

Thinking Faithfully about Virtual Eucharist
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Shortly after it became apparent that in person gatherings in our church buildings would need to be suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Archbishop Linda Nicholls, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, invited parishes across the country to use this time as an opportunity to “feast on the Word”. This perspective was shaped by her own considerable skepticism regarding the value live-streaming or video-recording Eucharistic liturgies,¹ but also by her foundational commitments around the place and power of the Word as nourishment to the Body of Christ, whether gathered or dispersed. The Primate’s strength of conviction on this count was compelling, and so when saint benedict’s table began to make some decisions around how we would approach our own online liturgies we embraced the opportunity to more deeply “feast on the Word.” This took the form of weekly Sunday liturgies live streamed from our church building and led by our two priests with music provided by a trio of musicians, but we also began to offer a brief daily Evening Prayer liturgy which live streamed from the home of the officiant. Anticipating at the time that we might well be in a position to resume in person gatherings at some point during Eastertide, we framed our Sunday liturgies in terms of Lenten longing to come through this wilderness time, ultimately arriving together with loud shouts of Easter joy at the festal Eucharistic table. I often said to people that our celebration of the Resurrection would take place on the first Sunday back together, when we’d proclaim the resurrection Gospel, light the Pascal candle, and sing the great and familiar hymns of the season.

Eastertide arrived, and while on May 4, 2020—just over three weeks into that season—provision was made to commence liturgical gatherings of no more than ten people, with strict guidelines around sanitizing, physical distancing, eucharistic practice, and congregational singing, there was little indication that we’d soon be offering any shouts of joy or glad alleluias. In our own context we opted to hold off on in person gatherings in the church building, and to enhance the live streaming as our primary way of gathering our dispersed community. This was partly due to ongoing renovations in the church building in which we rent space, which took place over the summer and early autumn, but also to a more general hesitancy to rush back to gatherings in which we’d not be able to sing, share communion in our familiar way, or even offer the simple hospitality of the sort that had shaped our ethos. Notably, in our live streamed liturgies the Primate’s invitation to feast on the Word was even more deeply embraced, as we opted to follow the arc of stories from Genesis and Exodus set out in the Revised Common Lectionary as the focus for preaching from June 14 through to October 25, 2020.

Still, we were aware of the deep longing for the eucharist in our community, and so while plans were set in place to begin some Word and music-based in person gatherings in October, we also began to seriously explore the idea of introducing a virtual communion practice into our Sunday liturgies. This was first raised by my ministry colleague, Rachel Twigg, late in July just as I was

¹ “There’s something important about being physically gathered together as a community in which everyone participates,” Nicholls says. “It’s not something you just watch on a screen.... The idea that we can do this at such a distance makes me concerned about people’s sense of this just being something that [they] watch, and so that’s why I would be very hesitant.” <https://www.anglicanjournal.com/eucharistic-feast-fast-or-famine/>

preparing to leave for a month of vacation. While my first response was to be rather reticent, she sent me on vacation with a copy of *The Virtual Body of Christ* by Deanna Thompson, which was the book that had begun to shift her own thinking on the matter. Published in November 2016, Thompson's book neither anticipates the current state in which we're doing ministry nor even touches directly on the matter of virtual communion liturgies, but instead makes a compelling case for how to think about church and community in a world shaped by sophisticated communication media, digital technology, and social networks. Dr. Thompson's March 26, 2020 article "Christ is Really Present Virtually: A Proposal for Virtual Communion"² extends her work in her earlier book by offering a thoughtful presentation of virtual communion practice, specifically—though not exclusively—for these times of pandemic.

Deanna Thompson's work opened the way for me to think differently about virtual communion celebrations, which now occasions this brief position paper. My position is, I believe, relatively modest, in that I am advocating only for permission within my diocese to implement a practice of weekly virtual communion liturgies for a six-month trial period. At the end of the six-month period a report would be submitted to Bishop Geoff Woodcroft, outlining our experiences, the theological implications and learning, and our proposal—if any—for continued practice.

I do need to acknowledge that there are a good many voices critical of such a practice, both within the Anglican communion and well beyond. I do not propose here to attempt to mount a rebuttal of the various important and thoughtful objections, but rather to respond to at least a good number of them in a way that makes space for the six-month trial period I am proposing. I believe that all of us are still learning here, and that the church as a whole needs to make room for improvisation and experimentation when it comes to online practice and ministry.

