

Pastoral Reflection – “Next Year in Person”

Susanne Guenther Loewen

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Easter has come and gone, and we have managed to celebrate it differently this year, without gathering in person as a faith community. We're in the same boat as other people of faith celebrating major holidays around this time: the Jewish holiday of Passover was also last week and the month-long period of Ramadan begins next week for Muslims. All of us are wishing it were safe for us to gather together in person in our places of worship to celebrate our holy days.

I've been thinking of a tradition from the Jewish festival of Passover. At the end of the Seder meal, it's customary for many Jewish people to express a prayer: “Next year in Jerusalem.” It's an ancient prayer expressing hope for homecoming for a people familiar with wandering in the wilderness – a hope for Passover to be celebrated in the Holy Land rather than in exile in a strange land.

This year, I thought of that prayer and that hope in light of this pandemic, and wondered whether we can apply it to ourselves in this way: “Next year in person.” It is our hope that next year, the danger of the pandemic will have passed and we won't need to be physically distant on Good Friday and Easter, but can gather together to worship in our church sanctuary. It is our prayer that next year, we can share Paska Easter bread and hot cross buns and sing songs of resurrection side by side. It is our hope that next Easter, we can gather for celebrations and meals with family and friends around the table.

We know that for this year, we must continue to be patient. We must remain in this uncertain wilderness for now, for the sake of the common good. But this remains our hopeful prayer: “Next year in person.” AMEN