

“Recognize Our Past Mistakes”

January 2017

Hymn VU 104 We have Come at Christ's Own Bidding vs 1 & 3

Scripture; Jeremiah 29:11 and Philippians 3:13-14

Reflection:

Both scriptures speak of looking to the future for hope and looking forward and not back. Someone much wiser than I, said something akin to, “we cannot know our future if we forget our past”. I think he was suggesting if we don't recognize our past errors and mistakes so we can correct them we will never go forward. The bible is telling us that the future is brighter and don't be afraid because our real future is in meeting Jesus. For some it is a real exercise to shake off the past and start anew, but that is what we expect in the new year. So, let's look forward with hope. Amen

Discussion:

Views about the bible, about religion in general, have changed greatly in the last few years. In the lobby of our apartment building just a few days ago I overheard a conversation, “there is no heaven nor hell”! This came from a 75 year old female. A devout Catholic gentleman, about the same age, just sat with a sly smile on his face, as if to say, sorry lady but you have no idea! What about you?

Hymn VS 118 Wonder & Stare

Prayer: Well God, you have given us another year. Traditionally January is the time to reflect, look back and resolve to do better this year, to look ahead with hope as the scripture says. We are sometimes weak and ask for your grace, your guidance, your help, to shake off last year's bad habits and look forward not just with hope, but with a positive attitude and actions. Amen

“Everyone Has a Story”

February 2017

Hymn VU 356 Seek first the Kingdom

Scripture: Deuteronomy 15:11 and Mark 14:7

Reflection:

Often I see lineups, perhaps twenty people or more, some with children, most smoking, waiting for the food bank door to open on Sherbrooke Street. Some get out of cars, others are pushing pilfered shopping carts. The dress code is obviously very casual. When writing this kind of reflection I think honesty is a must, so just a store and a parking lot away is the LCBO. That's why I am on this street at this particular location. Often one from the line leaves to trades places with a buddy holding up the sign and cup at the LCBO just down the street. So I wonder, who are these people; each must have a story, probably a sad one. Are they really deserving, do they want to do better, just down on their luck, or riding the system like one family I know? Don't know about you but as I leave with my bottle of wine and drive by the lineup sometimes I get pretty cynical.

Discussion:

What is our role as Christians, as human beings? Do we owe these people anything? Should we work hard and donate food so they can smoke and get free food? Recall the proverb, give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach him, to fish.....and you know the rest. What is our obligation, should we do?

Hymn VU 361 Small Things Count

Prayer, God, we are so blessed. We have warm shelter, food, family, friends and just about anything we want in life, and yet sometimes we grumble when the electricity goes out for a few minutes, or the traffic holds us up for an extra five minutes, or the store is sold out of our favourite snack, and we don't even have to wait in line, in the cold, in the rain just to get food. Thank you God and may or plenty make us aware of those standing in line. Amen

“Born on St. Patrick’s Day”

March 2017

Hymn: VU 595 We are Pilgrims on a Journey

Scripture: Psalm 100 and Romans 1 16:25

Reflection:

I am told there was quite a discussion in my family about what name I should be blessed with when I was born on St. Patrick’s Day. Also a significant day as my ancestors arrived from Ireland some hundred years earlier. I have since found out that St. Patrick was not exactly who we are lead to believe. He was actually born in England of Egyptian parents, if one can accept the historian’s story. Kidnaped at 12 or 14 he spent ten years or so in Ireland. He escaped but returned to convert all of those heathens. Apparently he had a bit of trouble convincing the north and south to get along and since Ireland had no snakes one wonders how that story started. So today the north and south sort of have a truce but Islam and the rest of the world have taken up that void to still give us a ring side seat in a religious war. All this during Lent!

Discussion:

Does Lent mean anything to you? What do you give up, or sacrifice for 40 days?

Hymn: VU 530 All beautiful the march of days

Prayer: Lord, Lent has sort of taken a back seat in our lives and worship. I often think that to most of the world being Irish on March 17 is more important than observing or even thinking about Lent. Forgive our being human Lord, and may we have the courage in our hearts to spend the forty days in the desert with you. Amen.

