

**That's What It's All About - A sermon in three Parts with Three Voices**



*This is the message from January 17, 2010 - our Vision Covenanting Service. The Sermon was given by Rev. Sarah, Cam and Rev. John (each taking one part). The Scripture for the day can be found by following the hyperlink.*

<http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=130843151>

**Part One - by Rev. Sarah Fanning**

When I was first learning to roller skate many years ago, one of the skills we had to master was doing the “Hokey Pokey”. Most of you here have done it at some point, and so I would like to invite you to stand as you are able and join me:

*You put your right hand in,  
You put your right hand out.  
You put your right hand in,  
And you shake it all about.  
You do the Hokey Pokey  
And you turn yourself around,  
That's what it's all about!  
You put your left hand in,  
You put your left hand out.  
You put your left hand in,  
And you shake it all about.  
You do the Hokey Pokey  
And you turn yourself around,  
That's what it's all about!  
Okay! Excellent! You may be seated.*

After your right and left hand, next is your right foot, then your left foot, then your head, and in some cases your butt, until finally you put your "whole self in!" It was a lot of fun, not to mention a lot harder to do on roller skates!

The memory of doing the "Hokey Pokey" came to mind as I reflected on the passage that Bill just read for us. Paul's letter goes on from talking about gifts, to speaking about the church community using the image of a body.

Can you imagine what would happen if you were doing the "Hokey Pokey" and the left hand refused to do the "Hokey Pokey" because it wanted to be the right foot? Or what if the right foot said, "Since I am not the left hand, I am not part of the body so I refuse to do the 'Hokey Pokey'"? The next thing you know, the head might say, "I'm the most important. I don't need any of you - I can 'Hokey Pokey' all by myself!"

Maybe this example of the "Hokey Pokey" seems a bit silly, but for me, it is a good picture of the church, particularly the community of faith in Corinth. As far as we can tell the church in Corinth was a troubled one. Many of their troubles seem to have included some dissension about who was "more important" than others. Here Paul is responding to claims that some people have more important spiritual gifts than others. In a faith community this is nothing less than a claim that some people have more to offer the community than others.

Paul is having nothing to do with this. Paul is very clear that *all the gifts* come from the same Source – God's Holy Spirit. Paul is equally clear that *all* parts of the body are needed for the body to be healthy and well-functioning.

This passage also speaks to me about the nature of being in *relationship*. The human body functions with each part relating to and supporting one another. The same can be said about how we relate to others. When we are in relationship with someone, it isn't just focussed on us and our own needs. It's about being mutual and supportive and encouraging. It's about partnering with one another to do things that one can't do alone.

I must apologize to those who attended the Genesis adult study group this fall, as they've already heard this story, but there's a great little tale by Rabbi Mark Gellman puts it in his story "Partners" about the creation of the world, "A partner is someone you work with on a big thing that neither of you can do alone. If you have a partner, it means you can never give up, because your partner is depending on you. On the days you think I am not doing enough and on those days I think you are not doing enough, even on those days we are still partners and we must not stop trying to finish the world. That's the deal."

As members of the body of Christ, we are partners – with God and with one another. We promise and covenant with each other that we will recognize our own gifts, recognize the gifts of others, and work together so that all are empowered to use their gifts for the glory of God. Just like the song says, "That's what it's all about!"

## **Part Two - by Cam Fraser**

That is what it's all about!

Over the past months as the Vision Task Force who have been instrumental in helping this church articulate its vision and mission, we've heard Mavis O'Neil quote her favourite part of the book *the Shack*. God speaks to the main character, telling him:

*I am a verb. I am that I am. I will be who I will be...I am alive, dynamic, ever active, and moving. I am a being verb. (pg. 204)*

(If you've never read the Shack - or if you have read it and have some thoughts about this interesting book I'd recommend taking a look at the study group that will be happening run by Mavis and Rev. Sarah in the spring).

God is a verb - and that's what it's all about! And today as a church St. Paul's covenants around three words:

**Welcoming**  
**Transforming**  
**Serving**

And that's what we're all about!

Whether they're used as verbs or adjectives, these are active descriptors of who we are and how we long to be as a church family.

