

# Meanwhile, Back on Zoom

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I got back on Facebook at the beginning of the pandemic to promote the mutual aid society I'd started with some friends in the neighbourhood and the prison ministry to which God has called me. I prayed about it first. And then discerned that it was part of my obedience to participate in the platforms so often used by the devil to thoroughly subsume the social in the logic of capital.

After about a month of pandemic lockdown without weekly letter-writing meetups, the mail from incarcerated people was really starting to pile up. So I turned to the internet—Zoom first, followed by social media—to expand the network of solidarity with incarcerated people through Abolition Apostles.

Of course, that was before five months of working from home and the zooming of the world and adjusting the screen of my laptop so no one will see my nipple while I breastfeed and the endless scroll of Black death, fascism, and advertisements for maternity clothes and baby food.

Five months of internet life and my attention span for reading has already significantly diminished, consuming headlines like so many empty calories that leave me malnourished and without anything meaningful to say at the end of each day.

The privacy and intimacy of my home has been destroyed. I sit in the same chair at my kitchen table for hours of Google Hangouts. The dishes pile up and disappear, and the dirt accumulates beneath my feet, but I remain seated because the background of the kitchen door with its window onto our backyard projects an image of normalcy, professionalism, even “having it together” in the midst of a global pandemic. I forget that I still have my camera on while drafting an email in another window and listening to the Zoom call on my headphones when David walks into the kitchen shirtless to kiss the baby.

There are days when I don't leave the house at all.

I've started a Twitter account for my book about white women, but even my ability to form cogent and punchy observations about white womanhood is deadened by the internet. I can't make art on the internet because ... *the internet*.

I logged on briefly to a dance class my friend Rashad was teaching on Zoom to see what it was like. Watching him shuffle and step inside the tiny box with other tiny boxes on top of him made me too depressed. I paid him my fifteen dollars but I couldn't stay. The most successful dancers in our culture make one-minute videos for other fifteen-year-olds to replicate. The fetishistic cannibalism of Blackness that is at the rotten heart of American culture finds its most fertile breeding ground on TikTok.

When I finally was exposed to TikTok, it was while visiting the home of a single mom and her fourteen-year-old daughter who we helped with grocery deliveries while they were recovering from coronavirus. The daughter synced her phone with their huge TV and scrolled through the blackface porn, blocking dance steps while telling me about the forty-year-old guy she met in the French Quarter on Mardi Gras. Watching this white girl imitate pale imitations of hip hop and the stripper pole, I realized—this is a hell realm.

Meanwhile, back on Zoom, I scroll through *The Guardian* articles about Portland while the virtual summit on racial justice takes a mindfulness break. The presenter reminds us of our ocean breaths as I read about moms and dads and vets getting teargassed by federal agents.

What has more viral spread in the US: videos of dying Black men pleading “I can't breathe” or the coronavirus?

White people across the country return to their breath.

I haven't really danced since before the pandemic. I gave birth on February 10, and while I recovered the world changed. I wore David's jeans for four months of hauling and delivering bulk beans and rice until I finally broke down and bought some new clothes on the internet. Most of my clothes are still ill-fitting. Other than learning the choreography of breastfeeding and rocking the baby, I don't know how this new body of mine wants to move.

In June, I joined the collective break from the internet and marched through the streets of New Orleans. Following its pattern as a relatively depoliticized city, the action here was mostly calm and symbolic and has now retreated altogether to Zoom calls about city budgets. Despite our new facial coverings, we haven't discovered how our new bodies want to move.

Choreographies of care emerge and persist in our homes, in our mutual aid networks, in hospitals and nursing homes, but we haven't found our way into radically new public choreographies now that our bodies have changed. Well, except maybe when the fire met that police station.

The only time I've cried during the past five months has been while preaching on Revelation. In the church that David and I co-pastor (now on Zoom, of course), we've undertaken a months-long study of Revelation in order to answer our incarcerated pen pals when they ask us what we think about it. That, and David and I have found that preaching on Revelation provides a good introduction to our anti-imperial reading of the scripture, including our understanding of empire as the body of sin. The week of the lynching of Ahmaud Arbery, I cried while preaching about God's judgement and the drowning of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea.

Corporate singing on Zoom reveals the lie of immediacy; even with the fastest internet, there is still a slight time lag. Our church sings together despite the awkwardness of ten people sitting alone in separate rooms on three coasts singing the same notes at slightly different times. Our discordant choir is a vehicle for the power of the Holy Spirit.

Hallelujah.