

16 June 2020 / Notes from Dreaming Church Beyond Pandemic

Introduction (Claire) - [It would be great to have Claire's notes]

Prayer (Ryan) - *God calls us together, even via Zoom.*

Dwelling in the Word - John 21:4-14

- *Jesus took bread.* Jesus provides; it's not up to us to manufacture. // Also, *bring some of the fish you've just caught.* Provision includes folks "caught" via move to online during pandemic.
- New patterns, doing things in new ways. // Jesus gives what he already has (*catch of fish, already cooking fish on the fire*).
- *Bread and fish.* Jesus provides out of abundance.
- Jesus nourishes. Real, physical nourishment, but also follow the story on to Peter's forgiveness and healing later in ch 21.
- "*Have you caught any fish?*" vs. "*Have you found anything to eat?*" Imaginations of "catching fish" as evangelism vs. nourishment.
- The disciples' awareness of who Jesus is was gradual; it took time. // The meal already prepared is like God already working in the midst of pandemic.
- Jesus addresses and employs them out of who they are. We don't need to be someone else.
- The beloved, close-relationship disciple is the one who helps move things forward.

Story Sharing / "Dwelling in the World"

- "Pandemic eyes" and exhaustion. I'm still functioning but not at an optimal level.
- There's a continued need for humor. Wearing a funny, Halloween mask to the dentist got a good response and made for good connection with others. Encouraging.
- Early in pandemic, it was good, especially for the kids who got to spend more time with me. But now there's parenting exhaustion. Cancellation of school has been hard, as has been the cancellation of church life. There's been a lot of effort around worship (and little else, see Doug K's CM article). Is worship all we have left?
- Relating to church from my dining room is not my first choice. Daily walks with friends in town and driveway visits have been good. We don't usually have time for this kind of relating in normal life. Caring for my elderly parents has been hard. My dad needs help, but we can't visit, and he can't visit my mom who is in a care home. I'm growing in patience and understanding.
- I've been connecting with people I don't usually connect with because of COVID-19. It's awkward to preach on Zoom. At first I tried to host a simple sharing time, but there's strong pressure for Zoom to be as like "regular Sunday morning worship" as possible. There's a tension between what people want (the old normal, which feels artificial on Zoom) and what feels more natural on this medium (sharing).
- I've enjoyed "visiting" other congregations' services online—something we usually wouldn't have the opportunity to do. We're not "captured by geography" in the same way.

- This has given us the opportunity to connect with people across the nation and around the globe. Our small congregation has had many special speakers from around the much wider church. This has been a time of deepening connection.

Key themes from these shared stories

- Violence [This comment seems to reflect the wider social situation, not what was shared above]
- Mental health challenges [Likewise, though a few a comments allude to extra stress on mental health]
- Exhaustion
- Fear about the future [Again, more a comment about our wider situation, not our conversation]
- Expanded connection and expanded exposure to wider realities
- Deeper tuning in to our human vulnerability and that of our neighbors

[BREAK]

Scenarios

Number One: A push to get together within exposed social divisions and overshadowing fear an uncertainty [Claire - *It would be great to get notes here too*]

Responses (personally, congregationally, for our neighbors)

- There would be huge opportunities to live our faith in every aspect of our lives. To be *followers* of Jesus.
- The response categories assume a bit of a false dichotomy between the inner life of the church and the outer life of our neighbors. These two are being exposed as not so separate. Because people need community so much, these barriers are crumbling down, reclaiming a parish theology. This is what Jesus is exposing in this season.
- This scenario feels tense and tiring, with division in congregations over reopening. Also in personal life. I'd feel tired of trying to hold these together.

Number Two: A safety first mentality exposes divisions over who can afford a more self-contained lifestyle and who cannot. [Ryan]

Responses (personally, congregationally, for our neighbors)

- The tension between opening vs. staying distant is deep in our congregations.
- Hope. We can live as people of hope in this context.
- Hope. The church offers a different quality of hope. A CBC Ideas episode named how "we are socialized for scarcity." What kind of hope do we offer in this midst of this?
- I have to tell my elderly and isolated dad there is hope, even if I don't always feel it myself.

- Sometimes the more sides are in a conflicted situation, the healthier a congregational system can be. New conflicts can disrupt entrenched older conflicts. We would have an opportunity to ask "What is the third way now?" We would need to pick what works in each community, with strategies being different in different congregations.
- We're being invited into *solidarity* and to embrace *disequilibrium*. We need to let this teach us what it needs to teach us.

Sharing of dreams moving forward and connections to Jn 21

- The history of the Christian church (after the resurrection during persecutions) allows us to see that, in comparison, our suffering and the change we're facing is small. We're challenged to follow the Spirit in a transformation of what witness and discipleship mean.
- Food. We need to allow ourselves to be fed. This learning challenge for us—to not be in control (disequilibrium), giving up institutionalism, loosening up amid the chaos, learning to move much faster. We face a growing need for trust.
- Being a town pastor. We need to get beyond our church walls, walking in our communities as people of hope. We still want to meet together, but there's so much more out there. People are hurting, and they're willing to talk. We're being given a window that could be very transformational.

Blessing