We've used the word covenant already this morning and we'll be using it again as we close the service today. Throughout the drama of Scripture we read the People of God entering into covenant again and again - and Rev. Sarah has reminded us the word partnership is a great way to understand covenant. All throughout the Hebrew Scriptures we read the people coming together again and again to remind themselves of the story they are living out. And to join together in doing so.

Jesus inaugurated one tradition that is likewise all about remembering. When bread is broken and wine poured in the sacrament of communion - we remember the sacrificial love epitomised in his story. But it is remembered so that it might become part of us - that we might experience that love towards us and show that same love to others.

We remember to become a part of it.

Jesus encouraged his followers to gather and do this in remembrance so that their lives when they were apart would reflect that ritual of broken bread and poured wine. They were not to be known as the people who gathered to share communion, but the people whose lives reflected the sacrificial love that the ritual of communion signified.

Likewise, gathering together to covenant to be Welcoming, Transforming and Serving is, in a sense, neither new nor groundbreaking - it's about remembering and being!

It's about renaming those parts of the story of God's love that most resonate with us and refining and declaring our desire to live them out.

And out is a key word. Welcoming, Transforming and Serving are 3 words that easily apply to our gatherings on Sunday mornings, but are not tied to this time or this place.

These are 3 words that apply to any moment in our lives, and our prayer is that our activities while we are together, whether Sunday morning, Tuesday Night, Wednesday Afternoon - might be Welcoming, Transforming and Serving so that we might be these things in all we do. We gather in many forms as a church for many varied activities so that in all the varied ways we live our lives we might epitomise the story of God's redeeming and sacrificial love.

These 3 words speak even more clearly to how we do things than to what things we do.

And in this way, we put into action the words that Rev. Sarah shared with us last week. Words by Douglas John Hall that remind us: *In the church, tell the story; in the world live the story."*

God is a verb!  
We are the body of Christ!  
And that's what it's all about!

### **Part Three - Rev. John Benham**

This morning every part of our community will gather to make a promise to be welcoming, transforming and serving as followers of Christ. From the youngest in our Sunday school to the oldest in our congregation truly everyone has a special place in our community, the body of Christ.

As your minister for just over a decade I've been honoured to hear your stories and the stories of people in Milton who have given thanks for the ways you have been "welcoming" when someone needed a friend. I've heard about times when you've experienced transformation through Christ when you've experienced forgiveness, and reconciliation. Your serving has touched the lives of others who have expressed to me that they didn't know how they'd get by without the support of this congregation. Today we renew our commitment to our mission, and I hope remember a favourite saying of mine, "God isn't finished with me yet".

It's been a difficult week to watch the tragedy and suffering unfold in Haiti. Tracy Kidder has written a book to help dispel any judgments we've made about Haiti, its history or its politics. Kidder's book title comes from a Haitian proverb, *Beyond mountains there are mountains*, meaning, you solve one problem and another appears.

A mission worker said, *"We thought we were doing really good work: seeing 1500 patients a week, educating 200 students each year, providing loans for 49 women. These have been the mountains we have been climbing. Now we discover that there are mountains beyond mountains"*.

The good news of Jesus is not going to save us from the struggles and tragedies of life. We as people living in a troubled world will be victims of brokenness, strife, and injustice. Some, like the people of Haiti, have found themselves victimized time and time again by forces outside their control.

This is not God's doing instead it reflects the brokenness of all of life, the brokenness that God came to redeem. The challenge for all of us is how we as God's people will respond and how we will show solidarity with these sisters and brothers so far away? Through our imperfect prayers, vision statements, and relief efforts, we will become the incarnate presence of God for those who are in need.

Through our offering we show the world that God is indeed present, caring, comforting, guiding and opening the way for new life.

I've never sensed that the Vision Task Force has wanted another plaque on the wall. I sense they dream of our vision living and growing in our hearts. In your pew you will find colourful hands for you to ponder how you will try to be more "**welcoming**" to others, and how we might be "**transformed**", by growing in Christ who makes us all new, and finally; how might we "**serve**" God in a new way.

