



# TOUCHSTONES

## Communion

August 2021

As a child in Unitarian Universalism in the Pacific Northwest, I never experienced a traditional communion of wine and bread. I remember an occasional “different” communion of sorts – I think even one with M&M’s at a youth con – but mostly, there were jokes about how the real Unitarian communion was coffee hour. When I did an internship at a hospital in Madison, Wisconsin, I put in my learning goals that I wanted to know how to serve communion. But when my supervisor found out that I had not been baptized, he said that I wouldn’t be able to serve communion in a way that worked theologically for many of the patients. So we didn’t do it, though I watched him come and serve it.

Many years later, a friend took me to a slightly radical Methodist church in Chicago, which had a very open table, and I got in line with others, and partook. It felt ancient, and relevant, and the good. Part of that was that the words of welcome were genuinely welcoming – it was not “this makes us special,” but much more humble and gentle.

Researching our history, the traditional bread and wine communion was a regular part of most Unitarian and Universalist churches for centuries. It remains so in many of our New England churches. This congregation had communion once a month, or on special holidays, for most of its life. But when I began to offer a bread and wine communion, using the 1936 Unitarian hymnal as our script, about five years ago, it was probably the first “bread-and-wine” communion since Dr. Connolly retired in 1943.

One of the reasons I think bringing communion back is that it gets us in our bodies, instead of just in our heads. Our liberal religious ancestors understood, and we must remember, that we are not just ideas and thoughts, but living breathing beings. We must eat. When we make religious rituals more embodied, they have more power and more realness.

There’s another reason. When we are invited to share our food – whether we call that a communion or a potluck or a meal out where we split the tab – it creates community and belonging. There’s a reason community and communion share the same root, of course. Eating together reminds us that we are all mortal, living, fragile beings – and can give us joy and nourishment.

We celebrate a bread-and-wine communion each Easter here now, which makes me glad. This month, when we focus on the topic of communion, I invite you to pay attention to all the moments of communion and communion in your life. When you sit with your friends and family, notice each other’s faces and how you are connected. When you eat by yourself, notice how the earth itself is part of you and you are part of it. Feel that power. Notice.

In faith,  
Matthew

## Readings from the Common Bowl

**Day 1:** "Empathy is an affinity, a communion, a comprehension." C. JoyBell C.



**Day 2:** "The secret of a full life is to live and relate to others as if they might not be there tomorrow, as if you might not be there tomorrow. It eliminates the vice of procrastination, the sin of postponement, failed communications, failed communions." Anaïs Nin

**Day 3:** "In a true partnership, the kind that lasts through the ages, there is an unspoken communion." Cassandra Clare

**Day 4:** "He is one of those who has had the wilderness for a pillow, and called a star his brother. Alone. But loneliness can be a communion." Dag Hammarskjöld

**Day 5:** "Here and there does not matter. / We must be still and still moving / Into another intensity / For a further union, a deeper communion." T. S. Eliot

**Day 6:** "Empathy is an affinity, a communion, a comprehension." C. JoyBell C.

**Day 7:** "I think ...[religion] is an art, ...an extension of the communion all the other arts attempt." Dodie Smith

**Day 8:** "Happiness is home. ...It is a state of mind. A place of communion and unconditional love. It is where, when you cross its threshold, you finally feel at peace." Dennis Lehane

**Day 9:** "Finally, he said that among men there was no such communion as among horses and the notion that men can be understood at all was probably an illusion." Cormac McCarthy

**Day 10:** "...Here is the mystery of our global responsibility: that we are in communion with ...all people. ...If we want to be real peace-makers ...our primary concern ...should be survival of humanity, the survival of the planet, and the health of all people." Henri J.M. Nouwen

**Day 11:** "Our homes, imperfect as they are, must be a haven from the chaos outside ...where troubled souls find peace, weary hearts find rest, ...lonely pilgrims find communion, and wounded spirits find compassion." Jani Ortlund

**Day 12:** "There is almost a sensual longing for communion with others who have a large vision. The immense fulfillment of the friendship between those engaged in furthering the evolution of consciousness has a quality impossible to describe." Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

**Day 13:** "The ocean was the best place, of course. ...It was a feeling of freedom like no other, and yet a feeling of communion with all the other places and creatures the water touched." Ann Brashares

