

Watch this week's service on YouTube by clicking: [March 7 Worship Service Video](#)

This is a communion service. You are welcome to have elements with you and partake as you wish

- Once or twice a year on a communion service we take a free will offering to replenish the **Benevolent Fund**. The Benevolent Fund is used exclusively to respond to requests for aid in the local community that come to the church. This Sunday we invite you to make an added contribution in your offering for this purpose. For donation information please visit: www.charleswoodunited.org/donate
- Join the **HeBrews eCafé on Zoom** Sunday at 10am for an hour of informal fellowship.
Link: <https://zoom.us/j/98193600858?pwd=K0IIOWM0ZWdsRmhUTkNWcmFvbkM5Zz09>
Meeting ID: 981 9360 0858 Passcode: 438120 Phone in: 1 204 272 7920
- **Lenten Study - Faith On The Move** - Thursdays at 7:00. Special Guest this week – Michael Wilson
Join Zoom Meeting <https://zoom.us/j/96227374307?pwd=Q0xkRFpkemdtVDBZdHZlVWFwODU4QT09>
Meeting ID: 962 2737 4307 Passcode: 677320 Phone in option: 204 272 7920

Dear Friends

Welcome to worship for Sunday, March 7, 2021.

I remember clearly the day some ten years ago when a friend who teaches at Canadian Mennonite University saw me in a hallway and said "You have to read *The Great Emergence* by Phyllis Tickle". Well, ministers and professors are notorious for saying stuff like that and the typical response is to say you'll take a look if you get a chance. But in this case she was right and I was glad.

Tickle's book has been the subject of a couple of studies here at Charleswood and I have referred to it many times. Her central argument is that every 500 years or so the church goes through a major paradigm shift, something Tickle evocatively calls *a great garage sale*, and when that happens two things occur. The first is that something new in Christianity emerges (imagine a new branch on a family tree). And the second thing that happens in this shift is that what previously existed undergoes a great transformation.

A summary will be inadequate but to give you a sense of it think about what was happening 500 years ago. The Protestant Reformation was the 'new thing' and the Catholic counter-reformation was the 'renewed thing'. Five hundred years before that, the Eastern Orthodox Churches broke away from Rome to become a 'new thing' while the Roman church entered the Dark Ages. In the 6th century the Roman Empire collapsed and the monastic movement began. And 500 years before that, of course, the new birth of the Christian church and the renewal of Judaism. It's a lot more complicated than that but perhaps that gives you a picture.

Fast forward, Phyllis Tickle describes how a new paradigm has begun to emerge over the last century as the place of church in society has changed dramatically. But hope is not lost for in death there is always new life. The idea I wish to introduce in worship today is that the pandemic has accelerated the change the church is going through and that we can see this in the sacrament of communion.

I have written before about how when I was growing up in the church, communion was reserved for those who were confirmed. It was a graduation from Sunday School of sorts and the privilege of those who had made a formal commitment to membership in the church. Earlier in modern church history there were other examples of restrictions around communion. It was only for elders or only for men.

Only for those whose attendance was regular or, in some Methodist practice, only for those who thought they were good enough to receive it. Denominational restrictions were very common and you would never think of taking communion in a church where you were not a member. Our dear friends in the Roman Catholic Church still ask visitors to reserve the elements for practising Catholics (no judgement – every church has its borders and barriers).

Gladly, much of that has changed in the United Church during our lifetime. The liturgical renewal movement of the 70's and 80's 'opened' tables by making the connection between baptism and communion. The question was asked, why should one who is baptized not be allowed to take communion? Christian educators challenged the assumption that denying communion to children was a better strategy for Christian development than offering it. A popular lectionary based curriculum, *The Whole People of God*, asked us to look at a myriad of ways the church was failing to be as inclusive and inviting as we might be.

All of this brought us to where we were in our understanding of communion one year ago, before the pandemic began. Aspects of this included celebrating an open table to which everyone present was welcome. The regular inclusion of children returning from their church school lessons to partake and even serve. Contemporary communion music and sung responses to aid in the creation of a festive atmosphere. The coming forward to receive the elements with service to the immobile as necessary. In every way an attempt to show that are all welcome at Christ's table.

But then the pandemic hit and while it wasn't top of the mind, one of the things it brought with it was reduced access to the table. We recorded a communion for Easter but then for several months we didn't really think about communion as we sought to offer online worship that comforted and encouraged one another through this time of common distress. As the Fall unfolded we began to think about when and how communion should be offered and to put it back in our regular routine as the end of the pandemic, and a return to worship in person, grew increasingly unpredictable.

The first Sunday in March marks one full year since the last time we had communion together in the sanctuary of Charleswood United Church. It remains something we miss and something we look forward to resuming. But I offer that we have learned something about communion in the last twelve months. Our understanding of communion has grown and deepened as a consequence of this experience. Or, in the spirit of Phyllis Tickle, the shift we have witnessed over the last few generations has accelerated during the unanticipated absence and we are better off for it. Offering communion online has been an exercise in extending the table. Or at least, extending the invitation. If indeed, it is Christ's table and it is Christ who is our host, what benefit have we received from being unable to enforce any barriers or enact any restrictions?

I suggest that, as far as the sacrament of communion is concerned, we are more authentically the Body of Christ now than we ever have been before.

Grace and peace,
Michael

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Thank you for your generous support.
- Read the scripture lesson for today by clicking here: [John 2:13-22](http://John%202:13-22)
- Please enjoy our online worship and feel free to share with others. The link for sharing is: <https://youtu.be/EusJsPCTpM>