As Cam has reminded us, these promises are not restricted to this place of worship or to one day a week, but our covenant has no boundaries or walls. Our faith is lived out each and every day. When you've finished writing out your promise during the offering you may take your hands home or we'd be delighted if you place your hands on the wall in Graham Hall as we create a rainbow of promises.



*To Close the Service the Following response was used as the congregation covenanted to live out this vision - to be a welcoming, transforming and serving family of faith!  
The responses are written in **bold**.*

A covenant is a promise we make with God and with one another,  
a promise to live God's Way.

Let us now make a covenant with God and with each other.

**In the presence of God and one another,  
We give thanks for the example and lasting love of Jesus Christ,  
Who shows us how to live God's Way.**

In baptism, we pledge to support one another as we grow in faith.  
We want to honour and fulfill these promises.

Do you commit yourselves to be welcoming?

**With God's help, we covenant to welcome and include all people, no matter who we are, where we are from, what we look like, or who we love.**

Do you commit yourselves to be transforming?

**With God's help, we covenant to learn and grow in our faith – to pray, to learn, to play, and to share with each other what we find out.**

Do you commit yourselves to be serving?

**With God's help, we covenant to share God's love with others, here and around the world, through our time, talent, and treasures.**

**We Pray together.**

**In your image, O God, we are created.**

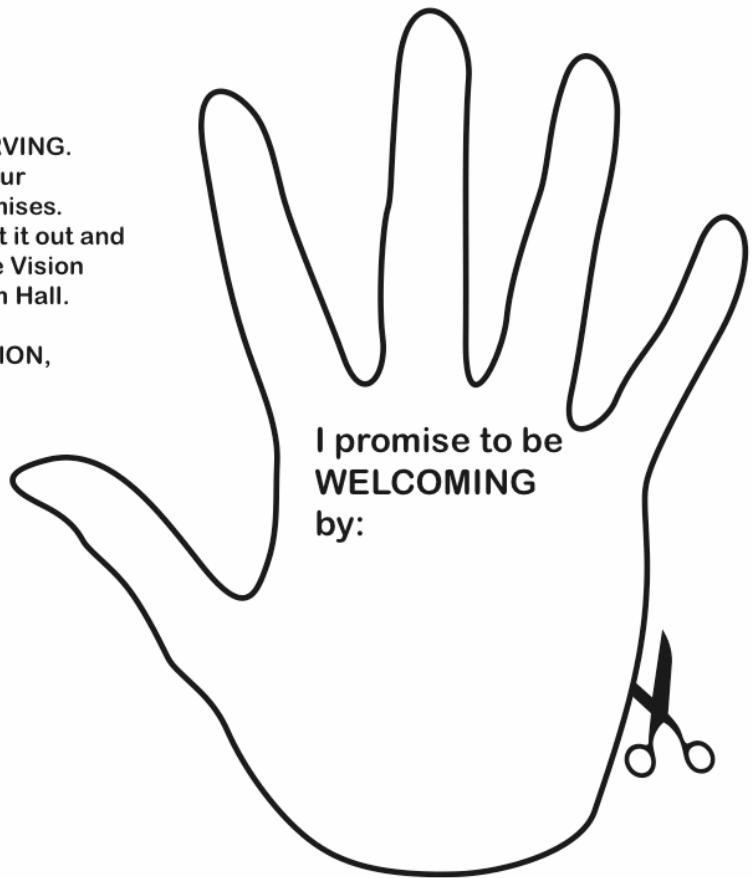
**Be with us as we reflect that image in our work and play, as we sing and pray, study and learn, laugh and cry together.**

**Help us to accept our responsibility as members of this congregation and as followers of the Way of Jesus Christ.**

**We ask for the encouragement of your Spirit and the energy of your love, as we live out this covenant to be a welcoming, transforming, serving community together. Amen.**

St. Paul's VISION is to be:  
**WELCOMING, TRANSFORMING AND SERVING.**  
Please think about how YOU can make your  
personal commitment to these three promises.  
Write a short statement on each hand, cut it out and  
bring it to the church to be included in the Vision  
Covenant rainbow on the wall of Graham Hall.

For more information about St. Paul's VISION,  
please go to [www.stpaulsmilton.org](http://www.stpaulsmilton.org)



**St. Paul's United Church  
Milton**