The Rooster's Crow

April 2017

Hymn VU 161 Welcome Happy Morning

Scripture: Mark 8:31 and Acts 4:33

Reflection:

Easter seems to jump around from late March to May, but whenever, it always seems to bring with it something special. A feeling not around the rest of the year. Is it because we personally hear the rooster crow more so at Easter but can ignore the sound throughout the rest of the year? Or is it something more? Perhaps a feeling that there is hope for the future with sadness on Good Friday but renewed hope and gladness on Sunday? Each and every year “He is Risen” sends a new message that there really is a Jesus looking out for us!

Discussion:

Does that noisy rooster ring in your head, or do you just hear happiness for what Easter stands for?

Hymn VU 155 Jesus Christ is Risen Today

Prayer:

Lord, you know it is pretty easy for us to hear, but ignore that rooster. At times we have all heard and ignored but on Easter Sunday we hear something different. We hear the joyous peeling of bells, the grateful prayers and laughter of children, all because He Lives. Thanks you God. Amen.

Fellowship and Prayer

Devotion for May 2017

Hymn: VU 409 Morning Has Broken

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8

Reflection:

May is usually the month to recharge, a month for renewal, and to regenerate as it falls on the heels of Easter. And so, for us in AOTS, all those things are equally true as we just held our spring Roundup. Over thirty of us from as far as YT, BC, Newfoundland, Alberta and mostly Ontario, became reacquainted, shared our thoughts, enjoyed meals and music together and explored our faith. For me it is always a renewal time. A time to reassess beliefs, discover once again what is important in life and appreciate what friendship really means. A time to relive, "Christ is Risen".

Discussion;

What does Easter mean to you? Is it just kids and painted eggs delivered by a make believe rabbit? Is it donning the suit that is now far too tight, trying to get that darn tie tied around a shirt collar that was made for last year's neck size? Do you make the required pilgrimage to church only to have someone greet you with, "wow, great to have you: guess we will see you again at Christmas"! Or, like our Roundup is it just a bit more than that. As the grass turns green, buds appear on the trees, birds signing wakes us each morning, and crocus and scillas appear on our lawns, May is not really a bad month, dandelions and all, to contemplate renewal and resurrection.

Scripture: Song's of Solomon 2: 1-12

Hymn VU 226 For the Beauty of the Earth

Prayer:

Lord, pretty sure you know how lax we can be; how forgetful; how ignorant of true renewal and resurrection, so we are thankful for May. It reminds us of many things and in particular as flowers miraculously spring from the frozen ground we are reminded of Jesus emerging from the empty tomb. Yes Lord, May is a pretty good month. Thank you, amen

“Would Jesus have driven a SAAB?”

Devotion for June 2017

Hymn: VU 357 Tell Me the stories of Jesus

Scripture: John 4:27 & Like 20. 1

Reflection:

Pretty difficult to find any reference in the bible but during a family (a minister being one) discussion on the weekend I pronounced that if Jesus were alive he would drive a SAAB. Maybe even a 1988 900 turbo convertible like Sam & I have. After all they are very safe, go against the grain of the main stream auto community, were destined to die for their different beliefs and one has to admit, a better ride than a donkey even over palm branches. Well, I hope you don't think I am comparing Jesus or his destiny to a car, but when family's get together, unlike strangers or even friends, one should be able to talk about politics or religion, don't you think? After all of their believes were learned or picked up from the parents by osmosis. Better to talk about Jesus and cars than no communication at all, don't you think?

Discussion:

This might be a stretch to tie the above to a discussion, however one mark of a troubled family is they never talk, they never address the hard questions like Jesus did. He was constantly confronted by those trying to trip him up with loaded question, but always had answers and was never afraid to discuss the issues. I think often, that even in the UC we sidestep the issues and don't really want to talk about certain issues, like divesting of certain gold stock. Do you agree, or prefer silence?

Hymn VU 343 I love to Tell The Story

Prayer:

Lord, we don't always want to talk, to discuss troubling issues with our families, but we know we can always talk to you. We thank you God for being there always, open, accepting and forgiving. Amen

Doing Things Backwards

Devotion for July 2017

Hymn: VU 216 Sing Praise To God Who Reigns Above

Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:10

Reflection:

If you do read the devotion I am sure if you realize I do things backwards. I don't use the UC lectionary. An idea pops into my head, not always the greatest, and then I spend time, way too much time, trying to match hymns and scriptures to my blurb. Well, sometimes it actually works, and sometimes not. Currently we are bombarded with Canada at 150. Not always a pleasant 150 years to remember. Our ancestors build monuments to God, and most, if still here, are pretty much empty on Sunday mornings. Those ancestors would give a lot of credit to God for their survival, and now we have pretty much abandoned their God, at least on Sunday. Were they deceived, naive, afraid, or just really thankful? I have never been, but we are all aware of the phrase, "there are no atheists in the trenches". You know, I wonder if that holds true for those in the past who, struggled for survival, who fought every day for food, to protect their families, to build a country for us, and filled the pews every Sunday.

