



**Going Viral**  
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I gave my article its title, and then I groaned. We know too well the wildfire spread of the coronavirus. It's not going to go quietly into the night. By staying isolated, we are doing what we can to stay safe and stem the spread. I pray for you all.

My article, however, is not about the virus *per se*. I'm talking about going viral on social media, though the analogy feels perhaps too potent right now.

On Saturday night, I went to a concert with my family – all from my living room sofa. A talented musician from our hometown of Denver was playing on Facebook Live, from his home. When Josh Blackburn played the bar circuit in Denver, my husband and I would go to watch him, often weekly. With the restaurants and bars closed, Josh adapted. This was his first attempt at an internet concert. It was strange for him because he had no feedback. "It's like I'm in a bubble," he remarked, feeling the oddity of the lack of applause, the clink of glassware, or the din of diner conversations.

What he couldn't see in the moment, were the hundreds of people sending up hearts and thumbs-up's on Facebook, the endless stream of happy comments, and the song requests that were flooding in. Watchers even started an impromptu game that was triggered when Josh's dog would wander onto the set from time to time. Normally, Josh would play in a restaurant for a contented crowd of 20-30 people. On Saturday night, over 8000 people checked in over the course of the two hours he played. More than 600 people tuned in and stayed *for the full two hours*. Even my 1-1/2-year old grandson busted out his [dance moves](#). That, my friends, is the power of social media.

It's not just social entertainment. Westminster Presbyterian Church in Twin Cities Presbytery normally has 800 people in worship, which is huge compared to most of us. Since they've started worshipping online, that number has gone up, way up. Last week, 3600 households participated. One of that Presbytery's African American congregations went from an average worship of 250, to 1000 online. Locally, some of our congregations have nearly maxed out the number of participants on the platforms they're using.

I don't think it's just a fad, though some of us who spend less time on social media might be intrigued by the novelty of online worship. I also don't think online worship will replace our in-person gatherings. But, there is power behind the technology. Televangelists have known that for decades. Now, even our small, local congregations are catching up out of necessity. We're catching up at a time when the world desperately needs to hear a word of hope and comfort.

When we are faithful in proclaiming God's Word, the Spirit will find unlikely ways to make known God's glory and the grace we've received through Jesus Christ. Though we didn't choose social distancing and online worship, we should embrace it, relish it, and celebrate it in this moment. Our ability to reach others with the Good News has just gone viral. We're not in a bubble; we're on full display. Let's make it count.

