

Watch this week's service on YouTube by clicking: [February 14 Worship Service Video](#)

- Join the **HeBrews eCafé on Zoom** Sunday at 10am for an hour of informal fellowship.
Link: <https://zoom.us/j/98193600858?pwd=K0lIOWM0ZWdsRmhUTkNWcmFvbkm5Zz09>
Phone in: 1 204 272 7920 Meeting ID: 981 9360 0858 Passcode: 438120
- **Lenten Study** Faith *on the Move* starts this Thursday February 18. Join Zoom Meeting
<https://zoom.us/j/96227374307?pwd=Q0xkRFpkemdtVDBZdHZlVWFWODU4QT09>
Meeting ID: 962 2737 4307 Passcode: 677320 Phone in option: 204 272 7920
- Read the scripture lesson for today by clicking here: [Mark 9:2-9](#)
- Please enjoy our online worship and feel free to share with others. The link for sharing is:
<https://youtu.be/BrUFTeHKwK8>

Dear Friends

Welcome to worship for Sunday, February 14, 2021.

Please don't look for Mardi Gras Sunday on your church calendar. Or google it. It is a Charleswood United creation.

When I was growing up it was not unusual for my mother to serve pancakes for supper on the day before Ash Wednesday. But that's all it was, Pancake Tuesday. I didn't understand what other names it had or how it connected to the upcoming season of Lent. I have been part of churches that celebrated Shrove Tuesday. Usually that meant come back to church on a Tuesday for a pancake supper. No worship service necessarily and not really a precursor to a solemn observance the next day.

When I was in theological school in the 1980's there was a movement for protestant traditions to reclaim more of the liturgical calendar. In other words, don't bypass Ash Wednesday just because it is heavily laden with Catholic spirituality. This is something to learn from, not run from. Nevertheless I have never been a strong advocate for Ash Wednesday services. I can't really give a reason why but I think I lean towards an understanding that it doesn't necessarily add to that which has been offered on the Sundays before and after.

But how do Ash Wednesday, Lent, Mardi Gras, and Shrove Tuesday, and pancakes all fit together? Good question, and helpful for explaining what we are referring to by Charleswood's Mardi Gras Sunday.

Easter is the great feast day of the church. As early as the 4th century the church would prepare for this feast with a period of fasting which we call Lent. The traditional period of time of "fasting for the feast" is forty days based on the Bible story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness for 40 days during which time he fasted and was famished (Matthew 4:2). In ancient times, as today, it did not mean a literal fasting of no food whatsoever but it did mean a single simple meal most days.

One did not have to observe the fast on Sundays and therefore if you count 40 days back from Easter, excluding Sundays, you end up on a Wednesday six weeks earlier.

This first day of Lent is called Ash Wednesday from a Catholic practise that began in the Middle Ages wherein palms leaves saved from the year before are burned and mixed with oil to create an ash. In a penitential ceremony known as the imposition of ashes, the priests 'marks' the forehead of the believer with the sign of the cross in the ash mixture. So it is that one enters Lent humbly and conscious of the fragility of life (ashes to ashes).

The day before was characterized by making confession before a priest and receiving absolution, something historically described by the Old English verb 'to shrive' or 'shrove' in the past tense. The day before Ash Wednesday and the beginning of Lent was therefore known as Shrove Tuesday.

But what has this to do with pancakes? Good question. Everyone likes a good festival (which has the same root word as feast) and so traditions sprang up in Catholic countries to celebrate the coming austerity and penitential nature of Lent. Broadly referred to as Carnival (a word that means 'without meat'), focus came to bear on the day before Lent and was known by the popular name Mardi Gras. Mardi Gras is French and literally means 'Fat Tuesday' so named because a fast was coming and therefore all the fat, butter, oil, fatty meat, etc. needed to be used up so it didn't go bad during Lent. What better way to use up your lard and oil than by making pancakes?!?!

It is not a coincidence that the place most associated with a festive Mardi Gras in North America is New Orleans, the city settled by French Catholics migrating down the Mississippi from Lower Canada/New France. They brought their 'joie de vivre' with them to the American south along with their old Catholic understandings of Mardi Gras as the last joyful celebration until Easter.

Ten years ago or so we thought that it would be fun to mix the traditional Pancake Tuesday with a local celebration of Mardi Gras. Even better was to do it on a Sunday when more of us would be available to participate. Isn't the first rule of a party, the more the merrier? We invited some musicians to join us in worship and enjoyed the music of Dixieland, a form of jazz popularized in New Orleans, the home of Mardi Gras. And so it was Mardi Gras Sunday was born.

We won't be eating pancakes together this year but we hope you will enjoy the flavour of years past as we jazz up our online service this week.

Grace and peace,
Michael

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