

From one degree of imperfection to another:

A consideration of gathering in different ways

Ruth Gouldbourne in conversation with Steve Holmes

Rev Dr Ruth Gouldbourne is minister of Grove Lane Baptist Church in Cheadle Hulme. She has written on Baptist ecclesiology in a variety of ways for more years than she cares to remember. She was nurtured among Scottish Baptists, for which she is grateful, and is currently plotting ways to return in a few years.

Rev Dr Steve Holmes is a Baptist minister, presently serving as Senior Lecturer in Theology at the University of St Andrews, and on the leadership team of St Andrews Baptist Church.



This conversation focuses on issues raised during the recent pandemic, and in particular the theological as well as practical questions around gathering for worship when we could not be together in our buildings. We have known each other for several years, but have not met recently. However, to have a conversation reflecting on issues about different ways of meeting which have been brought to the fore by the last few years, it seemed good to meet and share food as well as conversation. This is a lightly edited version of our discussion. Unfortunately, we cannot share the delicious food with those of you who read this – and that fact proved central to our discussion.

Ruth Gouldbourne: Traditional Baptist ecclesiology makes a big thing of the ‘coming together’ of people to worship, focusing on the promise ‘where two or three are gathered in my name, I am in the midst’ as the basis for calling any community a church community. So it seems to me that the central issue is around ‘gathering’, and what

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constitutes that.¹ What did ‘gathering’ mean when we were all online, and what does it mean now that we are exploring hybrid formats for our worship services?

Steve Holmes: I suppose I really want to distinguish between the ‘ideal’ and the ‘adequate’ or ‘acceptable’. Yes, our ideal ecclesiology is that the church – those who gather together around Christ – is in one place at one time, but in fact, we’ve all got members who are housebound, folk in hospital, folk who are away at any given time. We could also go back to the experience of persecution which early Baptists experienced in the seventeenth century, often enough with the pastor in prison, but that did not stop their being church. And of course persecution is still a reality for many Baptists around the world. So there is some sense of ‘gathering’ – maybe in intent or by desire or something like that, which has to be an adequate way of being church.

Then we go into lockdown, and we say ‘this is very, very different,’ and all of a sudden we’ve discovered technological solutions. The question is, for me, is coming together on screen, or with some of us in the room and some of us on screen – an ‘adequate’ gathering? And if so, or if not, where is the line that divides the adequate from the inadequate?

RG: I was really struck on our first Sunday on Zoom when most people had no idea of how this was going to work. (I had spent the previous week on the phone explaining ‘This is how you do Zoom.’) But once we got onto that first virtual meeting, people were moved almost to tears at seeing one another, and they still talk about that moment of seeing faces and being able to say hello. There was definitely a sense of meeting that I think was unexpected – and was really important.

SH: Our church had a preaching series on 1 Thessalonians during the pandemic, and I was following the reading in Greek, and the word

¹ Brian Haymes, Ruth Gouldbourne and Anthony Cross, *On Being the Church: Revisioning Baptist Identity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009) has significant discussion on ‘gathering’ as an ecclesiological distinctive. See also Nigel G. Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), and Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).



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prosopon was there twice. In the translation we use – the 2011 NIV – it was translated in two different ways. One was ‘I want to see you face to face’ and the other was something about being present with you bodily. Obviously for Paul, those two are inseparable, and it seems to me that our experience in lockdown was that we could see each other face to face generally, but we couldn’t be together. Now, the word *prosopon* has a very elastic meaning. At one level it is about facial appearance, and so seeing the face is adequate to it, and at another level, it is something about the person in the most ontological sense as indicated by an encouragement to ‘greet one another with a holy kiss’ at the end of 1 Thessalonians. That said, it is a letter; it is Paul using the technology of the day, when he can’t physically be with the believers in Thessalonica.

RG: I found that during the lockdowns, I preached more on the epistles than I normally do, precisely because Paul was – sometimes explicitly – wrestling with being both present, through the letter, and not being present bodily, and that was our experience.² The sense of presence grew as we got more accustomed to it, such that when we moved back into the building it felt odd. That was partly to do with having got used to seeing people’s faces on screen, whilst in the building we are still masked, and suddenly the faces weren’t there.

