

“The Open Table: A Harvest Communion”
A Homily by the Rev. Alex Jensen
First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto, Canada
Sunday, October 11, 2026

On this Sunday of our Harvest Communion, I want to begin with a great Communion story for you: the time I received Communion in full drag. *Intrigued?*

Back in divinity school, a queer Catholic friend of mine invited me to a Halloween Party, with a costume contest. He had it all figured out: he knew he was going to dress up as Janet from the TV show *The Good Place*. If you haven’t seen it, Janet is kind of like the human manifestation of Siri or Alexa, who grants people in the “Good Place” their every wish. Well, my friend also had it planned out that yours truly would go dressed as *Bad Janet*, the Alexa or Siri of the “Bad Place.” I’m talking a blonde wig, makeup, a black leather jacket... *All the works!*

Now, it’s not an important detail, but we did end up winning the award for the best costume duo... Just saying! However, the real catch was we didn’t have enough time to change between events. There was a small gathering of students that met for a Catholic Mass and dinner before the Halloween party, one that I had been to a couple of times, as we students knew there was always great food. *Free dinner is a great bargain in grad school!*

Once my transformation was complete, I was surprised that nobody recognized me. I was so convincing that even one of my professors thought I was some new girl! When I spoke, folks started to realize who was behind all of the Bad Janet drag and makeup. The part that relates to Communion was when the bread and wine were passed. There I was, in the circle.

I had been to enough Masses to know that I wasn’t supposed to partake, as a non-Catholic and as someone who didn’t see the bread and wine as the literal body and blood. However, in what remains one of the queerest moments of grace I have ever experienced, the priest passed me the basket of blessed bread, inviting me to partake, knowing fully who I was. Standing in that circle, in full drag, I was invited to receive at a table that had never been set for me... It was stunning.

For me, it’s a story about the volatility of closed spaces. How no matter how hard we try to shut or keep people out, inevitably the bread is broken and the wine is poured. Inevitably, the table is set... The meal or whatever it is that is kept out of reach is made available, even to those who would otherwise be excluded. Something that relates to the radical space we’re co-creating in our own Communion this morning.

Today, for our annual Harvest Communion, we’re breathing new life into this ancient ritual and tradition. The concept of the shared meal is an ancient technology: how eating together breaks more than bread. It breaks down barriers between us and makes us vulnerable to one another. As Priya Parker and the words of our meditation remind us, there’s an inherent power in gatherings. There’s something potent that happens when

people come together, not even just to solve problems or test our ways of being... But to simply just be.¹ Sharing a meal with one another is ancient, human technology.

The tradition of Communion itself has an interesting heritage. The first Communion, as it was celebrated, wasn't actually a Christian one. It was a Jewish Passover seder, or an early form of one.² The seder that Jesus celebrated with his disciples, with his beloved ones, his rag-tag group of friends, social outcasts, and misfits. This seder held the tradition's familiar symbols of bread and wine. The unleavened bread, or matzah, representing the quick Exodus out of Egypt, and the wine the covenant promises.

As the tradition took shape in early Christian communities, when there was a great field of debate over who Jesus was and his divine status, the focus of Communion was much larger than the bread and wine. Communion in early Christianities was a "Love Feast" or an *agape* meal, *agape* being the Greek word for unconditional, selfless love.³ Rather than the ritual with bread and wine, Communion was first celebrated as a potluck, not just for fellowship but to actually feed people. A form of mutual aid and care. It was a shared table around the needs of the most vulnerable.

Over time, the emphasis grew to centre the bread and wine; a separate ritual that took the main stage. While the original multiethnic love feasts welcomed everyone to the table, no matter their status and standing, soon the Eucharist became just for the baptized amongst them.⁴ Those who were wealthy or carried great status became the ones to eat the finest parts of the meal, leaving those disadvantaged with the scraps.

In many ways, Communion is a tradition that has been far removed from its original context and intent. Our own tradition, Unitarian Universalism, grew out of two liberal Christian traditions, and has grown to embrace so much more. Perhaps we are ready to reclaim this ritual, and ask ourselves what it might mean for us.

