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Christian Perspectives: A love letter to the Shelburne Primrose Pastoral Charge

If you had been wandering along First Street in Shelburne on the south side of Trinity United Church this last Sunday at noon, you would have seen a group of people huddled around a large bell smiling. Standing beside the bell you would have seen Jim Cheyne and Michael Hofman, speaking about what the bell means and where it came from. But in truth, so much more was happening than could be seen by the casual observer. For what is the importance of a bell sitting on a pedestal anyway? In truth, quite a bit.

Two years ago, Trinity United Church put together a visioning group to see how the church might serve the community as a spiritual impact hub. The first project out of the gate was to reconstruct the front steps of the church, which had crumbled from over a hundred years of salt, sleet, and usage. Today, the front entrance is now an open armed welcome to everyone. Ah, but the stumbling block, of course, was the bell.

The bell, originally built in the early nineteen hundreds, and once ringing out at noon each day to signal the lunch hour, had been mounted on a pedestal on the east side of the church ? right in the way of where the new stairs needed to be placed in order to meet the current building codes. The bell needed to be moved.

It is true in life, and it is true in the church: we don't like change. And sometimes we can get inordinately fond of the way things are or were or have always been. It is a fallacy, of course, as nothing is ever the same from moment to moment, but still we cling to the familiar and the known. The suggested move of the bell was met by anxiety. And it did not help matters, that while construction was taking place on the east side of the church building, the bell sat on the south side of the building in a rough little corner like a bad child, a tattered tarp draped across its shoulders, an all but forgotten piece of history seemingly discarded.

But last Sunday, the bell was given its moment of glory in the sun as we all gathered around to see it in a new place of prominence, placed on a specially built platform, where eventually there will be benches and gardens to surround it. But that, for me, was not what the smiling was about.

Leading the little gathering were two men ? Michael and Jim - from two families that represent so much of what Shelburne has been and what it is becoming. Jim and Jean Cheyne are beloved long-time members, not just of Trinity, but of the wider Shelburne community where they have been active participants. Michael and Whitney Hofman represent the younger couples of Trinity and the community whose collective spirit is attuned to the compassion and generosity which this world needs. Michael oversaw every detail of the construction, both on the front steps, and for our newly renovated hospitality room where we all headed to eat beautiful home-made cakes after the bell ringing.

Michael articulated clearly what we all knew ? that the moving of the bell represented change that is not always easy. But he also spoke of the gratitude that came with everyone's patience, and a willingness to overcome our anxiety with grace. Jim reminded us of our history, and the ongoing place we all play in the larger landscape of time.

Jim and Michal, and their wives, Jean and Whitney, represent for me where we have come from, and where we are going ? together. The elders in the community hold our collective memories and wisdom. The younger folk hold energy, innovation, and forward thinking. When we work together, for the common purpose of serving the greater good, there is no end to the marvels that await us.

In a world hungry for grace and mutuality, I was uplifted by the sight of that beautiful bell, and the two men who stood together, side by side, reminding us that it is possible to change, possible to work toward common goals, possible to be kind with one another as new wonders emerge. And just in case you aren't up on the latest word on the street, it's cool to be kind.

I hold such hope for both Trinity United Church and Primrose United Church, as their visioning groups move towards expanding the traditional church to provide a hub for all those desirous of offering a richer, fuller life for all people. And by extension, I hold great hope for our community at large.

Rev. Dr. Candice Bist