



St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

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September 23, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

When we began sheltering in place back in March, I invited us to remember the Exile or the Wandering in the Wilderness. Our faith story is full of times of dislocation and disillusionment. Ours is not a faith centered on a building, an altar, or any holy place, but in the risen Christ who is our liberator and sustainer.

Jesus teaches us that the bread that we break isn't only food. But he doesn't just mean bread either. He takes it upon himself. Jesus is the Bread of Life. Jesus is the Word of God.

Our gathering for worship, to eat literal bread and hear holy scripture is about our being changed by the one who draws us into transformation. It isn't just about the bread, even the Eucharistic bread. And it isn't just about the scripture, even the gospels of Jesus. It is Jesus himself that sustains and changes us. Even if we could eat no bread again or hear no words tomorrow, we would still have the presence of Christ with us, in us, among us.

This has been our challenge while apart. Not just to go without the things we long for. Or to be present to the people next to us. Even as these are good things. The challenge has been to know that presence in separation and to trust in it when we cannot see it or taste it or hear it.

You may be as eager as I am to be in community again. And given our present county numbers, this may be a window within which gathering is possible. But it's going to be a little different.

Sunday, **October 4 at 10:00 am**, I will be offering a service in the Lions 2 Shelter at **Deming Park**. It will be a mix of our traditional and original worship. If you plan to attend, please sign up at our website or call the office by Thursday, October 1.

Please remember that even though it is *safer* outside, it is not *safe*. Masks remain required. We will be distancing. And those in the at-risk group are encouraged to stay home.

Our regular streamed service will be running concurrently.

If you choose to attend, please bring with you

- Your mask on your face covering your mouth and nose
- A folding chair or blanket to sit on
- A device or order of worship printed from the website

(I will bring a few printed orders of worship for those who do not use computers)

- Bread

We will be celebrating an unconventional Eucharist. Rather than receiving a piece of bread from the table, you are invited to bring bread to our gathering as an offering. It will be blessed and you will be invited to eat. And if you bring more than a piece, you will have bread to eat at home, or to share with those who cannot be with us.

We don't know what the coming weeks will bring. Houses of worship have been a source of spreading in our community and the weight of keeping us safe is heavy. For those who wish to, this may be our best opportunity to gather.

And for those that cannot be with us, please know that you will be worshipping with us but in a different place. Your spiritual communion is just as filling as it is the Bread of Life who fills you. And that the winter ahead may bring a return to the patterns we built this spring and summer.

This is our wilderness time. Not a time for grumbling and assuming the worst. But of trust in the one who saves us. Who provides manna. The very means of life.

Grace and Peace,

The Rev. Andrew Downs

Rector, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church