SH: I remember fairly soon after we’d been allowed back into the church building, it was a Communion service. I was at the front, and there was this moment when everyone took their masks off to eat, and I suddenly saw all their faces – and I found that really quite moving.

RG: So, the face-to-face thing isn’t just about being on-screen or being in the building.

SH: Yes. I wrote a couple of quick blogs early on in lockdown, arguing that we gathered adequately enough online to celebrate the Eucharist.³ I argued that all the limits of a Zoom Eucharist – not being

² See, for example, Col 2:1–5.

³ “On Opening Church Buildings for Private Prayer”, <http://steverholmes.org.uk/blog/?p=7741%20On>; “Prosopal Presence: Our Current Conundrum”, <http://steverholmes.org.uk/blog/?p=7731>; “Can We Celebrate an Online Eucharist?”



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in the same room; dispersed elements; only seeing the celebrant on a screen – had already been a part of our practice in various ways. We might, for example, have offered the elements to believers in a crèche, even though they weren't in the same space, and couldn't see the celebrant except on a screen.

Now, we could argue that all these accommodations were wrong, and that seeing them all put together in a Zoom Eucharist made that obvious ...

RG: ... I don't hear us arguing that though!

SH: No, no, absolutely. So I think there is a sense in which our various Zoom Eucharists weren't perfect, but it was right and appropriate to do our best. I remember when I started teaching there was a man in my very first class who once told me that the most meaningful Eucharist he had attended was on a beach in Normandy [during the war] with stale biscuits and flat cider. It's not perfect, but in the context, it's what you do, and it matters.

And entirely on parallel with this, I have been writing on Eucharist and sacrifice,⁴ and looking at Calvin's argument that, yes, we do really feed on the body and blood, but the body and blood are located at the right hand of the Father. So what happens when we celebrate the Eucharist is a 'pneumatological relocation': by the power of the Holy Spirit the communicants are brought to the place where Christ is.⁵ Now, if that's right, then there's really no problem with our being dispersed when we celebrate – the Spirit brings us into one place!

A Baptist Response 1: A Positive Argument", <http://steverholmes.org.uk/blog/?p=7716>; "Can We Celebrate an Online Eucharist? A Baptist Response 2: Some Possible Objections", <http://steverholmes.org.uk/blog/?p=7721>; "On 'Kitchen Table Eucharists': A Plea to My Anglican Friends", <http://steverholmes.org.uk/blog/?p=7725>.

⁴ Stephen R. Holmes, "A Reformed Account of Eucharistic Sacrifice", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 24, no. 2 (2022):191–211.

⁵ See, for example, Calvin, *Institutes* (1559) IV.19.15; Julie Canlis has explored this theme in Calvin extensively: *Calvin's Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).



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RG: That makes sense of our experience. In our congregation, we never really discussed all this; it was simply assumed that we *would* celebrate communion, and nobody said to me ‘this is not real’. Everybody assumed that it really mattered. They didn’t come up with that language for it, but the experience was that we were united somehow in this slightly weird way. We were doing it differently, using the regular plates and glasses we had in our homes rather than the congregational utensils. But the experience of eating and drinking – which of course is all separate anyway even when we are together in the building, with separate individual cups and separate pieces of bread – was very real, and might well be described as pneumatological relocation into each other’s presence in God’s presence.

But as the minister, I made a point of using the chalice and plate we usually use in the building, and there was something important about that. It started me thinking about sacred space, sacred action, and how we make things if not sacred, then not mundane.

SH: And I guess there’s something there about continuity, as we talk about being gathered around the ‘Lord’s Table’ as a church. That is part of the liturgy that emphasises the continuity.

RG: I did change the language; I was aware of NOT saying we are gathered around one table. I’ve always used the language of ‘gathering’ with the saints throughout time and space, but I was aware of focusing more on that, and less on ‘being around one table’.

SH: I found Simon Woodman’s liturgy for dispersed Eucharist very helpful in that.⁶ I guess, if, say, the sanctuary was being repaired, and we were meeting somewhere else, we would do the same sorts of things, acknowledging the difference, and insisting that the difference was not destructive of the continuity.

RG: That’s really helpful. In our normal form of Communion service as Baptists, the words of institution are said directly to the congregation, rather than included in a prayer of consecration. By telling the words

⁶ “Scattered Yet Gathered”, <http://baptistbookworm.blogspot.com/2020/03/scattered-yet-gathered.html>. Simon Woodman is the minister of Bloomsbury Baptist Church in London.



