

Watch this week's service on YouTube by clicking: [January 17 Worship Service Video](#)

- *Join the HeBrews eCafé on Zoom every Sunday at 10am for an hour of informal fellowship. Please join us by clicking: <https://zoom.us/j/97519630417?pwd=czhSWk1VblllOMFZXeUFuMlhaWmdTdz09> or phoning 204 272 7920 and entering meeting number 975 1963 0417 and passcode 046532*
- *Read the scripture lesson for today by clicking here: [John 1:43-51](#)*
- *Do you play a musical instrument? Brendan Thompson wants to 'hear' from you. Details in Life and Work or email Brendan at brendandt@hotmail.com*
- *For news and events please have a look at the Life & Work insert: <https://charleswoodunited.org/media/life-work/>*
- *You can donate to the ministry of Charleswood United Church by visiting: www.charleswoodunited.org/donate Thank you for your generous support.*
- *Please enjoy our online worship and feel free to share with others. The link for sharing is: <https://youtu.be/Mi1zzyqhcXI>*

Dear Friends

Welcome to worship for Sunday, January 17, 2021.

I've noticed that a peculiar and delightful tradition has begun to spring up around Winnipeg each year in January. I can't remember this as something that happened when I was a child, nor do I recall seeing it when my children were little and we would be outside in winter for various activities. But I am certain that more and more, I am seeing 'used' Christmas trees stood up in yards, on paths, and around homemade ice rinks to create the illusion of temporary evergreen forests, or at least temporary groves. I think it looks awesome.

Not only it is a creative use of something that can no longer be kept in the house, but the trees that offered comfort and warmth while decorated inside now provide shelter and scenery outside, in places where they do not ordinarily exist. They literally change the landscape. Are these trees re-claimed, re-used, or re-cycled? I'm not sure what the appropriate term is. But I just know that I think it is cool.

There's a line in the epiphany song "I Am the Light of the World" by Jim Strathdee that goes, *when the kings and the shepherds have found their way home, the work of Christmas is begun*. I doubt that Strathdee had re-imagined Christmas trees in mind when he wrote those words back in 1967 but I sense a connection. There is a time for decorations to be put away, and lights to be turned off, and inside trees to be transformed into wind breaks outside, but were it not for one we wouldn't have the other. One thing leads into another and that is true in spiritual things as well.

Each year the lessons for January invariably lead us towards the things that seem inevitable if you take the time to think about it. Having celebrated the birth of Jesus, the growth of Jesus, and the destiny of Jesus in the stories of Christmas and Epiphany, the readings of January lead us to how his ministry begins. One week we read about his baptism. The next we read about the calling of disciples. Then the early Galilean ministry.

It is a teaching tool that helps us recall that the birth of Jesus, so celebrated, is not an end unto itself but leads us on to something else, what Strathdee calls, “the work of Christmas”.

The work of Christmas these days seems to me to be encouraging hopefulness in one another. The promise of vaccines is a hopeful sign, perhaps the most hopeful. It feels like many people are being overly critical about the way the rollout is going. Whether it could be better or worse, I don't know. But I do know that many people are trying their best to do something that has never been done before. Patience is more likely to encourage the rapid distribution of vaccines more than criticism will. I pray that hope for this effort will be part of the ‘work of Christmas’.

Similarly I pray for hope among people in small business. They have been asked to make extraordinary sacrifices and should be supported for doing so. While we rightfully and necessarily praise people working in health care, education, and essential services for staying on the job, the frustration and even desperation of those who work for themselves should not be forgotten. Hope is not a finite resource. There is never a limited quantity of it. Hope will never run out if we remember from whom it comes.

In the fullness of time, the snow will melt, and my beloved temporary fir forests will tumble. Perhaps a third life for them will be found as that which was once ornamental in the living room becomes mulch in the garden or woodchips on footpaths. This too will be the work of Christmas. For you and I, we will move from hoping that code red ends and restrictions are lifted, to hoping that vaccinations reach everyone sooner rather than later, and eventually to hope for the future beyond the pandemic.

If I can play with the Apostle Paul's famous words in 1 Corinthians 13 - *Faith, hope, love abide, these three. But the greatest of these (sometimes) is hope.*

Grace and peace,

Michael

P.S. An online Lenten Study is being planned for six Thursdays beginning February 18. More information: <https://charleswoodunited.org/media/life-work/>