



April 26, 2020
Third Sunday of Easter

*A family of faith ministering together
in the name of Jesus Christ*

Ministers: Each of us Assisted by Rev. Mark Perry

Organist: Kathy Limon

Meditation: *"Tipping Points"*

It had taken them a very long time to arrive at the point where they actually started to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, God's anointed one. They had gradually, very gradually, come to believe that he was their hope; he was the one who would unceremoniously toss the Romans out of Israel and restore them to their glory days, when David and his son Solomon ruled, when Israel was an economic and military powerhouse. And now that hope lay dead in a tomb, and they, people of 'the Way' felt defeated and dejected. It had been wonderful while it lasted, but now the ride was over and there was nothing left to do except go back to what you knew, go back to Emmaus and the life you lived before the days of Jesus' life and ministry. And so they trudged reluctantly along the road to Emmaus, their hopes dashed.

Is anyone familiar with Malcolm Gladwell's book *The Tipping Point*? The book seeks to explain and describe the "mysterious" sociological changes that mark everyday life. As Gladwell states, "Ideas and products and messages and behaviors spread like [viruses](#) do". An example of such change in his book is the rise in popularity and sales of [Hush Puppies](#) shoes in the mid-1990s. Gladwell defines a tipping point as "the moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point" when change takes off. I would go further and say that a tipping point is the moment when either change either takes off, or fizzles out and dies. It is that moment when things are balanced on a knife edge and will either tip one way or the other.

I was at an educational event a while back in which we were exploring the work of Phyllis Tickle *Embracing Emergence*

Christianity. What I took away from the study, and reading her book *Emergence Christianity* is the understanding that the tipping point the church finds itself at is not the tipping point between continuation of the way the church has been for the last 100 years or so, and the end of the church, but that the church is at a tipping point between continuation of the way church has been for the last 100 years or so, and something new. Tickle describes periods of vast change in the church that seem to happen at about 500 year intervals. The great schism between the east and the west, dividing the church between the Eastern Orthodox and the west; the Reformation which gave rise to Protestantism; are just two examples of such changes. Tickle argues that we are at moment of extraordinary change in the church, a tipping point. The catch is that we aren't sure just yet what the new thing that God is doing is going to look like.

When Cleopas and his partner were on the road to Emmaus, the movement known as 'the Way' was at a tipping point. Either it was going to take off, or fizzle and die. And right at that moment, Cleopas and his partner were joined by another traveler who shared much with them. And when they arrived home in Emmaus at twilight and insisted that their travelling companion join them in a meal and stay the night, they had an epiphany as the bread was broken. Their travelling companion was none other than the risen Christ. Immediately, even though it was not particularly safe to travel the roads after dark, they set off for Jerusalem once again. 'The Way' would not die, but would take off and spread around the world.

Yesterday as I was thinking about tipping points.

Can you name any tipping points that we find ourselves at now? Economically we are at a tipping point. What is the economy going to look like when the restrictions loosen and are eventually removed? How is business going to be conducted? Will all retail move online? Will stores become little more than warehouses that offer curbside pickup only?

Socially we are at a tipping point. Will things return to the way they were, or will there be new social mores? Will we shake hands when we meet, or bump elbows or tap feet or something else? Will we all wear masks when we are in public, or not? Will our sense of personal space change?

What about spiritually? Are we at a tipping point? Will people return to churches after the pandemic is over and restrictions are lifted the way they did after the second world war or 9-11? Or will people declare that God is a hoax, fake news, because a good god would not allow a pandemic to happen?

What about Union United Church? Is it at a tipping point? What will the future hold for us? What do we wish for it to look like? What are we willing to commit to to make that future a reality?

I wondered why we keep arriving at them and what is it we hope for. What I decided is that we keep arriving at them because we keep learning and growing and changing. As for what we hope for, we hope for things to improve, for things to get better than they are. We hope for justice and fairness. We hope for life. Tipping points create a line towards that which is life giving.

We all have tipping points in our lives, when something will either go one way or another. They happen to us as individuals. They happen to us as a society. They happen to us as a church and as congregations. What will the future hold? Who can know? All we can do is trust that we are moving towards that which is life giving for all. Oh, and one more thing that we can be sure of and that is that God is with us, and will be with us, no matter what the future holds. Thanks be to God. Amen.