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There are many identities I wear: friend, child, sibling, parent, spouse, educator, minister, lifelong learner, writer, producer, traveler. Living a compartmentalized life has helped me in the past.

But if I'm honest, the moments where I have truly felt alive are when all my identities are layered around me like a beautifully triumphant cape whose call to bravery and courage give me permission to live into God's dream for me. The separation within me, the edginess and harshness of difference dissipate into a united confidence. I live into a practice of faith that the God with whom "I live and have my being" has led me into the light.

Although my work outside the home has only been part-time this academic year, the transition from physically close meetings, events and errands to socially distanced experiences continues to bring great intimacy — and frustration. Although our daughter has lost the tactile and communal experience of story time at our local library, we have gained DIY ukulele lessons on our couch!

Trade-offs in the practice of this newfound intimacy are to be expected. Daily Zoom meetings with family not living in our house give me a peek into our daily practices that weekly or monthly gatherings never offered. I cook as my parents enjoy "seeing" my daughter, we listen to the random happenings in each of our days, and I accept or decline invitations for more gatherings, more support, more self-improvement. The range of emotion, vulnerability and playfulness vary as all my identities collide. There seem to be fluid lines between family and work.

The intimacy of storytelling becomes a deeper invitation to ritual and ritualizing moments in our collective story. But I still have problems seeing these opportunities as legitimate within the larger binary discourse within American society. The things I'm doing now seem to be alternatives to what we had been doing. And alternatives carry around a lightness, less serious, less real impression. "Alternative" gives us the sense that it (whatever or whomever it is) is less than.

Our alternatives to in-person graduation ceremonies serve as place-holders for the "real thing." We literally have posted lawn signs to signal celebration. Our online worship services are not just worship services, they are place-holders for our community gatherings in our church (building). Our Zoom calls cannot just be

meetings or calls, we continue to differentiate by using the terms "Zoom," "FaceTime" or "Hangout," as though the call was not truly a call.

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Jesus' disappointed and scared disciples must have understood their way of living after his death as just an alternative until he comes again. In fact, our entire Christian story is woven in that fabric of waiting. "We wait, in joyful hope, for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ." This life has always been understood as a poor alternative to the joy and peace of heaven.

Yet, Jesus tells us:

> If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows him. But you know him, because he remains with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live.

Can we come to trust this other Advocate within us and within our "where two or three are gathered in my name" community? Can we see that we have been given all that we need to build, tear-down, re-build, not build at all, a church environment where we can help to articulate and celebrate the beauty of God's presence living within and through us? Do we dare to cultivate our relationship with this Spirit as much as we cultivate a relationship with Jesus and with God, our creator?

If we continue to live mercifully, compassionately, kindly, certain in God's love and grace for us, then we can trust the Spirit that is within us. That's when our online worship service becomes a time of prayer in community. That's when our graduations become real moments of punctuation, perhaps a period and definitive end of a time well-spent as opposed to a question mark where we allow the lingering experience to breed self-doubt and discouragement. That's when our Zoom calls are strategy meetings, family gatherings, or time with our local librarians and curators of our culture.

This time is a special time. Many have said they actually hear the birds or that they notice the flowers more. Yes! The songs of the birds are less strained when we stay put and stay present to one another. The flowers receive more of our attention as our pace slows down; we become less segmented from ourselves and from nature.

That's why I enjoy my tears. I remember a time when tears were stifled, unwelcome, even barred from my daily awake experience of life. Like many, I was brought up not to show my tears, that this demonstration of sensitivity and vulnerability confessed a weakness, an inability to handle myself and these moments I was in.

But then I participated in a yearlong residency program serving as a chaplain in a hospital. My supervisor was not afraid of tears. In fact, he was curious about them. "What are those tears for?" he would ask.

After praying with that question, I began to examine the moments in my life when tears welled up inside me and overflowed down my cheeks. Can I be simultaneously angry and sad? Yes. Can I be simultaneously filled with gratitude and keenly aware of my unworthiness? Yes.

Tears invite me into myself and get me to see my strength, my curiosity, my desire for a better world. These tears connect with the example of Jesus, the loss of him in our story together and the ongoing gift of the other Advocate whose main role is to bring all us together again.

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