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of institution to the congregation, we are saying that what we do here somehow links us with what that was there, rather than repeating it. The words are part of the proclamation to the congregation rather than worship of God. I wonder if that's one of the things that made it easier for us than for some other traditions to do this online. We were already used to, 'this is in continuity with' rather than 'a repetition of'. So we have already shaped our Communion service to be a reminder of, pointer to, and therefore adaptation of the Supper, rather than in any way a re-presentation of it. Changing our practice to doing it this way is just taking that a stage further ...

SH: Yes, the sense of sacred space is useful and good if you've got it – but not necessary.

RG: And yet, I know my congregation wanted to be back in the building. It wasn't just about being in the same space together, it was also about being in the accustomed space.

SH: That is why people get annoyed when, say, the pews get taken out! Perhaps they sat in that pew when their son was baptised, when their husband was buried; that pew means something to them. And that's not unimportant.

I think we have liberty in a free church to construct ritual and space that works rather than constrains. But this brings a responsibility as well. Chine McDonald came to preach to us, on the theme of her book *God is Not a White Man*,⁷ and we as a leadership felt that we needed to think very hard about some of her comments on how spaces spoke – what our space said. Our minister is Congolese by birth, and we're not a monochrome church by any means, but the things they were reflecting on were about a wide meaning of space and ritual – about how should we look at the website, the notice boards; how does all this say that this is a genuinely multi-cultural community? How do we say this is not a Scottish community that welcomes guests, but this is an anticipation of the kingdom where people from Korea and Ethiopia and Congo

⁷ Chine McDonald, *God is Not a White Man and Other Revelations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2021).



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come and join in and bring what they have, and make something unique in that place?

RG: People's first encounter with our congregational life is not simply face to face and we take that for granted. Our noticeboards, our social media, all of that pass on information about who and what we are so that people have already 'met' the church even without meeting individuals. So meeting face to face is not all there is, and never has been.

SH: Perhaps we need to think of gathering for a worship service as an anticipated eschatological reality. In Revelation 7:9 there is the 'great multitude [...] from every tongue, tribe and nation', which I want to read as the universal church which, come the resurrection, will be gathered around Jesus. Every experience of, or every bit of gathering we do, is an anticipation of that. And so, on that account, all our gathering is imperfect, impartial and anticipatory. The fact that at a given moment, we gather electronically is clearly an issue that needs a response, but it's not a falling away from perfection to something worse; it's a falling away from what is already imperfect.

RG: From one degree of imperfection to another! I'm also struck by how often in the resurrection stories Jesus is not 'there'. On the road to Emmaus, he is there and then suddenly he is not; he says to Mary, 'tell the disciples to go to Galilee' and 'don't hold on to me'. In our gathering Jesus promises to be in our midst, but part of Jesus' presence is being further ahead.

SH: And points us again to the eschaton.

RG: This is really helpful. It is not falling from something perfect to imperfect, but rather that we are always anticipating what you have referred to as the eschatological gathering. So while we can't be unthinking about doing it differently, our reflection on the changes and questions they raise do not need to assume that this is inevitably disastrous.

SH: Yes, and the issue of implicit theologies is important here. There is a sense in which the right way to do it as Baptists is to do it and then



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think about it. It is the whole basis of contextual theology; it is reflecting on praxis that leads to understanding.

RG: This became important to us as a congregation, when we talked about how we wanted to do services. We used Zoom to start with because that was all anybody knew. And then we had a ‘Not the church meeting’⁸ and I invited people to think about whether they wanted to carry on with that, or do livestream which some of the other churches in the area were doing. People were very clear – they wanted to use Zoom, because that meant we could talk to one another. Partly this was about the after-service getting into groups and talking, but mainly it was about the interaction in the service. And I think if we had really pushed it, it was about a theology of participation. Nobody was going to articulate it in this way, but it was our lived theology.

SH: We ended many of our online services by everyone saying the grace, and encouraged people to look up and down and left and right. And because of sound distortion, it was chaotic – but at the time ...