For the sake of focus, I will consider the concerns raised by The Rev'd Dr. Christopher Brittain, Dean of Divinity and Margaret E. Fleck Chair in Anglican Studies at Trinity College, as set forth in his article, "On virtual communion: A tract for these COVID-19 Times (Part II)".³ Brittain sets out three reasons for discouraging the practice of virtual communion in an Anglican context. Firstly, he notes that "Anglican tradition has consistently taught that God can be present through the Holy Spirit in any human situation, and that those unable to attend the Eucharist due to a health crisis have access to God through 'spiritual communion.'" To be sure, this is quite clearly indicated in a rubric from the order for the Ministry to the Sick in the *Book of Common Prayer*:

But if a man, either by reason of extremity of sickness, or for want of warning in due time to the Curate, or by any other just impediment, do not receive the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood: he shall be instructed that if he do truly repent him of his sins, and stedfastly believe that Jesus Christ hath suffered death upon the Cross for him, and shed his Blood for his redemption, earnestly remembering the benefits he hath thereby, and giving him hearty thanks therefor; he doth eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ profitably to his soul's health, although he do not receive the Sacrament with his mouth. (p. 584)

² <https://wp.stolaf.edu/lutherancenter/2020/03/christ-is-really-present-virtually-a-proposal-for-virtual-communion/>

Note that all quotations from Dr. Thompson are from this source.

³ <https://www.anglicanjournal.com/on-virtual-communion-a-tract-for-these-covid-19-times-ii/> Note that all quotations from Dr. Brittain are from this source.

I do not for a moment dispute this principle of “spiritual communion,” but instead would ask why it is that it thereby nullifies the possibility of sharing in a virtual communion. In keeping with the current directives of our bishop we have not moved forward with offering a virtual communion, but have instead continued to celebrate a Liturgy of the Word which incorporates the proclamation of the Gospel, the confession of sin, and the offering of thanksgiving to God in the form of Word, prayer, and music. In doing this we have satisfied the terms set out in the Prayer Book rubric, and are in fact sharing together in a spiritual communion, even though we do not live stream an actual eucharistic liturgy. Our working principle has been that until all of us can take up the bread and cup, we will not have one of our priests celebrate eucharist online and share the bread only with those five or six people present in the church building. It strikes me that in this I am very much on the same page as Dr. Brittain, when he cites the Episcopalian theologian Scott MacDougall, who, Brittain writes, “cautions that the idea of watching a virtual communion online threatens to overturn the ‘liturgical reforms that ended the medieval practice of ocular communion because it disempowers the laity and insults the priesthood of all believers.’” However, if a virtual communion is designed in a way that allows “viewers” to become “participants,” it is no longer a narrowly ocular event. This would include providing a form of the liturgy which makes room for online participants to give voice to the liturgical responses, sing along with the musicians, and share silent prayer with the officiant; all elements which we currently use in our Liturgy of the Word. If a eucharist were to be celebrated using the elements set out on the table in the church as well as elements prepared and set out in each participant’s home, then this sense of participation would be further enhanced. I offer the following observations and notes from three different commentators:

- “What might it look like to do virtual communion well? We could start with preparing members beforehand, encouraging them to prepare the table in their own homes. Send along the recipe for the bread regularly used in communion; invite people to consider what cup and plate might be meaningful to hold the elements; remind them of the confidence we have that God is the one who acts in the sacrament; affirm what so many already know, that Christ comes to us even when we gather virtually.”
-Deanna A. Thompson, “Christ is Really Present Virtually.”
- “The first thing I noticed about my experience was how important the preparation was. I found a runner embroidered by my grandmother, dishes made by the same potter who made the saint ben’s communion vessels, went to the store for wine and used the same bread we use at saint ben’s. I also made generous use of incense in preparing my home altar. I texted back and forth with friends who were also participating in their homes and we all shared photos of the spaces we had created. All of this reinforced that this was an act of faith I was preparing for, and not just a TV show. It increased my sense of participation in the process. I was preparing to participate, not simply consume.”
-The Rev’d Rachel Twigg, after participating in the online eucharist of the 2020 Evolving Faith Conference.
- “[I]n this time when live-streaming is necessary as the most accessible way to reach out to the divided worshipping community, adding a (carefully catechized) practice of virtual Communion to such live streams would provide another way to recognize the presence of

the crucified Christ to each of us in our isolation and to build community from the ‘outside in,’ even under the technological constraints of centralized live streams that are necessary at the present moment.”

