit inviting us to in the midst of this crisis?*
- *What is this disruption enabling us to see and hear and do that we weren't able to see and hear and do before?*

The prophetic tradition reminds us that new visions are often born amidst crisis. The first followers of Jesus in the early church also had to confront the need for change as questions emerged that they had not considered before. They found their way forward to respond to needs and possibilities in their midst; we can too, and Richard Hooker can illuminate how we might navigate these challenges.

Authority and Mutability of Law

Richard Hooker defines law this way:

*“All things that are have **some operation** not violent or casuall. Neither doth any thing ever begin to exercise the same **without some foreconceaved ende for which it worketh**. And **the ende** for which it worketh is **not obtained, unlesse the worke be also fit to obtaine it by**. For **unto every ende every operation will not serve**. That which doth assigne unto each thing **the kinde**, that which **doth moderate the force and power**, that which doth **appoint the forme and measure of working**, the same we tearme a **Lawe**”* (Hooker, Book I.2.1/1:58.22-29, emphasis mine).

For Hooker, *everything* is ordered by law, even God Godself.

Hooker understands scripture to deliver divine laws, yet *“neither **God being their author** nor **his committing them to scripture** nor **the continuance of the end for which they were instituted** is **sufficient reason to prove they are unchangeable**”* (Hooker, Book III.10.Title/1:239.17-20).

His opponents argued that laws aren't just *“**instruments to rule by**, and that **instruments are not only to bee framed according to the generall end** for which they are provided, **but even according unto that very particular**, which riseth out of the matter whereon they have to worke”* (Hooker, Book III.10.3/1:242.9-13, emphasis mine). Hooker counters with this argument:

*The **ende** wherefore **lawes** were made may bee permanent, and **those lawes neverthelesse require some alteration**, if there be anye **unfitnes in the meanes** which they **prescribe** as*

tending unto that end and purpose ... But that which hath bene once most sufficient, may wax otherwise by alteration of time and place (Hooker, Book III.10.3/1:242.13-16, 26-27, emphasis mine).

While Hooker is addressing questions of church governance being pressed by the Calvinists in the early years of the English Reformation, his understanding of the *fitness of laws to obtain their end* is foundational to how Anglicans and the Episcopal Church have approached change across the church's life.

Hooker is a man of the late sixteenth century, and he accorded scripture supreme authority. However, even in according the scripture that supreme authority as God's law, Hooker nevertheless allows for the *mutability of that law* to meet *particular situations in particular places at particular times*. He makes this move by *examining the particular law in question in light of its end*, and the *aptness or fitness of the law as a means to that end*. A failure on either account would *admit the possibility of change* (Rauh, 23, emphasis mine).

Hooker gives us a way to balance respect for authority *and* the need for change. He provides the way to accord scripture the authority it deserves and to confront us as the law of God (Rauh, 24), *and yet, also* provides the way for our interpretation and tradition to evolve. This is foundational to our Episcopal ethos. He saves us from the immediacy and urgency of our present moment, *while at the same time* inviting us always to be considering whether or not *what we are doing* and *how we are doing it* is actually *servicing the end we are seeking to serve*. This is how we have been able to make significant changes that, at one time, seemed to threaten the very core of our tradition—women's ordination and the marriage between two people of the same gender come to mind.

Sacramental Theology—Signs and Tokens, Symbols, Historical and Transhistorical

Signs and Tokens

While Hooker is long known for his work on law, the authority of scripture, the tradition that stems from its interpretation, and the place of reason in unlocking the scripture, it is his sacramental theology that captured my soul. Hooker has a rich, rich understanding of *participation* that takes us into the deepest place of communion. To encounter, to *participate* in, *the sign and token* is to *participate* in the reality itself. In our tradition, a sacrament is a sign, a *means*, but it also *participates* in that grace of which it is a sign (Rauh, 28). From my thesis:

*The bread and the wine of the Eucharist are not just a sign, a **means** of encountering the Body and Blood of Christ, they **are** the Body and Blood of Christ in reality, although in this reality, they do not lose their materiality as bread and wine...The sign of the grace cannot be separated from the grace, nor can the grace be separated from the sign. To separate the materiality of the sign from the grace it embodies would be to render the Incarnation meaningless. If our faith in the Incarnation proclaims anything at all, it proclaims that God desired a reconciled relationship with his creatures in such a way that did not obliterate the creature. God took on this flesh, the Word became Incarnate; the flesh does not disappear, nor does the sign in the sacrament (Rauh, 28-29, emphasis mine).*

Symbols

In *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, Roman Catholic theologian Sandra Schneiders defines symbol this way:

A symbol is...the mode of presence of something that cannot be encountered in any other way...Whether the symbol appeals directly to senses or is an idea or image in the mind, it is essentially a perceptible reality that mediates what is otherwise imperceptible (Schneiders, 35).