RG: ... Yes, at the time, it was fine. And one of our members who chose not to access the service through Zoom, but listened to the recording afterwards said she loved the Lord’s Prayer for which everybody un-muted themselves and which we said together, even though the sound distortion meant she could not really hear what was being said. It was the recognition for her of everybody’s presence, when she

⁸ Baptist church polity is based on the regular gathering of members to ‘discern the mind of Christ together’ in order to plan, take decisions and organize the life of the church. Church meeting decisions are minuted and are binding – and our constitution requires that ‘those present at the meeting’ take the decisions. It was unclear to start with whether meeting on Zoom met the constitutional requirements. So we instituted what we called ‘not the church meeting’ – our regular gathering had our normal discussion and took such decisions as we needed to (we tried to keep them to a minimum), with the proviso that when we could eventually meet as ‘normal’ we would ratify these decisions for the sake of constitutional process. It turned out to be a very good experience, opening up new possibilities of discussion by using Zoom breakout rooms and working hard on feedback between meetings. We have since ensured that our constitution allows for those who are not able to attend the meeting because of illness or distance to attend on Zoom and take part. This is proving to take some work.



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couldn't see them – even when it was chaotic.

We have a baptismal service coming up in a few weeks, and though most people will be in the building, we have one or two who can only join by Zoom. And I find I am struggling, even in talking about it now, with the language. People joining by Zoom would be present; they would really be there – they would do the readings and lead the prayers – but their presence is of a different kind.

SH: This is where the elasticity of the word *prosopon* we talked about before is helpful – even when we are not in the same room, we can be 'face to face' in a way that is real. Everything that happens on Zoom is about presence in some sort of space.

RG: So the language of how we describe what we are doing has to be renewed.

SH: Indeed – we can't talk about 'watching' the service – though it might be in a screen, you're not merely 'watching', but participating. And again, it is about very deliberately welcoming those who are joining in all the different places – in the sanctuary, in the overflow, as well as those who are joining online. It's about trying to find ways of saying 'we are all together'.

RG: When we were all meeting on Zoom, I was running the whole thing, and so I could see everybody who was joining. Now that I am back in the sanctuary, for good reasons, but frustratingly for me, I can't see who has joined online without turning round and looking at the screen, which takes me off the camera. So I have had to learn to look at the camera at various points and talk to people that way, even when I can't see them. And we get everybody in the building to wave to those who join on Zoom – though getting people to wave at the camera, not the screen is hard work. Folk instinctively connect to seeing the face. But importantly there is a drive to interaction. And that brings the issue of recording – when it is one-way. Our practice has been (and was even before the pandemic) to record the service and to make it available afterwards for those who could not attend. The new thing in our recordings was to make a video as well as audio available.

SH: I could understand someone saying that recording something that



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others will view later crosses a line and is no longer ‘gathering’. I could imagine getting there myself, but I think I come back to the intention and the provisionality of everything we do, and the confident belief that the Spirit makes up for our deficiencies. So, if someone is watching on Facebook because they don’t want to be seen for no good reason, then I think we have a problem with that. If using the anonymity of watching asynchronously for a reason – someone with no experience of church, wanting to get some idea of what it is like, then that’s one thing – we know of people who have found us online that way. But if church members tried to remain at some distance from the rest of the church, that’s difficult. On the other hand, if someone is in a nursing home, and timing can only work outside of service time, so the only way to engage is through the recording, then they are gathering the best way they can. That should not be sneered at or dismissed. I can understand somebody drawing the line there, but I don’t necessarily want to. I do think that intentionality and possibility matter.

So, a multi-campus church where the sermon is broadcast to different groups without any common life is one thing. But I was talking to somebody in charge of Baptist missional work in the Canadian Maritimes, in places where you can draw a 50-mile circle, and there are 250 people living there. We talked about what church looks like there: broadcasting a sermon to different house-groups is the best approximation that can be managed, whereas in the other context, you are settling for second best. We should always be striving to do church as well as we can. And if we know we have stopped short of that, then we have got a problem, but that will look different in different contexts.

RG: And there is something about God’s eternal *now*. If we’re talking about the communion of saints – an unusual concept for Baptists, I recognise⁹ – community with those whose temporal experience is quite different from ours, whatever that means; those who are not

⁹ This is something that has recently been explored using Baptist approaches in Paul S. Fiddes, Brian Haymes, and Richard Kidd, *Baptists and the Communion of Saints: A Theology of Covenanted Disciples* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).