-Hannah Bowman, “Virtual Communion and the Call to Discern the Body.”⁴

I would simply note that in all three there is an emphasis on preparation for the liturgy, and, in the case of Bowman, careful catechesis.

Dr. Brittain’s second reason for discouraging the practice of virtual communion has to do with the distinct differences between online community and actual gatherings of people in physical spaces. In this, he highlights two distinct ways in which participants are meant to be united:

If one recalls that the Eucharist not only unites participants with the sacrifice of Christ’s death on the cross but also with the table fellowship that Jesus shared with outcasts and sinners, then a substantive limitation of virtual communion comes into view. It would be one thing for Jesus to chat with the Samaritan woman over Skype; it is quite another thing for him to violate social boundaries by meeting directly with her at the well (John 4:4-26). Similarly, while the disciples of Jesus might find it curious that Jesus has Zacchaeus as a Facebook friend, they cannot misunderstand the message that is communicated when Jesus agrees to eat with this tax collector at his home (Luke 19:1-10). Virtual communion makes it easier to diminish such key dimensions of celebrations of the Eucharist than do in-person gatherings.

While I make no argument with the rather playful examples he employs, I believe that when, further into the article, he further extends this line of thinking he fails to consider the reverse side of his own position. He writes,

Yet adopting virtual communion risks undermining the corporate nature of the Eucharist. There is a significant possibility that such celebrations will establish divisions between those with and without internet access, or even, for example, between those who receive a Zoom invitation to join and those strangers and neighbours left uninvited.

Yes, the matter of those who have no internet access is a very real one, and I’m aware of a good number of people who are feeling quite isolated from their church communities for this very reason. Still, as Rachel Twigg notes in her reflections on having participated in the online eucharist hosted by the 2020 Evolving Faith Conference, a virtual communion liturgy has the potential of welcoming a wide array of participants:

The service was powerful, but equally powerful were some of the conversations that occurred on social media afterwards with people who expressed the way the meal had been healing, because it’s not just the pandemic that has limited their ability to participate in eucharist on a regular basis but their geographic locations (rural areas without regular access to a priest), work schedules (not being able to get to a church when a service is offered), health or disabilities (the stories of people who had eucharist for the first time in

⁴ <https://livingchurch.org/covenant/2020/04/03/virtual-communion-and-the-call-to-discern-the-body/> Note that the words “carefully catechized” are in brackets in the original.

years because they were house-bound broke my heart), or a reasonable fear that they would be rejected at an in person service (people of colour, LGBTQ folk etc.) served to increase my sense that this is an important opportunity to reach people the church has previously ignored.

In addition, I'd note that Dr. Brittain's concern for the division "between those who receive a Zoom invitation to join and those strangers and neighbours left uninvited" also applies for in person services at which the those wishing to attend must pre-register and then sign in when they arrive, while it is not at all an issue for congregations that *publicly* live stream their liturgies. In the case of our own community of saint benedict's table, time and again we have heard from participants that they finally felt safe to come to worship without having to worry whether or not they might be accepted.

Dr. Brittain's third reason for discouraging the practice of virtual communion is that, "Scripture and tradition present the Eucharist as being inherently communal." "It is not," he continues, "merely something one watches passively but it requires the active participation of those who have gathered." To this I can only offer my very hearty agreement. Our community uses a fixed sentence for the breaking of the bread in our communion liturgies, which reinforces the communal and participatory character of our practice: "This is the Body of Christ: behold what you are, become what you receive." Yet is a virtual communion liturgy for which people have carefully prepared and in which they are able to see the names and photographs of other participants and even share comments one with another without some communal elements? To be sure, it is not the same thing as being gathered together in a shared space, a loaf of bread and cup of wine set out before us to be shared, but virtual connections can be connections all the same. And when Dr. Brittain then observes, "Moreover, as Paul emphasizes, there can be no divisions among participants over who has access to it (for example, excluding those without reliable internet access, such as the poor and marginalized)," he again slips into a place of neglecting to ask, "and who is *not* able to participate with us when we do actually gather?"

In addition Rachel Twigg's reflections on her experience of who was able to participate in that particular virtual communion, I offer here the example of a young woman in our community who lives with a chronic illness that so taxes her physical strength that in the normal course of things she finds herself able to get to the liturgy only once every five or six weeks. Since we had to suspend in person gatherings and move to live streaming she has not missed a single Sunday, and has asked if we'll be able to continue streaming even after our gatherings have fully resumed.

