

## ***“A shape-shifting tool”***

May 2008

Hymn            Great is thy faithfulness        VU 288

Scripture        Luke 6: 27 – 40

      Luke 6:37        “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”

Prayer            Let us pray –O God, we are quick to be critical when someone comes late to our meeting, or forgets to prepare the list he promised. The world around us does not help us to understand how to forgive or how to love our enemies. Listen to our feeble excuses and help us to build the strength we need to be better followers of your teachings. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Reflection        One afternoon I was waiting for the shuttle to take me to the airport. Sitting next to me was a woman reading her newspaper. But my eyes were on a fourteen-year-old boy who was on his skateboard. He wore his baseball cap turned around with the bill in the back, the cool look, you know.

      He buzzed us once. He buzzed us twice. Then he came around a third time for what turned out to be his grand finale, and he inadvertently knocked the newspaper out of the woman’s hands.

      She immediately started yelling. “Oh, you teenagers! No wonder the world is going to pot, because you are in it! I can’t stand it! And so on.

      The boy went down to the corner to talk to his buddy, and they turned to look at us. Then they talked together some more.

      In the meantime, the woman began to gather up her newspaper and get it all back together. She put it under her arm, walked to the middle of the block, and motioned to the boy to come to her.

      Very slowly and reluctantly, he came on his skateboard, and almost in an act of defiance, he turned the baseball cap around, put the bill straight out in front, and said, “Yeah?”

      She responded by saying; “What I meant to say is that I was afraid I would get hurt, and my comments were totally inappropriate and out of line. I hope you will accept my apology.”

      The boy’s face has been a source of inspiration for me ever since. He looked at her and smiled, then he said, “How cool.” I was deeply moved and touched by the moment.

      In Latin America, in some Hispanic societies of the world, that moment would be seen as a healing moment, as a holy moment, as a small miracle, as a *milagro pequeño*.

      Within ten minutes’ time, through a conscious intention and action of genuine apology, this woman made a choice. She made a life-affirming choice to create a life-changing moment between herself and the boy, a *milagro pequeño*. He will never forget that moment. I will never forget that moment. And she, who shape-shifted that moment, through genuine apology, will not forget that moment!

*(based on material from “A Blessing in Disguise” a collection of life lessons by Andrea Joy Cohen)*

Discussion     Do you apologize when you hurt someone's feelings or make an inadvertent mistake? If not, what holds you back?  
Has anyone's apology ever impacted you?  
Jesus knows that loving one's enemies is impossible without strong motivation. How does he argue that his disciples have that motivation?

Closing prayer     Let us pray – O God, here we are a group of men who are trying to follow in your way. May we encourage each other, and build one another up in every circumstance. May we love and accept one another just as we are, not waiting for change or perfection – as in Christ you have accepted us. Help us be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other as you have forgiven us. Help us not to bring past issues into the present. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Coming event     Are you making plans for an AOTS Laymen's service? – on Father's Day?

Book of the month     "A Blessing in Disguise" by Andrea Joy Cohen

## ***“the church”***

May 2009

Hymn

“The church’s one foundation”

VU 331

Scripture *It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure that you don’t use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom. Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love; that’s how freedom grows. For everything we know about God’s word is summed up in a single sentence: **love others as you love yourself.** That’s an act of true freedom. If you bite and ravage each other, watch out – in no time at all you will be annihilating each other and where will your precious freedom be then.*

*Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads, or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every aspect of our lives. That means we will not compare ourselves with each other as if one of us were better and another worse. We have far more interesting things to do with our lives. Each of us is an original. From Galatians 5:13-15 and 25-26 in The Message*

Prayer

Let us pray – Amazing God, Creator and Confronter, open our hearts to hear your voice in unexpected times and places. Appear to us in forms we cannot deny. Challenge us in ways we cannot avoid. Lead us in paths from which we cannot turn back. Discipline us, that our self-discipline may be better informed and more consistent. Test us that we may test ourselves by the model of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen

Lesson

We’ll begin with a story – *There once was a well-respected and loved teacher named Hufis, a Sufi sheik who could do all kinds of wonderful things. But he began to hear of another sheik, Raaleh, whom travellers from the other side of Persia said could do even more wondrous things. Troubled, he set out to find her, and they met on the shores of the Persian Gulf. As it happened, it was prayer time. So Hufis took his prayer rug and flung it out on the water. Then walking across the water, he said his prayers seated on his prayer rug, floating on the water.*

*When finished, he turned to Raaleh, “Can you do that?” She took out her prayer rug and threw it into the air. Then, climbing an invisible staircase, she sat down and said her prayers, floating in the air. Upon descending, she called to Hufis: “What you and I have done today, the fishes and birds do every day. Wouldn’t it be more worthwhile if we would learn instead to treat each other as human beings?”*

In the early church, believers were received into the church by adult baptism. The sacrament itself was preceded by training and teaching. The instruction in Matthew 28:19 to “make disciples” includes both baptism and teaching or apprenticeship. Since baptism was a one-time act the words seem to emphasize the teaching ministry of the new church. We still train and prepare men and women in this teaching function when they become set apart as ordained or commissioned ministers.

