

During a recent Zoom meeting of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut's *Faithful Futures* program, a number of clergy and lay leaders discussed their initial responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and their thoughts on what a hybrid scenario would look like as they returned to in-person worship. Basically, how might the transition to more people in person--with people remaining at home and participating in worship online--look? One clergy person offered a frame for considering this transition time based on the reading from John 4, where Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman at a well. In the story, we read:

The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

The tension between Samaritans and Jews in the first century was palpable. The idea of one location to worship God--on Mt. Gerizim in Samaria or on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem--was less an act of spiritual piety and more a power play. In Jesus' day, Jerusalem won. Yet, Jesus dismisses both locations--Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Zion--and offers up a radically new idea. No longer is the location that one prays from a marker of the efficaciousness of the prayer. Rather, worshipping God in John's gospel is done *through* one. Namely, Jesus. The spirit and truth Jesus speaks about is the access that he offers not only to Jews but Samaritans and all people beyond the first covenant.

While worship in the sanctuary in person or worship at home via livestream do not possess the tension that existed between Samaritans and Jews, it is not a huge stretch to understand that we can become comfortable with our locations. Comfort can morph into preference which can morph into priority which--before you know it--can morph into a full blown expectation that *this* is the place to worship. (Let's hope that we never find ourselves in this position.) And, we know that such a scenario is easy for humans to get lulled into. We are, after all, creatures of habit.

At present, our focus is on how to return to in-person worship well and safely. A corollary to this is also how to keep a rich and robust experience for those who will remain at home. What we often say about the Episcopal Church--it is not either/or it is both/and--holds true in spades for this moment in time. I do not know what the future of worship will look like at this point, but the future cannot be a closed off *either* one offering *or* another. Rather, what we live into will be tweaked and altered in hopes that it engages and enriches everyone wherever they are at. I am thankful for a number of committed individuals who will help with this work so that there is a meaningful and vibrant experience for all.

On another note, I participated in a Stamford Health Forum last night sponsored by the City's Health Department. It was a panel discussion on vaccinations from a religious perspective. A full spectrum of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim leaders spoke eloquently, passionately, and faithfully about their traditions encouragement for people who can get vaccinated to do so. Among the traditions, the focus on caring for the other, living in service through love, and the connection between faith and science were echoed throughout the meeting. The moment was brief, but the content was timeless. May we all continue to hold up these core principles within our own tradition, engage in the richness of diversity that is found in Stamford, and, in the process, embody a little of the will of God here and now.