Yet I believe it is important to take seriously Dr. Brittain's caution "that digital media and online engagement bring costs as well as benefits."

There is a substantial amount of academic literature emerging on the effect of new communications technology on human relationships and identity. Increasingly, such research raises concerns over the negative influences of the internet and social media. Some studies suggest that online networking can impact negatively on human emotional life.

Ultimately I think that we need to recognize that the sort of connections and community that takes place online cannot duplicate the intimacy that can be created and nurtured in person. I currently maintain a moderate presence on Facebook, and my profile now tells me that I have eight hundred and twenty “friends.” Quite clearly I can’t possibly maintain that number of friendships, particularly not if I look to the model of friendship set out by Aelred of Rievaulx in his twelfth century classic, *Spiritual Friendship*. Yet among my most treasured friendships are three people who live in other places across the country, with whom relationships continue to be cultivated by phone calls, email messages, and even letters and cards carried through Canada Post. In a sense, these are all “virtual media”, and all are enormously important in sustaining and deepening those friendships. Would I rather that those three friends all lived here in Winnipeg? Would I wish them to all get to know one another, in a shared circle of friends who I can regularly see face to face? Yes, of course. But would I stop my virtual communication with them simply because I rarely see them face to face? No.

In an article from 2011 advocating the use of distance and virtual models for theological education, Jason Byassee makes note of this very dynamic:

I will still maintain that the best setting in which to grow in wisdom and love with God and neighbor is interpersonal, face-to-face meeting punctuated by worship, meals together and service. And yet such meetings are not always possible. We are embodied beings and bodies can only be in one place. This is why St. Paul so often longs to be with the congregations from whom he is absent in the body. But notice what he doesn’t do: he doesn’t wait to offer them his words until he can be with them. He sends them letters. Letters meant to be read corporately, perhaps even to lead to worship or be part of it. Such letters allow him to engage personally without being present personally. They are a poor substitute in some ways. In others they are superior. We have preserved St. Paul’s letters. Unfortunately we do not have his face-to-face conversations.⁵

Relationships and community formed and nurtured in a virtual environment may not be quite as satisfying as that built through “interpersonal, face-to-face meeting punctuated by worship, meals together and service,” but it does bring opportunities. Here I would point to our community’s current practice of offering Evening Prayer online each weekday at 5pm. On most of those days there are between fifteen and twenty people signed in to participate, often with more than just one person present on any given screen. Many of the people who attend are drawn from our core church membership, but a good number have only ever connected to us in this manner, with several coming from locations outside of our city. Participants will see the names and images of the others who are present, and over the seven months we have been doing this there have been connections made. People will check in with one another as they await the beginning of the service, sending greetings, sharing resources, offering to pray for one another. For years I have wanted to pray a daily office with others from the community, and now—on account of the need to overcome the isolation of these times and through this virtual medium—that prayer is being steadily offered, day after day after day.

⁵ <https://faithandleadership.com/jason-byassee-virtual-theological-education>

Of course, aside from Dr. Ephraim Radner,⁶ almost no one would raise a theological objection to the practice of virtual Evening Prayer. What is at stake here is the question of a virtual communion, and specifically of the sort in which participants bring their own bread and wine to their own tables. Alongside of the concerns raised by Dr. Brittain, a common question is whether or not it is theologically possible to share in communion if the participants are not together in person, sharing in the bread and wine that has been set out on the communion table and consecrated there, under that roof, by a priest of the community? Put another way, can the bread I baked at home be paired with the wine given me by a friend, set out on my dining room table where I've set out a cloth and lit a candle in preparation for the live stream, be considered part of the same bread and wine that I see the priest hold up on the screen of my laptop? Is it even reasonable to think in such terms?

In a blog post from October 20, 2020 titled "'Filling my soul at a time of despair': Can Communion Truly Happen Online?"⁷, The Rev. Dr. Robert Fennell makes an appeal to what he calls the "small but mighty doctrine" of the ubiquity of Christ. Perhaps a small volume could be written on the doctrine, which was much favoured by Luther and deeply impacted early Lutheran eucharistic theology, but the short definition offered by Dr. Fennel will suffice for our purposes: "the teaching of the Church that after his death, resurrection, and ascension, the Risen Christ is present everywhere (ubiquitous)."