**Day 14:** "The practice of forgiveness is not ...a way of dealing with guilt. Instead, its central goal is to reconcile, to restore communion ...with one another, and with the whole creation." L. Gregory Jones

**Day 15:** "Soul grows in communion. ... From true conversation... communication deepens into compassion and creates community." Sam Keen

**Day 16:** "Whoever moves within the forest can partake directly of sacredness, ...drink the sacred water as a living communion, ...open his eyes and witness the burning beauty of sacredness." Richard Nelson



**Day 17:** "Eating, and hospitality in general, is a communion, and any meal worth attending by yourself is improved by the multiples of those with whom it is shared." Jesse Browner

**Day 18:** "Faith is not knowledge of an object but communion with it." Nicolás Gómez Dávila

**Day 19:** "For mystics from the Abrahamic faiths..., the inward odyssey is also an upward odyssey, a quest for personal and vital communion with an infinite Being." David C. Downing

**Day 20:** "True communication is communion—the realization of oneness, which is love." Eckhart Tolle

**Day 21:** "The man or woman who proclaims devotion to the cause of liberation yet is unable to enter into communion with the people, whom he or she continues to regard as totally ignorant, is grievously self-deceived." Paulo Freire

**Day 22:** "...The effort to discover an authentic self, ...and find a soul in a clear, unimpeded communion with the sacred is consonant with spiritual quests throughout the ages." Cynthia Eller

**Day 23:** "My love affair with nature is so deep that I am not satisfied with being a mere onlooker, or nature tourist. I crave a more real and meaningful relationship... in which I have communion and fellowship with nature...." Euell Gibbons

**Day 24:** "To care means first of all to empty our own cup and to allow the other to come close to us. It means to take away the many barriers which prevent us from entering into communion with the other." Henri J.M. Nouwen

**Day 25:** "Commit to finding the true nature of art. ...Go for that communion, that real communion with your soul, and the discipline of expressing that communion with others." Anna Deavere Smith

**Day 26:** "...I ...know that eating a Hershey's Kiss is like an act of communion." Damien Echols

**Day 27:** "Love creates a communion with life. ...In any moment we can step beyond our small self and embrace each other as beloved parts of a whole." Jack Kornfield

**Day 28:** "They spoke of a communion so much vaster than any church could contain: one I had sensed all my life could be expressed in the sharing of food, particularly with strangers." Sara Miles

**Day 29:** "There is communion of more than our bodies when bread is broken and wine drunk." M.F.K. Fisher

**Day 30:** "The measure of your solitude is the measure of your capacity for communion." Henri J.M. Nouwen

**Day 31:** "The deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion." Tom Ryan



## Family Matters

### The Marvelous Loaves

The story, *The Marvelous Loaves*, by UU RE Director Beryl Aschenberg, First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee, is delightful and engaging. It is included in Michelle Richard's book, *Come into the Circle: Worshiping with Children*.

The baker of the marvelous loaves is



Grandpa Alan, a member of the Nottingham Unitarian Church. When he is asked about his bread recipe, he simply says, "The secret ingredient is LOVE."

Grandpa Alan always bakes a loaf for the church's annual Bread communion. Children and adults alike are incredulous. How can one loaf be enough?

Grandpa Alan begins cutting the loaf with a bread knife, and as if by magic, the bread multiplies into 20 loaves. "It's a miracle," somebody called out. "Don't be ridiculous," Grandpa replied. "It is a sound mathematical principle."

The youth group was planning to serve food at a soup kitchen on the following Saturday. During coffee hour, Barbara, the Director of Religious Education, asked Grandpa if he would bring a loaf of bread to help feed the hungry. Grandpa Alan agreed.

Grandpa Alan met the youth at the soup kitchen with a homemade loaf of bread. There were SO many hungry people, the bread just kept multiplying. Well, a secret like that doesn't stay a secret for long. Grandpa Alan and his bread were featured on the six o'clock news, which is how the town sheriff learned about the marvelous bread.

The sheriff was not a nice person; in fact, he was a bully who was mean to everyone. When he saw the news, he knew that he had to get a loaf of the bread. That magical bread would be

worth a lot of money, and the sheriff loved money.