Schneiders continues:

...A symbol...participates directly in the presence and power of that which it symbolizes...The symbol never exhausts the reality, that is, it never expresses it fully, but is so intimately bound up in the symbolized that there is not a way to separate them...The symbol embodies and thereby brings to expression reality that it can never fully "say"...They [symbols] are the locus of our encounter with the real (Schneiders, 35-36).

This rich understanding of symbol expresses powerfully what Richard Hooker means when he speaks of *signs and tokens* and what our Book of Common Prayer expresses in the catechism when it states: "*The sacraments are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace*" (Book of Common Prayer, 857).

Historical and Transhistorical

Schneiders makes a helpful distinction between *historical* and *transhistorical*. She states:

*The term **historical** has to be carefully defined. Not every true thing said about someone who actually lived is historical. If we define historical the way historians define it, it is that which takes place in space and time according to laws of cause and effect and is at least in principle, publicly available. In other words, the historical is not anything that ever happened, but only that which is in principle open to historical investigation. For example, Jesus' birth is properly historical, but the incarnation is not; Jesus' death is historical, but the salvation of the world wrought by his death is not; the Easter experiences of Jesus' disciples are historical, but the resurrection is not. This does not mean that the incarnation, redemption, and resurrection did not happen or are not real. It means that they are transhistorical; they belong to another sphere of reality that is not the subject matter of the human discipline of history. They are available only to faith” (Schneiders, 101).*

This distinction between historical and transhistorical was a significant breakthrough in my understanding:

*[In the] example of the eucharist, the bread and wine, an **historical** reality, are signs of a **transhistorical** reality, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Similarly, the text of scripture, an **historical** reality, is a sign of a **transhistorical** reality, God's self-revelation. The Word of God becomes the mediator, the nexus, the locus, the focal point of an encounter between the reality of the **historical** and the reality of the **transhistorical**, between the reality of this temporal world and the reality of the kingdom of God (Rauh 29-30, emphasis mine).*

This is the position that Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, occupies as “our only Mediator and Advocate” (Book of Common Prayer, 330); he embodies and mediates both historical and transhistorical realities.

Speech as an Instrument of Communion

Hooker has an exalted view of speech and its place in facilitating communion. He writes: “*The chiefest instrument of humane communion therefore is speech, because thereby we impart mutuallie one to another the conceiptes of our reasonable understanding*” (Hooker, Book I.10.12/1:107.7-9). For Hooker, our human reason is made in the image of God's reason, with reason being wisdom and will working together—in God, these work together in perfect harmony; in human beings, wisdom and will are out of sync (Rauh, 11, 15-16). When we speak, we are

allowing someone else to view that image of God in us and we in them (Rauh, 30). Schneiders affirms this:

To see another is to encounter a person's "surface," to "stand before" or "be in the presence of" another. But speaking/hearing (the one always implies the other) is a mutual entering into interiority. By speaking/hearing, the two persons open the walls surrounding their inner selves, and their heretofore incommunicable experiences are put in common. They both now live in a different world, a world they share, rather than in two separate worlds (Schneiders, 34-35).

Applying These Principles

These understandings of law and its mutability, signs and tokens, symbols, historical and transhistorical, and speech as an instrument of communion lead to some interesting possibilities as we think about Eucharist by means of Zoom. Currently, for the greatest part of our communities, having Eucharist by means of gathering together physically is not safe. As such, physically gathering together is *not a fit means to obtain the end of communion* as we experience communion in the Eucharist.

Much has been made of the physicality and materiality involved in our Eucharistic celebrations, both of the elements, the rubric that the Celebrant touch those elements, and the physical gathering of the community; however, this may place too much emphasis on the *historical* realities inherent in the Eucharist—the bread and wine on one altar, the Celebrant's touch, the community gathered together in one physical location—and not enough emphasis on the *transhistorical* realities of the Eucharist which are beyond time and space—the Body and Blood of Jesus, the reach of the Spirit, the mystical communion of the Body of Christ. Hooker raises for us the power of speech as an instrument of communion. Might we allow the Word of God, Jesus Christ, to use the instrument of speech in the dance between Celebrant and Congregation, which is not impaired by Zoom and other interactive platforms, to facilitate the Eucharistic communion that the people of God so deeply desire?

Some have referred to our communion or gathering as being "impaired" at this time—is this truly an impairment of our communion, or is this an impairment in our capacity to envision how we might celebrate the Eucharist in an expanded way? When the Church is at her best, we have allowed our understandings to evolve as the *means* we have previously observed need to expand

to meet the demands of our particular place and time and circumstances. Again, women's ordination and the marriage of two people of the same gender are two examples in our recent memory.