I sincerely believe, as many have believed before me, that the Risen Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, is everywhere present. Marry this doctrine of ubiquity with the doctrine of the Triune God's sovereignty (which says, in brief, that God decides what God does, and how – not us), and we have a potent case for virtual communion.

We also can trust, and even cling to, the ubiquity of Jesus Christ, whose sovereignty in and with the Holy Spirit lets him be really present wherever and whenever and however he chooses to be. That's his call, not ours.

Who am I to suggest that Jesus cannot be present, cannot bind believers together even at a distance, cannot impart the gifts of the Holy Spirit, cannot bless and nurture and feed his separated flock? Who are we to impose such limitations on the Creator of All? What is a pandemic in the face of such awesome, gracious, transformative, liberating power?

There is a lightness and playfulness to Dr. Fennel's words, but then of course he was writing this for his blog and not for an academic journal. There is an even more marked playfulness to Robert Farrar Capon's presentation of the eucharist and how the elements are consecrated. In a chapter entitled "Zapping" from his book *Hunting the Divine Fox*, Capon begins by challenging the way that many people think about the presence of Christ in the sacrament of communion, too easily defaulting to language that suggests that Jesus *becomes* present in the bread and wine. This, Capon maintains, is a problem, "Because it implies that his presence occurs after a previous absence."

⁶ <https://livingchurch.org/covenant/2020/03/20/should-we-live-stream-worship-maybe-not/>

⁷ <https://creedalandlovingit.wordpress.com/2020/10/20/filling-my-soul-at-a-time-of-despair-can-communion-truly-happen-online/>

For in fact, there is no sense in which Jesus can be said to show up at Communion. Not in a natural sense, for the Mystery of the Word of which Jesus is the supreme sacrament was in the bread—and on the altar, and in the pews, and out in the parking lot, and down in the cesspool—twenty minutes before the Mass started and ten seconds after the world began. And not in a religious sense, because Jesus, in his Godhead and in his Manhood—crucified, risen, ascended, and coming again—is fully present in all the baptised. He doesn't show up in a room from which he was absent. He sacramentalizes himself in a room in which he was already present. The bread and wine of Communion are not a peephole through which the church checks out some mysterious stranger who wants to come in for a visit. They are a mirror that the church holds up before her face to see the Mystery that is already inside her and at home.⁸

The point for both Capon and Fennel is the same, whether or not Capon uses the term “the ubiquity of Christ”. The living Christ is with us, and there is nowhere that he cannot be. This reminder, I believe, frees us from overly worrying about the mechanics of *how* Christ is made present to us in the eucharist, and most specifically in bread and wine that is raised up and then consumed in different locations, yet still together.

Needless to say, Dr. Brittain would not come reach the same conclusion. He has no problem with affirming that “God can be present in such [online media] encounters,” but to this

Because this is true, I have no issue with the practice of holding prayer services and worship online. But whether God is present or not does not decide the debate over virtual communion; instead, the issue has to do with how we are present to each other and to our neighbours.

This matter of “how we are present to each other and to our neighbours” is picked up on by Hannah Bowman in her article “Virtual Communion and the Call to Discern the Body.”⁹ In Bowman's view, the real theological question related to virtual communion is “a question of discerning the body (1 Cor. 11:29): both the presence of Christ in the material, consecrated elements, and the nature of the gathered community.” Bowman points out that this experience of *not* being able to gather in our accustomed ways has in fact left us with a sense of what she calls “unity-in-distance.” Yes, we connect virtually, and may in fact find our practice of prayer deepened or enhanced, as has been the experience of daily online Evening Prayer for the saint benedict's table community. People reach out to one another through phone calls, text messages, and email, checking in to see how others in the community are weathering the challenges of isolation and loss, and yet still grieving the distance. “This unity-in-distance,” Bowman asserts, “is precisely the situation of Jesus on the cross, as Jürgen Moltmann describes it in *The Crucified God*.”

⁸ Robert Farrar Capon, *Hunting the Divine Fox*. Anthologized in *Romance of the Word*, Eerdmanns, 1995. p.363.

⁹ <https://livingchurch.org/covenant/2020/04/03/virtual-communion-and-the-call-to-discern-the-body/> Note that all quotations from Hannah Bowman are from this source.