Discussion:

Well some of us still enter those monuments on Sunday mornings. Why? To give thanks, out of tradition or habit, to honour God, or just because? Something to talk about!

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18

Hymn: VU 226 For The Beauty Of The Earth

Prayer: Lord help us to remember who we are, how we got here and who created not only us, but our beautiful earth we inhabit. We thank you for who we are, where we are, and all you give to us. In Jesus name we pray

How's the Weather?

Devotion for September 2017

Hymn: VU 291 All Things Bright and Beautiful

Scripture: Exodus 9:24 and 2 Peter 2:17

Reflection:

Well, if one accepts that climate change is mostly man made then we have not treated God's creation properly. We had fall weather in July & unbelievable summer weather for a couple weeks in September. The southern hemisphere has been battered by hurricanes and earthquakes. Some would suggest this is God punishing us for our treatment of the planet. Hard to accept since we are all guilty but only a few are getting punished and only a few believe that God is vindictive and issues punishment for our actions. So what is going on? Is the weird weather part of God's long term plan and how much is mankind really responsible? I don't think scientist really know. If one does a lot of digging and reading it seems we do play a part in the changing weather, but only a small one.

Discussion:

Do you think God is responsible for the massive climate changes various parts of the world are experiencing and how much is mankind responsible?

Hymn: VU 530 All Beautiful March of Days

Prayer:

God, creator of all things, we are thankful for our beautiful home and ask your forgiveness if we have misused it. Please give us the knowledge, the strength and the will to undo any damage we have done. In Jesus name, amen

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Trick or Treat

Devotion for October 2017

Hymn: VU 516 Come, You Thankful People, Come

Scripture: Psalm 30:12 and Colossians 3 15:17

Reflection:

October is Halloween for some and Thanksgiving for others. One wonders if we need either. Both supposedly have religious beginnings. Halloween is rapidly overtaking Christmas as the best retail day of the year. Amazing what advertising can do. As for thanksgiving it is strange that we need a special day for it, however for me it is far more enjoyable than Halloween. Have to wonder what Jesus would think; would he open the door and distribute candy, would he enjoy turkey and pumpkin pie? Well neither existed in his day so it is pure speculation, but you know a discussion of the above really provides our personal insight into how we picture the savior of the world.

Discussion:

Well let's talk about Jesus and trick or treat and pumpkin pie!

Hymn: VU 217 All Creatures of Our God and King

Prayer:

Lord, help to make every day thanksgiving and celebrate the real Halloween. In Jesus name, amen.

Face Covering Law

Devotion for November 2017

Hymn: VU 275 From God's Hands

Scripture: Duet 22; 5 11 Timothy: 9-10 1 Peter: 3 2-5

Reflection:

Our ministers, I am a member of one church but attend another, hence the plural for minister. In any event they both do a good job with sermons but stick pretty much to pure biblical topics. I like to look at today's events and try to find scripture and hymns to match. Often not an easy job nor even a good match. I would like to take on Trudeau or Kathleen Wynne but this is not the forum for that kind of language, so let us look at Quebec's new face covering law. One has to tread really lightly when stomping on another's religion. I have read most of the Quran, have some Muslim friends and the word is that face covering, like a lot of ritual in all religions, is a man-made dictate. Check Quran 7:26 and draw your own conclusions. In Canada I am under the impression that only bank robbers cover their faces so I wonder what the fuss is about. My biased opinion is that no one goes out in public with their face covered unless they are walking at the corner of Portage and Main in February or some other really Canadian corner. So, we know our government some years ago gave away the final say on these matters so no doubt the Supreme Court in their wisdom will allow anyone to do or say what they please in Canada.

Discussion:

Discuss a time when you felt that you or your beliefs were not being respected by others.

Hymn: VU 286 If you will trust in God....

Prayer: Lord, we don't want too or mean to offend others who may believe in you in different ways, and share different customs. However, I guess it is difficult for some of us to accept or understand, so please Lord, open our hearts and minds that we may full understand and accept those who chose to worship in different ways. Amen

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