

Playing and praying in a virtual world

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I've been thinking a lot about this on-line worship. As you know Communion is coming up week after next and some people are a little bewildered about the how and why. We keep talking about virtual worship and virtual relationships – as if it is something other than real. So, I want to share my thinking with you.

First of all, virtual does not mean it doesn't exist – it simply means other worldly. Not physically present but represented or carried in another media or universe. I have said to you on a number of occasions that Jesus calls us to be other worldly. We are answerable to a higher being not physically present on this planet – but present in ways and actions, people and love; kindness and mercies – very little of what you can 'see'.

That Jesus became God visible – is a big thing but it doesn't mean we didn't believe in God before.

Then, I would say, what are our prayers if not virtual? We try and make them see-able (visible) in rituals such as writing them on scraps of paper; hanging them on the Christmas tree and setting them aloft tied to balloons – but in fact, our prayers are real...and invisible.

We have faith in prayer points; prayer circles and corporate prayer. So how is it different on zoom? The distance doesn't change it – it is still a prayer – and when you know someone is praying with youno matter how far away, it is still a prayer.

And finally, Jesus was the master of virtual faith. When he healed the Canaanite Woman's daughter in Matthew 15:21-27, her daughter wasn't there!

And she said, "Yes, Lord; but please help, for even the dogs feed on the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ...and HE said, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed at once."

Then there was the Syrophenician's child in Mark 7:24-30.. Too embarrassed to take him home...

Jesus still rewards her faith - even as a foreigner..."Because of her answer, he says go back, your daughter is cured... " And after going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone. And when she healed:

Not convinced? - what about the Centurion's Slave in Luke 7:1-10?

The Centurion says his house is not worthy of a visit from Jesus but again, faith is rewarded... "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith."

And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

You get my point. When we are together on zoom – **we are as together in spirit as humanly possible** – but with pictures.... For some. Not for those on the telephone.

It may feel like we are playing but we are, in fact, praying.

And the virtual world has its benefits. It has literally turned the tables over in the temple. It throws open the doors. We can include people stuck in other states, people who couldn't get to church physically. We can even invite our families.

We have an opportunity to reshape worship in a way that better meets our needs. It's can be shorter, more visual – you control the volume, you can stay in you PJs and turn off the picture; pass notes to each other with recipes and questions.

I had to rethink what to present. Some of my colleagues are producing really slick looking worship – but they do that by pre-recording 'a program'. Then they broadcast on Sunday mornings. really slick and beautiful - have a look at Canberra City Church on YouTube...for example.

I have chosen to do it live, messy with mistakes. It is not as slick as my standards demand but its human, honest and real because we are stumbling our way through it together. That to me is what real worship is. The notes we miss, the mistakes; the fumbling and stumbling are still given with whole hearted commitment and it is divine love translated into our imperfect selves. I believe that is all God wants.

We are honest in our devotion. We are committed to His community. When we have communion, you too can break the bread. You can raise the cup and bless it. The 'curse' of virtual service means that you physically get to hold and love the bread that will feed you. I will wash it with my prayers but you will get a tactile experience you never had before!

Praise God!

And praise Zoom and all its glory because God gave us the geniuses to invent it and our clumsy but brilliant ways of using it.

Blessings to you – and thank you. Thank you for joining me on this adventure.

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