Parameters of Eucharistic Celebration by Means of Zoom or Other Interactive Platforms

I accord the scripture and the tradition of the Church high authority, and I do not propose these changes lightly. As such, I am not arguing for an “anything goes” approach as we consider Eucharistic Celebration in these new ways of gathering. There is a concern that using digital means to gather may move people from being a participant to an observer. This risk may be heightened in these new environments, but frankly, this is always a risk in any worship experience. Even gathered in the same physical space, we can allow ourselves to fully participate and be open to what is unfolding in our midst, or we can watch what is going on all around us and remain detached as an observer.

St. Luke's experience is with Zoom, and our parishioners have noted that they feel like participants in our services. We experience ourselves as the gathered community because there is the dance of Officiant/Congregation in real-time. Our community can see each other and hear each other. While the responses aren't always perfectly together due to the half second time delay over Zoom, our responses were never perfectly together in our sanctuary—praying in any community brings these challenges in our communal responses.

Many congregations are using live-streams. One colleague shared that his congregation is also experiencing this sense of participation through use of the chat box, sharing responses, sharing peace, and sharing prayer requests. Yet another revealed how parishioners make use of visual icons—thumbs-up and hand-claps—to signal their participation.

What may well make the difference is not whether or not one is using Zoom or a live-stream, but whether or not the worship experience is live or pre-recorded. There is something essential to gathering together in real time so that this dance of Celebrant/Congregation can unfold, though the manner in which that dance moves may differ according to the means by which a community is gathering. Consequently, I would not be in favor of people watching a recording after the fact and lifting up their bread and wine apart from the community gathered by means of Zoom or some other interactive platform.

As I envision celebrating the Eucharist by means of Zoom, or other similar interactive platforms, the congregation would be offering their responses at all those points indicated in the Eucharistic prayer, most especially at the Great Amen, which marks the people's assent to and participation in the words spoken on their behalf by the Celebrant. I follow Hooker and Schneiders in understanding that *speech*—the speaking *and* the hearing, albeit in new ways—is a chief instrument facilitating communion. We would ask people to use bread and wine as the material elements to be consecrated. To heighten our communal experience, we would share the recipe we use at St. Luke's to bake our communion bread. The People would raise their bread and wine in their locations as the Celebrant raises the same during the words of institution and at the Great Amen. We would teach about how we dispose of elements not consumed during the service in proper and reverent ways. We would take advantage of the formation opportunities this experience would afford and talk about how families might mark sacred space in their homes for this celebration. We would trust in the *transhistorical* realities always at work in our Eucharistic celebration, including trusting that the Spirit can get where she needs to be to consecrate the *historical* realities of bread and wine and bring forth the *transhistorical* realities of the Body and Blood of Christ, as the Spirit is never constrained by our limits. We would trust that our communion is not impaired, but is complete, as it always is when Jesus is binding us together with his Body and Blood into the mystical Body of Christ.

Liturgical Experimentation

St. Luke's understands that we are a changing Church living in a changing world. This community of faith has long identified a charism to try things on behalf of the larger Church. We have always experimented in concert with our Bishop and the larger Church, sharing what works and what doesn't. We see this as part of our ministry and our mission. I respectfully ask the bishops, my own included, to consider which congregations and communities in their dioceses have this charism and to task them with testing these adaptations on behalf of the whole Church. I believe this permission lies within the authority of the diocesan bishop to grant. For those who feel called to this ministry and mission, for those priests and congregations who have this charism, task us and bless us to try it, and judge it by the fruit it bears. We may well find out that this is not a lifegiving direction to move, *or* we may discover new aspects of our Eucharistic communion that have remained hidden until now.

Again, I hold scripture and the tradition of the Church in high authority; I respect the authority of the bishops, liturgical scholars, and theologians, but I also believe that priests and the congregations and communities we serve have wisdom to share because we are so close to ground in these extraordinary times as we rethink so much. Hooker offers a significant and humbling challenge here. For him, it is the gift of reason that gives *every* human being a valid and necessary role to play in the interpretative task (Rauh, 40, emphasis mine). With power, beauty, and humility, Hooker states:

“Companies of learned men be they never so great and reverend, are to yeeld unto reason, the waight whereof is no whit prejudiced by the simplicitie of his person which doth alleage it, but being found to be sound and good, the bare opinion of men to the contrary, must of necessitie stoope and give place” (Hooker, Book II.7.6/1:181.14-182.2).

