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"Gathering & Connecting"

*"How often have I desired to gather your children together
as a hen gathers her brood under her wings..."*

Luke 13:34

From my office window every morning I watch about a dozen finches flitting about the feeder in a flurry of yellow. On my walk yesterday I found the empty half shell of a delicate pale blue robin's egg. And right on schedule last week, the first Baltimore oriole arrived in a bright orange flash through my front garden. Meanwhile, out and about on a local sideroad I've spied a massive tangle of twigs and branches high in the crotch of a leafless tree, presided over by a maternally watchful bald eagle. I've also seen numerous flocks of geese gathered in dry fields, happily gleaning the remnants of last year's corn.

It's interesting how some birds are solitary critters, while others naturally flock together. I suppose people are like this too! But after nine weeks of isolation, one thing I think people of all feathers are missing right now, is **gathering**. We are incarnational people – bodily tangible beings. We believe in 'the Word made flesh.' Shared physical presence offers something that just can't be found in the pixelated image of a computer screen or the crackling line of a phone.

But church gurus who are busily scrutinizing and analyzing how congregations are coping with the pandemic, so that they can predict what church will look like in our new future, have suggestions. They say we may have to forego gathering in person, in favour of creating 'connection' – which is not the same thing! The body of Christ is far more than a church full of warm bodies gathered inside.

It is enlivened by the living breath of Spirit – and expressed through intimate, caring relationships. It exists and abides where justice flourishes and peace prevails – whether in person, or far apart. Deeds of kindness and acts of compassion are being revealed in creative new ways that surpass separation and distance. Christ's body remains unified and functioning despite the dispersal of its parts. Lamenting over Jerusalem, Jesus wishes to gather the people as 'a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.' This implies more than simply rounding up the little chicks. They are not just gathered, but sheltered and protected by a doting mother hen.

While we may ache for the time when we can gather together again in person, and we may long for the warmth of human touch and yearn for the physical presence of loved ones, I hope that we are all finding ways to value and savour the in-tangible elements of our relationships that protect and shelter us; the love, support and kindness that may not touch us physically, but reach out to touch our very hearts.

Be well, stay well,

Elise

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*"Our relationship with God and each other strengthens us, and helps make the world a better place.
We welcome and include **everyone** into congregational life."*