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living in the same time, then we can say we are still in community.

SH: And that is right. One of our older members, our church secretary, regularly speaks of those ‘who have gone before us in the church’ – in the sense of those who have gone before who are still part of this community, and our story is their story, and we can’t unpick that.

RG: In one of your blogs,¹⁰ you commented that whilst worshipping online was new, some have been teaching online for a while, and were finding some unexpected benefits in that. You wondered whether that would also happen for those of us worshipping online. Might it have something to do with the communion of saints? Might it become something we find a language for as we have begun to explore new ways of relating?

SH: Maybe. For us the unexpected positives include the fact that at least one person found us online, and has come through to faith and baptism. One of my ways of reading that is that the kind of barrier of watching a service online is far lower than the barrier of stepping into a church building. And again, folk who were unable to join physically can be with us online. We made connection with an American serviceman who couldn’t get to any church, but found us online and starting worshipping with us; we’ve made contact with a woman in Australia who joined us when they were locked down. It seems to me that we need a space which allows for those who are there precisely because they don’t yet want to be part of a community, but still to have a place to worship.

RG: A former colleague preached on the woman who touched the hem of Jesus’ robe and reminded the congregation that not everyone needs or wants an effusive welcome.

SH: Yes absolutely. I remember getting a phone call from a former student years back. He had been running outreach groups in local cafés and had discovered some folk wanted to stay in the cafés and own that meeting as their worshipping community. We talked about preaching of the Word and celebration of the sacraments and decided

¹⁰ “Can We Celebrate an Online Eucharist? A Baptist Response 2”.



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that, yes, why shouldn't those café meetings be churches? What was intended to be a liminal space in fact became a new form of ecclesial community.

RG: This reminds me of Ali Boulton's paper "Church Down Ali's"¹¹ – at what point does something become what we can coherently call 'a' church? The question that meeting regularly for a spa evening and discussing issues of faith left me with was about continuity. Clearly there were ecclesiological elements in the event – there was a gathering, there was mutual openness and trust, there was a naming of Divine presence. But there was no ongoing structure, no mutual commitment to 'walking together'¹² in the old Baptist phrase, no

¹¹ A paper given by Ali Boulton, a pioneer minister, at Theology Live! 2022, in which she described the gatherings in her home based around 'spa evenings' at which issues of faith, life and discipleship were discussed. These gatherings were mainly for women who had no other 'church' connection, and several regular attenders began to refer to it as 'Church Down Ali's'. The central question of the paper is, 'Is such a gathering "church", and if so, how?' The paper has not yet been published but is available online in the video format. "'Church Down Ali's': An Exploration of Whether 'Church' Happens at Pamper Night", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vN3TGjIRd0s>.

¹² Baptists have defined membership of a local congregation as the covenant commitment to 'walking together'; that is, sharing life and undertaking to support one another's discipleship. This has taken different forms over the years, but the expectation of mutual commitment has always been present. It is currently voiced in the promise made by the congregation when new members are welcomed. The new members promise to be involved in the life, service, witness and worship of the congregation, and the congregation members makes these promises:

'Do you welcome [these friends] into the fellowship of this worshipping community?

We do. This is our joy and our calling.

God has given us the gift of [these friends] and through them has given us gifts for ministry in the life and witness of this congregation. Will you support [them] in Christian service and in the responsibilities of church membership?

We will. Thanks be to God.

Will you pray for them and encourage them through hospitality, friendship and prayer?

We will, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus Christ.'

Christopher J. Ellis and Myra Blyth, eds., *Gathering for Worship: Patterns and Prayers for the Community of Disciples* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2005), 82.



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expectation of continuity. So, could this gathering be called ‘a church’ or ‘a congregation’?

SH: It reminds me of that liberation theology phrase, ‘ecclesial communities’. When the church in Latin America was under persecution in the late twentieth century there was a significant shortage of priests, and so communities were simply meeting and reading Scripture together. There was the recognition of ‘our’ story in the Bible story, and there was a real sense of there being something church-like happening here.

RG: I wonder if that illuminates the issue of recorded services. There is something church-like happening in that moment, but because it rules out mutual relationship, it can’t have the continuity of church.

