

10 April 2020 (*Good Friday*)

Dear Friends of Elmwood,

If the cloud of COVID-19 had not descended upon us, we'd have gathered in the sanctuary to mark Good Friday, that most solemn day in the Church Year. It has been our practice to share this day with our United Church friends from Calvary, White Oaks, and Wesley-Knox Churches. This year it was Elmwood's turn to act as host. The Choir had been working hard to prepare special, sacred music under Lorraine Clark's gifted leadership. But that is not to be. Not this year.

I've attached material you can use to worship where you are on Good Friday, alone or with others. I will be worshipping too, in the sanctuary of Elmwood, but physically alone. Though we'll be in separate places, our worship will be in common.

Many Churches, I notice, have turned to livestreaming, and other forms of broadcasting over the internet. 'Zoom' is suddenly popular, despite its hazards. Some were doing this already. Others have used this crisis as their chance to jump in with both feet. I have so far resisted this move. This is not because I'm a Luddite and the results would embarrass me, though you'd be excused for thinking so.

Mind you, the Luddites were not fuddy-duddies who hated every new technology. Far from it. They were working class protesters, highly skilled, and part of a once-thriving cottage industry in 19th century England. In an act of class revolt, they smashed the new industrial looms run by *nouveau riche* factory owners. The new technology threatened the Luddites' livelihoods and ran them out of business, widening a wealth gap that was already far too wide. But 'Luddite' is now a disparaging label for anyone opposed to automation, computerization, or *any* new technology. The note of 'social justice' has been lost.

But I digress – except to say this: every new technology introduces unintended consequences. We celebrate them, use them, enjoy them. But new technologies introduce new risks. In solving one set of problems, they create new ones.

We blithely believe we can control how new technologies will and will not be used, but we can't. They end up using us in ways we could never have predicted and are too slow to notice. Rather than conforming them to our needs, they conform us to theirs.

This is true, too, with attempts to funnel acts of worship through computer technology and the internet. They turn worship into one more kind of entertainment, a performance by clergy and choir for religious consumers. This illness had already infected too much Protestant worship. Livestreaming worsens it. If we don't perceive this as a problem, we may think Livestreaming is called for and obvious. I, myself, have enjoyed Evensong Services on YouTube from the Chapel of my old College in Cambridge. The music is exquisite, the prayers sonorous, the preaching, well...so, so. But having watched it, I would never say I have worshipped.

I don't think genuine worship survives technological transformation onto a screen, no matter how 'high definition' the image or how crisp the sound. We see images, we hear voices, yes. But this is a different experience, and it's not worship. It asks much less of us, for one thing. We can't share in worship by livestreaming any more than we can share a meal over Facebook. Worship happens in shared time *and* shared space. This is why we have sanctuaries. This is why we need to gather to worship.

The Church's technologies are ancient, necessary and sufficient: bread, cup, and water; table, font and pulpit; scripture, prayer book and hymn book. We're denied these right now. Maybe, by missing them, we'll cherish them more.

Am I wrong? (It happens a lot!) I'm still formulating my thoughts about this. Tell me yours if you wish. Or just tell me how you're faring. I'll write you again and send more worship material in time for Easter. You can always press delete or unsubscribe.

(Well done, you! You read the whole thing.)

Yours in the faith,
Andrew