*A Pandemic and* the Agile Church: Spirit-Led Innovation in an Uncertain Age

Chapter Four: Failing Wee, or What The Church Can Learn From Silicon Valley

Some reflections on the book your Synod Council is reading

In a lovely irony during this time of pandemic change, Dwight Zcheile’s fourth chapter is on the importance of innovation and failure. He writes “Chris Trimble provides a provocative metaphor. At one point in history, Polaroid was known as a highly innovative company. Its signature snapshots that didn’t require darkroom development prefigured today’s digital revolution of instant images. But Polaroid, like Kodak. has been marginalized in the world of digital photography. How did this happen? Trimble observes that Polaroid was too focused on its cameras. It loved its cameras more than its customers. He asks the church: ***Do we love church life more than we love our neighbors?”*** *(pg 68)*

I may not love church life more but I sure miss Sunday worship right now. Out of love for our neighbor, we are distancing ourselves while COVID-19 is present or possibly present. If you think that your faith will protect you from this virus you are abusing the brain and the faith God has given you. Don’t put others at risk by refusing to follow the recommendations from God’s gift of scientists.

Out of love for our neighbor we know and those we do not, our congregations are not meeting for public worship or meetings at least through the end of March. Schools are closed in Alaska and teachers are reconfiguring lessons to teach online. Pastors are figuring out how to “pastor” without a gathering congregation. We are learning new skills with online tools like ZOOM and Facebook while also going old-school with phone trees and shepherd groups to keep in touch and know how best to support each other.

Our pastors and congregational councils are trying to figure out how best to resource us for this journey. Staying connected with your congregation during this time of physical distance will be a gift to you and to others. This isn’t the first time the world has known the disruption of a disaster or war. Scripture is full of stories of people discovering who they are as God’s people in the midst of struggle, not in paradise.

Some have wondered how to honor Holy Week. If we aren’t able to assemble by then, we’ll still celebrate in our homes. Faith Lutheran/Delta Presbyterian are thinking about using their sound system for a parking lot service for people staying in their cars Easter Sunday. Imagine the engines roaring and horns honking while the riders shout Christ is Risen! Even now, keep the rhythm of your week with a time of worship on Sunday. Our fasting from communion during this time is a small sacrifice. That holy meal is not our salvation; it points us to Jesus Christ and his sacrificial, redeeming, abundant love poured out for this world. If you need a bible, tell your pastor.

Make peace with the absolute fact that you and I won’t get everything right as we try new things while missing the old comfortable patterns. A willingness to risk what is new is rooted in trust in God’s abiding presence and ability to work in and through us—especially in experiences that feel more like new shoes than comfortable slippers.

“Innovation is not like the Olympics, where you train for a decade only to win or love, but more like baseball, where losing 70 percent of the time is pretty good.” (pg 67)

I join you in praying each day for those known well and those who are strangers. Imagine the strong and gentle arms of God embracing them, showing them the way through this maze of information and emotion. Claim the good in having a different routine, even not of our choosing. Choose your attitude, repeatedly. Read the psalms for a reminder that lament is alongside thanksgiving. Frustration is found alongside faith.

I miss gathering for worship on Sunday, but that has never been the sum of being the church. Perhaps now, we’re cut loose to imagine and innovate as God’s faithful people.