

Surely, God is in Zoom worship (16A; Genesis 28:10-19a)

But that doesn't necessarily mean the sacraments belong there.

by [E. Carrington Heath](#)

July 17, 2020

To receive these posts by email each Monday, [sign up](#).

For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.

Over the past few months, I've learned a lot about Zoom. Like most clergy, I didn't learn the nuances of gathering community online in seminary. We have all been fumbling pastorally, trying to find out what does and does not work in online church.

A big debate in the clergy circles I follow has been over the permissibility of celebrating communion over the internet. Two distinct camps have emerged: one believes this to be a logical way forward for the church in this moment, while the other maintains that a virtual celebration is not a valid one.

So far I have chosen not to celebrate the sacraments until the church I serve is gathered in person again. For me, it has to do with the sacredness of the congregation, gathered in a specific place and time. Until we are gathered back into our sanctuary, we are simply waiting—and marking our longing.

This week's Genesis reading is about Jacob's journey in the wilderness and his dream of the ladder. In the morning, he wakes up and names the place where he slept "Bethel" or "house of God," proclaiming, "surely God is in this place."

In my personal theology of the sacrament, Christ is spiritually present in a real way. It's not simply a memorial to me, though I respect that it is for some. When I preside at the table, I call on the Holy Spirit to be present in the bread and cup in a real and life-changing way.

I've learned over the last few months that God can be in places I never expected: the gathered body of Christ dialed into the same Zoom call, for instance. My congregation has shared prayers, worshiped, and enjoyed fellowship with a depth that I've come to appreciate. Surely, God has been in this place.

Still, I can't quite get to the point of asking my parishioners to add bread and grape juice to their Instacart orders. God may be in this place, but I'm not sure that means that the sacrament belongs in every place we can imagine.

Here's the challenge. I'm not sure that I'm right. I'm used to having strong theological feelings on most things, and I have them here, too—it's just that they are inconveniently not aligned with just one side of this question. I can make arguments either way.

Perhaps God is in that place of tension, too.