

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered-Down

Thursday, September 24, 2020

Bridging the New Digital Divide

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To God's elect, strangers in the world scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance. –Peter 1:1-2

For many years we heard of a *digital divide* and how certain portions of our society were being left out from countless opportunities due to their inability to access the internet and computers. This was, and is, a real problem, although that divide has been narrowing. Since the virus I have become aware of a new kind of digital divide, and fortunately there seems to be some positive movement with this one too. Certainly, you are aware of the sides involved. On the one side are the digital enthusiasts who excitedly present and promote the technological “solutions” to our COVID isolation. On the other side of this chasm are the detractors who are not so sold on these “solutions,” and feel a bit reluctantly dragged into an unwanted new level of digital involvement. (And yes, I am among this latter group.)

The enthusiasts have been quick to step forward and offer help in the face of great social disruption, and I am immensely grateful for the many digital blessings of our day. It has been wonderful to be able to send daily meditations and sermons by e-mail. Numerous video-recorded lessons and sermons have gone out when none could attend a service. YouTube and our website have served as repositories for these messages. How dark and silent these days would have been without these technologies! But this is only the beginning, as the true enthusiasts have shown us ways of doing inter-active worship on a Sunday morning. There have been interactive choirs and live-streaming worship. I am not even sure exactly what this is, let alone how it is done, but in churches all around us the enthusiasts are having their day! And of course, there is the now famous Zoom Meeting and various kinds of inter-active video communications. These meetings have been as small as a few folks, and as large as the Lancaster Association and the Penn Central Conference. The enthusiasts have a great deal to brag about, and many of them do! Gladly we have been spared any boastful digital folks here at St. Luke's, but I have come across many elsewhere who smugly recite all the communication miracles that they have and are performing. According to these people, all problems can be solved with the touch of a button and the right technical guidance (theirs). It isn't quite fair that these over-zealous and

occasionally boastful ones give the normal digital enthusiast a bad name, but that is the way these things go.

Then there are the detractors. Despite what some may say, these folks are generally not anti-technology. It is just that their enthusiasm lags far behind that of the digital fanatics and they feel as though they have been dragged into a level of computer work far beyond their comfort zone. They also don't appreciate those who imply that their computer ineptitude may indicate low intelligence. While detractors can easily fall into the sin of complaining and nit-picking, they often do speak appropriately critical assessments which the enthusiasts need to consider. Not all have computer access and some are very uncomfortable with computers. Hearing and sound quality can be a real problem. I have yet to be a part of a Zoom meeting where there wasn't at least one person who had great difficulty getting on board. The technology is not as refined and reliable as many like to think and glitches abound. Some weeks ago I watched the Penn Central Conference annual meeting on line. They managed to pull off the meeting with all its speakers and numerous special features. It was also loaded with glitches and pauses during which problems were traced and resolved. By the end of the day I felt as though I had finished a long ride over a very bumpy road. It was exhausting, but there was a satisfaction in having met as we needed to meet!

It was in the days following that meeting that I felt the digital divide beginning to close, at least in my spirit. I am learning to appreciate the technophiles among us, for they have done a tremendously valuable work of keeping us connected. I am grateful for all the hard work they have put in. In their zeal they often grossly underestimate the actual amount of time and energy involved in their work. Yes, the overzealous and boastful among them can still rub me the wrong way, but I am getting used to that. And while I am softening as a detractor, I still believe that we more cautious minds have much to say to the digitally obsessed. There ain't nothin' like the real thing, and critical voices need to be raised when some speak of the gathered church as becoming obsolete in the digital age. The technology still has a long way to go, and realistic critiques also need to be made when the new high-tech may not be reaching as many as the enthusiasts believe.

Zoom meetings are no longer necessary within St. Luke's, but in our involvements with the wider church, with school and with work, we are still very much in the digital mode. I will be thrilled when this is over, but in the meantime, we press on. Staying connected is a struggle, even when there is no virus, but this is at the core of our faith and calling. Peter and the Apostles addressed a scattered Church, and used all the resources they could to hold them together. May all Christ's people live and work harmoniously as we do our all to keep Christ's Church together and vibrant.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

O Sovereign and almighty Lord, bless all thy people and all thy flock. Give thy peace, thy help, thy love unto us thy servants, the sheep of thy fold, that we may be united in the bond of peace and love, one body and one spirit, in one hope of our calling, in thy divine and boundless love.

—Liturgy of St. Mark, 2nd century