Yet few people today consider teaching the most important function of a church. When it comes to calling a minister, most congregations say that the ability to preach good sermons is crucial. Those who value the place of music in worship feel that a fine music program is essential. Some say the most important thing about a church is the building itself, and suggest that serving the church means keeping the building in excellent condition. Of course, the Sunday School teachers would agree that teaching is primary in today's world where little Christian education is given in the home.

The church is teaching, preaching, music, and much, much more. If we take seriously the words of Jesus to "obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20) we will love our neighbour as ourselves, look after the sick, care for the thief, the leper, the prostitute, and turn the world upside down! All of these are possible only if the church is considered to be a "community" or "family" – a group of people working together, caring about one another, and caring about those in need outside of their community.

**Prayer-in-action**      In small groups use your imaginations to create a "perfect" church. Use your own congregation as a start and decide what changes need to be made.

After you have done this, see if there is one change your group can initiate now to help to "perfect" your church.

**Prayer**      Let us pray – Creator God, we pray for strength of spirit to be your church. Baptize us with your love that we may do your work. Guide us that we may be examples in word and in deed. Mould us into your disciples. Amen.

## ***“Yearning for Living Water”***

May 2010

Hymn “Living Christ, bring us love” VU 599

Scripture *John 4: 7-15 (The Message)*

A woman, a Samaritan, came to draw water. Jesus said, “Would you give me a drink of water?” (His disciples had gone to the village to buy food for lunch.)

The Samaritan woman, taken aback, asked, “How come you, a Jew, are asking me a Samaritan woman for a drink?” (Jews in those days wouldn’t be caught dead talking to Samaritans.)

Jesus answered, “If you knew the generosity of God and who I am, you would be asking me for a drink, and I would give you fresh, living water.”

The woman said, “Sir, you don’t even have a bucket to draw with, and this well is deep. So how are you going to get this ‘living water’? Are you a better man than our ancestor Jacob, who dug this well and drank from it, he and his sons and livestock, and passed it down to us?”

Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst – not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life.”

The woman said, “Sir, give me this water so I won’t ever get thirsty, won’t ever have to come back to this well again!”

Prayer Let us pray – We are thirsty, God. Our lives are dry. Give rest to our bodies, peace to our souls, and water to refresh our spirits. We need living water to nourish us with hope and love. Amen.

Lesson In these supposedly secular times there is a deep yearning for the sacred. Bookstores are full of books on spirituality, such as the best-sellers *Care for the Soul* by Thomas Moore, *The Road Less Travelled* by Scott Peck, and books by authors such as Deepak Chopra, James Redfield, John Shelby Spong and the Dalai Lama. The spiritual thirst that is at the heart of our age is found both inside and outside traditional church communities. People want, not to just talk about God, but to experience the sacred in the midst of frequently chaotic, rapidly changing lives.

There are rivers mentioned in scripture from Genesis to Revelation. Some are powerful images of the river of life that flows for the very beginning to the very end. Some are images of hope and promise. Others are images of God’s promise in terms of water and river.

In the land of Israel, there are two lakes. One, which is completely void of vitality, is the Dead Sea. Here, there are no trees or shrubs or even blades of grass. There is no sound of birds singing or insects chirping. The second lake is known as the Sea of Galilee. It is surrounded by lush forests, fields of grain, masses of flowers and the air is teeming with birds and insects.

The difference between the two seas is living water. The Dead Sea is so salty that nothing can survive. The Sea of Galilee contains fresh water and it teems with life.

Jesus probably spent time near the Dead Sea and would have seen and felt the heat and lack of life in that scene. But he also stood beside the Sea of Galilee and saw

and felt the vitality of a land that had fresh running streams. In that land, as in many today, the difference between life and death is living water.