This Harvest meal we share today is our own Unitarian Universalist take on Communion. Rather than bread and wine, we share in bread and cider, given as a gift from nature's abundance; from the thoughtful and caring hands and hearts that have offered them freely, without reservation.

I think our Harvest Communion is best understood through the lens of the Gift Economy, a natural and even spiritual concept that I continue to find theologically central in my own journey. As a teacher whose parables were rooted in the land, perhaps Jesus saw bread and wine as gifts of the Earth. The Gift Economy is best understood through the words of Robin Wall Kimmerer, a botanist and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. From her book *The Serviceberry*, one of the most spiritually profound books I've read in recent years, Kimmerer explains the Gift Economy in this way:

¹ [*The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters*](#), by Priya Parker.

² [*"Passover and Last Supper Revisited."*](#) by Joel Marcus, *New Testament Studies*, Cambridge University Press.

³ [*"Love Feast," History of the Early Church.*](#)

⁴ [*"The Lord's Supper Is a Multiethnic Love Feast"*](#), by Jamaal E. Williams & Timothy Paul Jones, *Christianity Today*.

In a gift economy, wealth is understood as having enough to share, and the practice for dealing with abundance is to give it away. In fact, status is determined not by how much one accumulates, but by how much one gives away... All flourishing is mutual.⁵

As we gather on this Sunday before Thanksgiving, as we savour the harvest and abundance before us, we make the radical claim that here is the truly broad table. In my experience, UU congregations are about as broad as communities can humanly be. This table is set with bread and cider, and everything is prepared with you in mind. No matter if you've fallen away from congregational life and are only now just returning. No matter if you're a Christian or a Humanist, Earth-centred or Buddhist, Jewish or Muslim, or if you're just simply unsure... This table is for you. This ritual is a reminder of the abundance shared. That the primary way we celebrate abundance is to give it all away.

Before our bread was bread, it was wheat. Rising from soil that was generated over thousands of years, from the bodies of leaves and creatures now long gone, seeds were nurtured in darkness by the sun's light, recklessly scattered across the Earth. Farmers tended and harvested it. Millers ground it. Even the yeast itself, a living thing, gave its breath to make this bread rise. And our very own Hope brought it as a gift for you.

Likewise, before this cider was cider, it was apples hanging heavy on trees, in orchards not far from here. Bees and pollinators moved from blossom to blossom, carrying life between the trees. Those apples were picked by many generous hands so that our own hands might be fed from abundance. Those apples were pressed and poured, and our very own Donald brought them here as a gift freely given.

A gift is never meant to stop with us; it only stays a gift if it remains in motion.⁶ When you take this bread and this cider, you are not participating in a transaction. You are becoming a part of the living, breathing circle of giving; a circle that is all of ours to share.

From our Reading, the parable I shared with you earlier, we know that Communion can mean a lot of things.⁷ This bread and cider can be whatever you need them to be: symbols of the Earth's harvest and our gratitude. Sustenance for the long journey ahead, in a new season of loss, grief, or pain. A shared meal akin to a radical kind of potluck, where all are welcome and no one is turned away. *This is your table. This is our table.*

Friends, at this table we have gluten-free and gluten-full options for bread; organic cider that is fresh and preservative-free... *And cruelty free, of course!*

Ashley and Donald will be stationed at the two tables along the chancel. We encourage you to come up the centre aisle and to choose a person to receive from who is closest to you. You're invited to take a small cup of cider and/or a little piece of bread and to enjoy

⁵ [*The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World*](#), by Robin Wall Kimmerer, pp. 32-33.

⁶ [*The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World*](#), by Lewis Hyde.

⁷ [*"The Parable of the Autumnal Communion,"*](#) Anonymous, shared with permission.

it then and there. Once you've received, please make your way back to your seat along the side aisles rather than the centre. There will be small wastebins for your cups along the side aisles. For those who are unable to make their way to the chancel, Hope and I are available to bring you some bread and cider; please just raise your hand high in your seat.

As with all things, you are not required to participate, though all are welcome at this table. Whether you come in your Sunday best, or a blonde wig and a leather jacket, this table was set with you in mind.

So come, friends. This table is for you.

Come and be fed.