

For those of you may not know, I'm a brat. An Army brat, that is. I grew up on Army bases in Europe and the US in the nineteen fifties and sixties. It's a very different world than that inhabited by the average American, with its own culture and customs.

It's funny what you remember from childhood. My dad was an officer, and if you were an officer, you and your family went to church on Sundays. It was expected of you back then, not for religious reasons, but unspoken social ones. We went to Protestant services. After all these years, I don't remember a word of any sermon, or any bible verse, or the words to any hymns except a few Christmas carols. I do remember the hard wooden pews, and the weird cardboardy flavorless flavor of the communion wafers that kinda sorta melted in your mouth and stuck to your tongue, and the odd sour taste of the grape juice used instead of wine.

Communion was kind of exciting, a break from regular old boring Sundays. I don't remember it happening very often, probably because we moved from base to base a lot, and Protestant services were led by ministers from a variety of denominations who served folks from a variety of denominations. All of whom had slightly differing theological stances on the subject.

But I have this image in my head of the wafers and the wine being passed out, and everyone waiting to eat and drink together. I think my mother may have gently slapped my hand a time or two to keep me from jumping the gun and gobbling the wafer down. Hey, I was bored and hungry.

We said the words to together. We ate the wafers together. We drank the juice together. For a moment, we were one with the divine, as we received the memory and presence of Christ together. Not that I really understood that fully at the time, being a child.

I think that when many of us hear the word communion, we understand it as a Christian practice.

But communion can be understood in other ways than in the Christian sense. It can be understood as an act of sharing, but more often as the experience of intimate fellowship or rapport with something. Ritual and worship and prayer can give us that experience, without us necessarily believing in a deity.

I think the best example of this is the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address. This invocation is done to open and close major meetings, or when anything important is done. It's also a great way to start and end your day. If you haven't read it or said it, I highly recommend you do.

There are some 18 verses. The first one is for The People and it goes:

*Today we have gathered and we see that the cycles of life continue. We have been given the duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things. So now, we bring our minds together as one as we give greetings and thanks to each other as people.*

*Now our minds are one.*

There are verses for The Earth Mother, The Waters, The Fish, The Plants, The Food Plants, The Medicine Plants, The Animals, The Trees, The Birds, The Four Winds, The Thunders, The Sun, Grandmother Moon, The Stars, The Wisdom Keepers, The Creator - and each verse ends with the words: *Now our minds are one.*

The address closes with this verse:

*We have now arrived at the place where we end our words. Of all the things we have named, it was not our intention to leave anything out. If something was forgotten, we leave it to each individual to send such greetings and thanks in their own way.*

*Now our minds are one.*

Notice that many of the minds are not human or even animal. The whole address is the practice of establishing rapport – communion - with something larger, with the natural world, and placing human beings in right relationship in that world.

*Now our minds are one.*

This is also communion. Communion opens us up to other view points and it is critical to the spiritual practice of community.

And the spiritual practice of community is foundational to our faith. We use the term Beloved Community a lot, but I wonder sometimes how we understand that, and how that understanding informs how we practice it.

The words communion and community share the same root word - the Latin *communis* – meaning mutual participation. Communion can also mean an association or fellowship. The word communication comes from the same roots, and you can't have community without communication.

Last month, I shared how I think blessing the world takes us into communion and into the holistic way the right brain pays attention to the world. As I noted then, we also need the left-brained orientation, which I think for us is covenant. But the right brain needs to guide the left.

I think people can misunderstand or misuse communion as some state of fuzzy woo-woo undifferentiated Oneness. On the contrary, my understanding is that communion requires a state of alertness, something like a flow state. A heightened awareness where our singular consciousness isn't getting in the way of our knowing and understanding.

So many of our current predicaments are what we call 'wicked problems'. A wicked problem is a social or cultural problem that's difficult or impossible to solve—normally because of its

complex and interconnected nature. Racism is just one example. Or we're simply caught in a dilemma between two not so great choices that generate not so great outcomes, and we are forced to choose between what we guess is the lesser of two evils.

When we're in a flow state of multiple viewpoints, solutions can present themselves. They arise from the collective field of awareness without us giving up our individuality and autonomy.

I like to think of it as knowing the world with the eyes of a bee. A bee's eyes are multifaceted, each facet giving its own incomplete view of the world, but together they give the bee a more complete view of the world. One that allows it to navigate and survive.

The thing about communion is that we can't be selective about the viewpoints we choose to see with or listen to. That disrupts the holistic orientation and drops us out of communion. No singular viewpoint can be allowed to dominate, or we find ourselves back slicing and dicing the world and trying to write prescriptions. Back trying to fix the world with details. And fixing the world that way literally means fixing it in time and place, trying to make it static and unchanging. Needless to say, that's the biggest mistake of all.

As a culture, I believe we've ignored communion at great cost. Communion can be as simple as a shared sense of the common good, or as complex as a sense of cosmic unity.

I think there's a lot to McGilchrist's claim that left-brained thinking has come at the expense of the bigger picture, and has now reached a point where it is seriously distorting our lives and our thought. The question then becomes one of trying to overcome those distortions and restore balance. To have the bigger picture guide us. To see like bees, to not being attached to only one viewpoint, usually ours. To quit struggling over whose view is going to rule.

I think it's possible. I think we're going to have to, in order to navigate and survive. We face wicked problems. It probably won't be easy. But you never know. It will take some humility to do so. It could surprise us and be easy.

We must always start where we are. I believe that communion gives us the best place to start from, as individuals, and as communities.