

The Body of Christ

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Introduction

As most of you are aware, churches have now been given the green light by the government to hold public worship once more – after a 3 month enforced hiatus, we can now start to meet in person once again. Here at All Saints Walsoken, we intend to hold our first post lockdown service on Sunday 5th July. We will have a Prayer Book Communion service at 8 o'clock, followed by a 10:30 service – this was our normal the pattern of services before lockdown; and 5th July being the first Sunday of the month, the 10:30 service will also be Holy Communion.

However, although we can now meet in our church buildings again, it won't be business as usual. One big difference is that, initially at least, we won't be able to sing, so will have to make do with recorded music for the time being. Communion will be in one kind only for now – so it will be the wafer but no wine. We will all have to observe social-distancing rules, which are likely to be with us for some time yet. There will be no refreshments after the service, and parts of the church will be roped-off, so that cleaning can be kept manageable.

Virtual Services

Given all this, some maybe saying, "well why bother coming back?" And, it's a fair question. After all, over the last 3 months we've all made the shift to online 'virtual services' and live streaming; if not on the internet then on the TV, perhaps watching "Songs of Praise" or "The Sunday Service".

However, as useful and as helpful as these internet and TV services have been during lockdown, they cannot become a long-term or permanent replacement for the gathering together of the Christian family on a Sunday morning for worship. We do need to re-establish our physical gathering together, in person, for the worship of our Lord, Jesus Christ. And I'll share with you some reasons why. However, I need to mention that I have drawn some inspiration for this address from an online article by David Gunderson. If you'd like to read that article, you can use this [LINK](#):

One reason we need to come back to church, is that we are physical beings and God gave us a physical a body – He made us out of the very soil of the earth. God has also given us a physical world in which to live, and we go through life using our five natural senses of touch, smell, sight, sound and taste. Meeting someone in real life is a very different experience to meeting them online. The point being that we were never meant to live in just a virtual world, because we are not virtual beings. As

helpful as the online or TV experience has been, it has its limitations. No loving family willing accepts a long-distance relationship as the norm, when it's fully possible to meet in person.

God's Family, One in Christ

The Holy Spirit draws us together in unity and in Christ and we share fellowship together. The fellowship that we share with one another is an intrinsic part of being a member of God's family. But a family that doesn't want to meet together, that is unable or unwilling to share fellowship, or meet other members of that same family, is dysfunctional. Christ wants His family to be healthy, not fractured or fragmented.

We are not just Christ's family though, we are also His body here on earth. As St. Paul tells us, we are Jesus' hands and feet now, and we each have our part to play, but again, we need to come together to function properly. If we remain separated, rarely or never meeting other members, we become a 'dislocated body'. Over time such a body we will cease to function and will eventually die.

Also, let's not forget that worship is a celebration – and who wants to celebrate alone? Earlier this week we saw the joyful scenes of celebration as Liverpool fans gathered together to celebrate their premier league victory. The fans just couldn't help but come together to rejoice in this moment – it's as though they were somehow compelled to do so by their joy and enthusiasm. Even with some lockdown restrictions still in place, they just had to gather together to rejoice – they wanted to be with other fans at this time, and they sang their victory songs as one.

Every Sunday is a celebration of Jesus' glorious Resurrection, His victory over death and sin, and so we should want to share this time of worship and rejoicing in God's love and goodness with others who rejoice in the same Good News. Who wants to sing and rejoice on their own? True, we can't sing at the moment, but that limitation is only temporary.

Family Meal

Finally at the heart of Christian worship is the family meal – Holy Communion. Whilst we have been able to listen to online sermons and watch worship on TV, what we haven't been able to do is receive the sacrament. And this is something we just can't do virtually, we really have to be there in person to receive the bread and wine. Family meals together, with all the members present around the table, are always special times, and are to be cherished. Especially in today's modern world, where such occasions in many families are now quite rare, sadly.

Whilst it's true that, initially at least, we will only be able to receive the sacrament in one kind, the bread, as the chalice will have to be withheld for the time being, we need to remember that receiving Communion in one kind only does not in any way diminish it's spiritual effectiveness. After three months of virtual worship, receiving Holy Communion again really is something to look forward to.

It may not be possible for you to return to church straightaway, especially if you're still shielding. But if you are able to return, then I urge you to do so, to come back and join in, because God's people need to come together again. As much as we've innovated and extended our reach online - and that's been a good thing, and we want to keep those 'digital developments' - I don't believe the Church can permanently migrate there, making the internet its new home. If the Church is to thrive and grow, then we absolutely need a physical presence as well; we need that sense of family and fellowship, grounded and serving in a local community.

Finally, I'd like to finish with a direct quote from Gundersen's article, he said:

“The Bible's vision of heaven doesn't look like a quarantine, a livestream, or a Zoom call. It's a “face to face” encounter with the risen Christ and a worshipful reunion of both saints and angels. In the life to come, we won't be siloed and segregated in mansions of glory, but living and working and loving and serving together in a new world where righteousness dwells.”

Amen.