At the well in Samaria, Jesus gave the woman living water. An old song goes:

*Jesus gave her water that was not from a well.*

*She went away singing*

*And came back bringing*

*Others to the water that was not from a well.*

It was living water, the water of life, and it changed her life. She came as a lone figure, isolated from her neighbours, and left as a life-giving influence on others.

We too are called to drink of the life-giving water and then to act. We drink from the well and new life germinates within us. We respond to that energy and we act, move, risk, and grow in faith. Every step we take, every stage in our faith journey is a starting point for new growth. We drink living water and we begin to live, open to the wisdom and power of God. We share what we have learned, and become for others a spring of living water.

Discussion    What comes to mind when you think of a river?

When you think of “living water”?

Describe your life today in terms of a river – what kind of a river? – how are you flowing?

Can you think of ways to bring others to the water that is not from a well?

Prayer        Let us pray – Creator God, as you moved over the waters and life came into being, we would ask you to move in us and create new life among us. Give us the water of life that we may thirst no more. Fill us with your spirit and enable us to become springs of water, places of refreshment and hope for the thirsty. Amen.

Devotion for May 2014

Hymn: For the Beauty of the Earth VU 100

Scripture: Luke 3 :40-51 and John 1: 2-5

Reflection:

Mother Day is a pretty recent celebration: roughly since 1908 and started by a mother in the US, and eventually spread around the world, however similar celebrations were in affect many centuries before. "Honour thy father and mother," was an edict to the Jews according to the sixth commandment. After checking many dictionary definitions I concluded that the phrase meant the same in the ten commandments thousands of years ago as it does now. I thought that important because I wondered what was Jesus interpretation? Recall Jesus went missing at the age of twelve. Worried parents returned to Jerusalem and three days later he was found, and even then was not very apologetic. When asked by his mother, to make wine from water some years later, he was not exactly enthusiastic about obeying, but he did. So, how does that sixth commandment fit with Jesus, and how does that filter down to us today?

Discussion:

Did Jesus really keep the sixth commandment, and do we?

Hymn: When mothers of Salem. The Hymnary (blue book) 609

Prayer:

God, father and mother of us all, we ask your blessing on all mothers no matter what corner of your world they live in. We pray that we are worthy of being your children, that with your help we truly honour our mothers, and fathers. We pray for your guidance to make us worthy of being parents, so we may also be worthy of that honour from our children. We thank you Lord and ask your blessing on our mothers, our fathers, on us and our children. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

## The Renewing of the Earth

Devotion for May 2015

Hymn: VU 291 All Things Bright and Beautiful

Scripture: Psalm 85:11

Reflection:

May is a special Month, snow is gone, in most of Canada anyway, grass is showing a bit of green and the odd Crocus or Skilla is poking through. In Canada the 24th of May is the traditional opening of spring and we all get a holiday, supposedly because of the Queen's birthday, but May 1st has a much deeper meaning in many cultures, religions and countries. May first is celebrated as International Workers Day, sort of a freedom celebration. In the Catholic Church May is devoted to the Virgin Mary. Within Canada some cities and even provinces celebrate May first or the whole month for various reasons, some outlined above. All in all May is a happy month around the world. Above all May heralds God's joyous gift of spring, the renewing of the earth and the awakening of our faith.

Discussion: Just another month along the road or is May special for you?

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:13

Hymn. Great is Thy Faithfulness

Prayer: Lord we rejoice at this season, a season of resurrection, a season of new life, a season of renewed faith. We are thankful for the awakening earth and its promise of newness once again. In the name of the risen one, amen.



## **“Complexity and Beauty”**

Devotion for May 2016

Hymn: VU 703 In the bulb there is a flower.

Scripture: Mathew 6 28:30 and Song of Songs 2:12

Reflection:

Although we celebrate Easter as a renewal of life, May is usually nature's time to spring into life. We take so much for granted but if one really looks at flowers, tree leaves, even weeds. You cannot but look in wonder and marvel at the complexity and beauty. Who could possibly design such intricate and wondrous beauty, and have it grow at the same time. Hard to think nature could just start from nothing and evolve into all its various forms. If not the God we believe in, then some magical power must be about in our world.

Discussion:

According to so called experts, 90% of our food is genetically modified. Already we are aware of some nasty results. So, is it right that man interferes, changes and modifies some of Gods creations, or is this just part of man's role on this earth?

Hymn: VU My Lord What a Morning

Prayer:

Lord, may we always be thankful and mindful of your creations in nature. Forgive us if we do harm and change things that should not be changed. Please give us the knowledge and courage to really care for your earth that we are entrusted with. 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