I ask that bishops judge what some are proposing based upon whether or not it is *“found to be sound and good,”* not under the rubric *“that’s just not how we’ve done it before.”*

Gathering has Not Changed, Only the Means by which We Gather

I don’t know where these proposed changes may lead us in the future. I am clear that, for now, celebrating the Eucharist physically gathered together is *not a fit means* to achieving Eucharistic communion for a great number of our people. Even once the pandemic has passed, it may still be the case that the physical gathering is *not a fit means* for some of our people. The Church is forever changed by what has occurred. It may be that the pandemic has revealed a change that has been afoot for some time, a change brought about by technology no less jarring and disorienting than the many changes that came about in the time of the Reformation—the advent of the printing press, and liturgies in the language of the people, and the people receiving in both kinds, and the married priesthood to name a few. I long for the time when we will regather at the altar in the sanctuary of St. Luke’s, *and* I am excited for the possibilities before us as we will also continue to gather by means of Zoom or other similar interactive platforms, both now and in the years to come. **It is not the gathering together as the people of God that has changed, only the means by which we are doing it.**

Pastoral Response: Normative and Allowed

One of the beautiful things about the Episcopal tradition is our capacity to be generous with one another when we are not of one mind, and honestly, when have we ever been all of one mind? At other significant moments in the Church's life, when we have had a diversity of opinion and practice, when the future direction has not yet been made clear, when we, as a whole Church are still in process discerning the mind of the Spirit, we have found a way to offer a pastoral response until such time when our theological work and normal processes allow for greater clarity. Much of our theology and practice with regards to marriage between people of the same gender proceeded with this sense of pastoral response.

Even when we do have clarity, we still understand there are circumstances that fall outside of what is *normative*. It is *normative* for a bishop or priest to administer baptism, yet if a bishop or priest is not available, a bishop may authorize a deacon to preside and administer baptism, and in emergency circumstances, any baptized person is *allowed* to administer the sacrament (Book of Common Prayer, 312-314). In the case of an emergency baptism, at a later date in a public celebration with a bishop or priest presiding, the baptism is recognized, though the administration of water is not repeated (Book of Common Prayer, 314). It is *normative* to celebrate Holy Baptism within the Eucharist at the chief service on a Sunday or other feast, and especially on principal occasions recommended as especially appropriate, yet we *allow* for this sacrament to be celebrated at other times and even outside the Eucharistic celebration (Book of Common Prayer, 298, 311-312). As we found our way forward with the *Enriching Our Worship* materials for Eucharistic celebration, it was still *normative* to use the Book of Common Prayer for the principal Sunday service, and yet *allow* for the use of these liturgies at other services on Sunday and throughout the week.

As we think about these new means of gathering for Eucharistic celebration, might there be a way forward by considering the gathering of the community in one location as *normative*, and yet also *allow* for these other possibilities? It is important to note in these instances that what is *allowed* is no less valid than what is *normative*; all of these celebrations of the sacraments are fully valid. By the same token, a Eucharistic celebration by means of Zoom or other interactive platform, while not *normative*, would be *no less valid* than a Eucharistic celebration in a community gathered together in one location. Eucharistic celebration in this form would be *allowed* and *fully valid*. This time of COVID-19 is crying out for a pastoral response—I wonder if this distinction between what

is *normative* and what is *allowed* might help us to move forward in offering a pastoral response for this time.

Jesus Gives Us Pause—Cautionary Words

I pray that we don't inhibit these liturgical adaptations from a place of fear. As a religious leader, Jesus' words in Matthew 23:1-4 always give me pause:

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them" (Matthew 23:1-4).

In a time of extraordinary hunger on every level, may we not add to the weight of the burdens our people are already bearing in these times. Jesus always found grace to feed the hungry, even when it went beyond what seemed possible or broke with tradition. This following passage has come to me more than once in recent months:

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the sabbath." He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests. Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests in the temple break the sabbath and yet are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath" (Matthew 12:1-8).

How might this passage inform us as we think about our traditions and law and Eucharistic hunger?

Conclusion—It's All About Communion

Jesus was not afraid to adapt *when the law was not fit to serve the end it was meant to serve*, and feeding people in the deepest possible way, drawing them into communion with himself, with one another, and with God, has always been *the end* to which all else points. Should we be deliberate and discerning in implementing any adaptations? Absolutely, but let us not dismiss them out of hand as I dismissed the notion of virtual Eucharist years ago. The Spirit may be inviting us into new places and new ways, but our *end*, communion with God, remains the same as it ever was. I look forward to the continuance of this conversation and pray for both the wisdom and the will to move forward with boldness, humility, and creativity, knowing we are anchored in the richness of our tradition.

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