SH: I have been saying for years that it’s easy to do online meetings with people you’ve met once, but hard if you’ve never met them at all, and I wonder whether, if all we can do is record, then great, that’s what we do. But, barring a particular work of the Spirit, recording is something adequate to maintain the community that exists, but probably not something that is going to provide an easy way for people to become part of a new community.

RG: That would certainly fit our experience. The congregation will talk very fondly of the deepening of relationships and expending of relationships – but it was not easy to bring in anybody new.

SH: We need some proper research on it. We get the data – who is watching online, who is checking the website. So, we know somebody watched, for example, the sermon, but not the rest of the service on Tuesday afternoon. Was that somebody checking us out? Was it somebody who had heard the sermon and knew it would be discussed at the group on Wednesday night and just wanted to revisit it? Was it one of our housebound folk? We don’t know. Recently, one of our students was up front in the service for the first time, and we know that this person’s parents tuned in – and this is significant because one of the parents had left the church some years ago, and this was their first engagement. Now, will this go anywhere? Who knows. But it is something to note. We need to tease out these kinds

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of stories and what they mean.

RG: It is very hard to start a relationship online. The term ‘somatic’ is so helpful, because relationship is not just face-to-face, as in being able to see – it is about the non-verbal communication, which is so exhausting online, and where somebody is completely unknown, it is very tough. It’s as simple as eye-contact, which you can’t do online.

SH: Of course there are ways to make online communication less bad. I had to interview a new employee online, and was impressed at how she presented herself, so she and I did some work with our students about online interviews, and how to come over as well as you can, because it’s being suggested that at least first-level interviews will be online in future, as it is just so much more convenient. We run an online Masters programme, and I’ve done a bit of teaching for Westminster Theological Centre online. When programmes involve two study weeks a year, when we get everyone together and intentionally form a community, that is then going to continue online, and it can be very effective. But perhaps we need to learn some of the ways of creating relationship online. We are created to be bodies; our ideal relationships are embodied relationships. That’s what it is to be human. It’s back to what we were talking about earlier, of doing the best we can in given circumstances, knowing that nothing we do achieves eschatological perfection, when ‘we will know fully, as we are fully known’ (1 Cor 13:12). Do you have any social media friends that you first got to know online? I have several.

RG: On Twitter, yes. And I was realizing on the way here that I was anxious about our meeting – because we haven’t met in, how many years? We have had lots of online contact. But actually to be together again was making me anxious – and of course, it’s fine. There are very few people that I only know online, but there are quite a lot that I *mainly* know online, and things like Zoom during lockdown definitely changed the relationship. There has been the possibility both of more contact with distant friends, and with deepening relationship with people only slightly known before.

SH: And again, it is back to the best we can do. Zoom is better than a phone call because you can see someone’s face – but physical space is



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better again. But every present possibility is still only anticipatory. You can identify limitations with any encounter. ‘We’re in a public place, so I can’t talk about this in case someone overhears’ and so on ...

RG: Is there more danger of Docetism if we get ourselves well-settled into Zoom or hybrid church? That is, Zoom gives us a real possibility of a new kind of disembodied contact, and we are getting increasingly accustomed to it. Might we begin to opt for the comfort of this, instead of the sometimes uncomfortable reality of being in the same room with other bodies? And might this lead us towards a docetic tendency; a discomfort with human embodied reality – our own, and by extension, that of Jesus? If that’s a danger, how might we avoid it?

SH: It’s interesting, isn’t it? I think we need to be as courageously close to heresy as we can, since most heresies are good ideas taken just a little bit too far. And to say that we set fences and we will never go anywhere near that direction is generally a mistake. But the threat of Docetism or Nestorianism shouldn’t make us neglect the reality of what can be done. And so long as we keep saying that, yes, to be in the same room is better, we’re not giving in to that danger.

RG: So, whatever we can do is good – but there is always going to be better, because it is always anticipatory, however good it is?

SH: Yes, we do not have perfection in any of it; so we are not falling from perfect to imperfect if we are doing something that is not as good. It is all a mess or less than the best. There are better and worse approximations – but we need to guard against reaching a point where what we are doing is so approximate that it is not in touch with the real thing.

RG: And there is a delight in some of the better approximations, which we are now able to discover as things open up, and perhaps we value them more because we lost them for a while. One of those delights is the joy of sitting at table together as we have done today, and share conversation. Thank you.