The sheriff went to Grandpa Alan's home and offered, then bargained, then threatened Grandpa Alan in order to get a loaf of the bread. Grandpa Alan refused saying, "You just don't understand. It won't work for you. Nothing personal, but there is a mathematical principle at work here." The sheriff wouldn't take no for an answer. He pushed past Grandpa Alan, went into the kitchen, took a loaf of bread, and returned to his home as fast as he could.

The sheriff began cutting the bread, dreaming of the riches that it would bring him. But the bread didn't multiply, instead it began dividing into slices and pieces and crumbs. Then the crumbs began dividing again and again until nothing of the bread was left.

As Grandpa Alan told everyone who asked, a sound mathematical principle controlled the bread and it was this:

***Hatred Divides, Love Multiplies.***

Source: Touchstones

### Family Activity:

#### *Baking and Sharing*

Read the retelling of *The Marvelous Loaves* above. Then engage your children in baking cookies or something else to share with someone.

### Frog and Toad

Amy Alznauer

A perpetually cheerful Frog pays a visit to Toad but finds Toad glum, sitting on his front porch.

"This is my sad time of day," says Toad, "when I wait for the mail to come."

"Why is that?" asks Frog.

"No one has ever sent me a letter. My mailbox is always empty. That is why waiting for the mail is a sad time for me."

Then Frog and Toad sit on the porch, feeling sad together.

Frog rescued the situation by running home, writing a letter to Toad, and sending it literally by snail mail. The little

## Praise & Thanksgiving

### A Theology of Communion

Rev. Marco Belletini

(In the following, Marco Belletini calls for a ritual that has both meaning and depth.)

My communion theology is broad at some points, narrow at others. Just "sharing" anything—stones, feathers, balloons—is not communion to me. However, I detest universal formulae, and don't think Bread, Wine, and the Last Supper must always be there to celebrate eucharistic (Christian) communion. A Flower "Communion" can be eucharistic, but often is not. To be eucharistic communion for me, three things must be there (in classical liturgical jargon):

1. *eucharistos*: praise and thanksgiving for good gifts (*eucharis*) in the present, including bread, wine, flowers or [the] enduring presence of Jesus (but this last is not absolutely necessary to me, which makes me a heretic of the first order, I'm sure).

2. *anamnesis*: retelling of the story; praise and thanksgiving for all past good gifts, including the "redeeming" lives of the christic prophets, whose stories are the living vine on which we graft our own coiled lives.

3. *epiklesis*: praise and thanksgiving for the coming future, which requires that we all change for the better ("repent" is the ancient word...). The Spirit is invoked to be present among us all so that we may take the good gifts of present and past and weave them into a future worthy of human dignity and for the delight and pleasure of the One who will only love and ever love and Who is Love. (This last "future" orientation is for me the most important. I think that simply "remembering" Jesus is dangerously sentimental; without a pledge (Latin: *sacramentum*) to the "Rule of God" all power in the rite leaks away at "Amen.")

These are the touchstones of my sacramental understandings. I realize this puts me squarely into a camp at odds with just about everyone, since I am so loose about this all, but my love for the eucharist is unquestionable.

Source: *The Communion Book*, edited by Carl Seaburg, 1993, UUMA.

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The Unitarian Universalist Church  
4848 Turner St.  
Rockford, IL 61107

-Coffee Hour on Sunday. 337-267-3668. 11:10 a.m. Grab a cup and jump on to say hello!

- Touchstones: contact your touchstones group facilitator for the time and meeting ID, if you do not already have it.

Want to have a group – a book group, a parent group, a “circle supper”, or whatever you like?  
– just email Autumn at [office@uurockford.org](mailto:office@uurockford.org) and she can give you the Zoom login and password

### *Communion & Deepening Connections*

While the traditional practice of communion is not meaningful to most Unitarian Universalists, other meanings are consistent with the annual theme of “deepening connections.” An ancient practice linked to communion is captured by the hospitality offered by Abraham and Sarah to three strangers. The admonition in Hebrews 13:1 was, “Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.” Communion is also a quality of enduring friendships and love in the sense of “union with.” Further, in our congregations, communion is an important characteristic of beloved community as invite people to gather around the welcome table.