

A reflection in the time of Covid19

by Betsy Marcelin

After accepting the request to write a reflection I was trying to find a place to start...and I was having trouble. I'm not good with open ended requests. As I was participating, on-line, in Sunday Morning Prayer, Chad began to sing the Gloria and I burst into full on tears. I have been so impressed with the amount of work and creativity that our church leaders have put into bringing worship, study and fellowship into our homes. I shine with pride when I tell my friends about how glad I am to be a member of St. Peter's in the Woods and of the wonderful ways St. Peter's remains a part of my life in the midst of a pandemic. But in that moment, with that familiar song and voice that are so much a part of our community, I found myself feeling real grief. Grief for what we have lost and that we are unsure of what "coming back" will look like. Grief because there is so much that I am missing by not being able to be present with my church family.

I miss the ministry of altar guild and the hardworking folks who gather to set and keep our Lord's table. I often see team members giving one last look before worship begins just to make sure the items are in place and nothing is crooked! I love that these "checks" are not because we think God or our priest will be mad if something is not in place, but because we take pride in setting this table for a holy meal.

I miss my "back row" people who, as true Episcopalians, sit in our same chairs each week. You know who you are...troublemakers!

I miss hugs. We had a little preparation with elbow touching and waves early on, but purposefully staying away from human touch, especially in church and ESPECIALLY at the peace was difficult. Every week when I am sent off because "worship has ended and service begins", it is not only with the nourishment from Holy Communion and from God's teachings, but with the life filling hugs and good wishes from dear people. I feel this essential human need for communication through a simple touch in a new way these days and I worry that touch has become something to fear. We must be safe and humble in this time of pandemic, but I look forward to the day that I can have a Charlie Biggs hug along with many others.

I had been participating in the newish Contemplative Service at 5:00pm on Sundays. While I look forward to participating on-line, I realized the moment that I wait for is when there is an offer to receive a blessing or a prayer with one of the clergy. The mark of the cross made on my forehead with holy oil is special and I am realizing that it is the touch of the hands on my head that makes me feel safe and grounded. The sacredness of that experience lies in the words and touch, for those few seconds, meant only for me. I miss that touch.

I miss my friends! I am not native to this part of the country and I have lived in Virginia for almost 12 years. I moved here with 40 years of family and community in many places around the world, but not in Virginia. I admit, moving to Virginia was not my first choice. But over time I have been able to grow in acceptance that this is home and that much of my community is through St. Peter's. In different combinations you are people with whom I have studied, traveled, socialized, cooked, cleaned, created, wedding supported...the list goes on. And I have worshiped with all of you. How lucky I am.

And so yes, I am grieving. But I am grieving because I have been blessed. And what I know to be true is that no matter how we return, we will return. And we will be safe together in our space. And I live in the knowledge that God will be as happy as I will be when we are all together singing, "Glory to God in the highest..." – I can assure you I will be crying then too.