

Subject: A New Thing - Virtual and Real Lord's Supper  
Date: April 3rd, 2020

Dear Members and Friends of Newton Presbyterian Church,

We have already learned several new things through our time of online worship. We have learned to pray together without being physically present. We have learned to reach out to each other at the Passing of the Peace by text or email or instant messaging. We've learned to put in online giving, either through a computer or a smart phone app. The talented volunteers have learned a lot about putting together the services as well, making strides each week to make the experience more spiritually fulfilling as well as technically polished.

Now we embark on a new challenge. This Palm Sunday, we will engage in a service of the Lord's Supper without being physically present to each other. The necessities were maintained. Our Session approved this service. A minister of Word and Sacrament and a Ruling Elder celebrated. The elements of bread and the fruit of the vine – grape juice in this case – were observed. I, as your Temporary Pastor, have been in theological conversation with ministers across the church. The shared belief is that our Reformed theology permits this, because God is a Spirit, and those who would worship him must worship in Spirit and in truth. (John 4.24) The Scots Confession tells us that "...this union and conjunction which we have with the body and blood of Christ Jesus in the right use of the sacraments is wrought by means of the Holy Ghost, who by true faith carries us above all things that are visible, carnal, and earthly, and makes us feed upon the body and blood of Christ Jesus, once broken and shed for us but now in heaven, and appearing for us in the presence of his Father. Notwithstanding the distance between his glorified body in heaven and mortal men on earth, yet we must assuredly believe that the bread which we break is the communion of Christ's body and the cup which we bless the communion of his blood." Since Christ can overcome the distance between heaven and earth, surely we know that our God can overcome the distance between our various homes!

So, to prepare for this, what do you need? You should prepare by setting out some bread and grape juice. If you are unable to obtain either, whether because of quarantining, or the stores do not have it, remember this famous phrase of St. Augustine's that John Calvin frequently quoted, "Only believe, and you have already eaten." When that moment comes in the service, we invite you to share the bread and cup with others around you, so that you may see the face of Christ in the faces of those with you. I look forward to this new moment in our life together, and for the lessons we will learn from passing through these challenges by God's providence.

In Christ's mercy,

RW

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