In the cross, Father and Son are most deeply separated in forsakenness and at the same time are most inwardly one in their surrender. What proceeds from this event between Father and Son is the Spirit which justifies the godless, fills the forsaken with love and even brings the dead alive, since even the fact that they are dead cannot exclude them from this event of the cross; the death in God also includes them. (Moltmann, cited in Bowman)

It is the broken body of Christ crucified to which the eucharist directs us; not, mind you, without tones of resurrection sounding through us as we share in the bread and cup. Yet in a time when we are separated, the tension between unity and separation—or, as Bowman prefers, “unity-in-separation”—brings a particular and poignant reason to not rush past the scandal of the cross.

If this unity-in-separation is already made evident in the virtually-gathered congregation, how much more so in a material practice that makes that separation and isolation visible as well, as each one brings their own gifts, at a distance, and understands them to be made truly, at a distance, Christ’s body and blood? To proclaim that “we are one body because we share one bread, one cup” as we raise separate breads is a proclamation of precisely this unity-in-separation that is the life of the Trinity at the cross. A virtual Eucharist presents the body of Christ in the full scandal of its abandonment.

I take from Bowman the point that the opportunity presented to us in these days is to learn to “discern the body” when the body can’t gather in its accustomed ways but is instead, of necessity, largely virtual.

[I]n this time when live-streaming is necessary as the most accessible way to reach out to the divided worshipping community, adding a (carefully catechized) practice of virtual Communion to such live streams would provide another way to recognize the presence of the crucified Christ to each of us in our isolation and to build community from the “outside in,” even under the technological constraints of centralized live streams that are necessary at the present moment. And while I would not expect virtual Communion to remain a normal part of our liturgical practice once this crisis is past, we should consider its ongoing relevance to those who are prevented by circumstance from gathering with the church in person or even from receiving communion from visiting ministers, such as those in solitary confinement. Their experiences should always remain at the center of our understanding of who we are as the community of the Church.

Bowman’s point about building community from the “outside in” is significant, and not narrowly for these hard days. As Rachel Twigg pointed out, one of the most interesting discoveries regarding online liturgies is found in the number of people who have found it possible—or emotionally safe—to join in. This includes people for whom reasons of distance, (dis)ability, infirmity, or even identity can make walking through the doors of a church building a challenge. As we plan what we do and how we gather as church communities and go to work discerning the shape and calling of our own specific and local manifestation of the body, do we dare to start at the “outside” and ask the question, “Who is *not* here”?

Such a question is an important one to ask, whether now in the time of upheaval or in the future as things begin to return to something more familiar and recognizable in the life of the church. I resist using the phrase “return to normal”—and dislike the catch phrase “the new normal”—as I suspect that whatever awaits us on the other side of the current crisis will at the very most sound a few notes of familiarity.

Prior to March 2020 most churches were moving along according to the beat of *kronos*, or the kind of linear time marked by the clock and calendar. Lent was underway, the plans for Holy Week falling were into place, and a new Pascal candle had been ordered. By the Third Sunday in Lent it was clear that many of those plans might need to be re-imagined, and then within just two days the word dropped that even what was remaining in Lent would need to be utterly reconfigured due to the suspension of all public gatherings in our church buildings. We were no longer marching along according to *kronos* but had instead encountered *kairos*; a decisive moment of both upheaval and of new imaginings. And while the clock has continued to tick and the pages of the calendar continue to be turned, we remain in a state of *kairos*. Deeply discomfiting and disorienting for most of us on at least some days, this *kairos* period invites boldness, improvisation, and faithfulness. It stands as an almost liminal chapter in our story, the other side of which will both bear the scars of these days but also shift us toward the chapters that lie beyond. No return to normal, but rather a new beginning born of what we now know from having walked through *kairos*.

Early in this paper I suggested that my position here is relatively modest, in that I seek only to be granted permission to implement a practice of weekly virtual communion liturgies for a limited six-month trial period. That remains my foremost concern, though I am also attentive to one further question raised by Hannah Bowman:

What if, instead, this crisis of separation — a crisis in which community is fractured by distance yet still united by communication — in a way, made newly possible by modern technology — is an opportunity for new ways of discerning the body of Christ, and for new theological reflection on the nature of that body, with relevance to our ongoing liturgical practice even once the crisis is past?

When a church finds itself in a *kairos* period of uncertain duration, it must dare to improvise and to learn, otherwise it risks the kind of ossification from which it will never emerge. The proposed six-month trial period may well be something that will bear fruit for the wider church—the wider body of Christ—or it might turn out to be a not altogether satisfying measure put in place for the time being. If it is not tested and shaped by actual practice, we will simply never know.

Jamie Howison
The Feast of St Simon and St Jude, 2020