

## *“Remembrance and Peace”*

November 2007

Hymn                      Let there be light                      VU 679

Scripture                Leviticus 26: 3-6a, 9-12

Prayer                Let us pray – Loving God, you created a world of harmony and unity that we have shattered with missiles. Napalm has incinerated the trees, bombs have left craters where houses used to be and land mines have blown scavenging children to bits. Give us the courage to stand against the evils of war, to create a new garden of peace and love where all children can play in friendship and safety. In the name of the Prince of peace we pray. Amen.

Lesson                Reverend Audrey Fisher stood on the grounds of Coventry Cathedral. She was looking at the shell of the ancient church. She saw the blackened, charred walls and marvelled at the beauty that had once been. Then her eyes wandered to the new building rising out of the ruins of the bombed cathedral. It rose as a testament to the hope of humanity. As she stood, she held in her hands a cross that had been fashioned from the blackened nails of the bombed out ruin. She held it high and while looking at it began to hear haunting sounds of the past.

She imagined the planes, the whine of the bombs, the sounds of explosions, the sounds of wind and fire and then the deafening noise of the great building toppling and burning.

In her vision the clouds of smoke lessened and an eerie silence seemed to fill the sky. Slowly the silence was filled with the sound of human voices. Voices crying in anguish. Voices from London and Paris, from The Hague and Hamburg, from Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They cried for loved ones ripped away. They cried for their homes and places of work and worship. They cried for the beauty that had been destroyed, for the history that was lost in the flames and smoke. They cried for all that they had known and loved. But mostly they cried for the evil named war. They cried out against the greed that can set one nation against another. They railed against racial hatred and bigotry of all kinds. They longed for harmony between people, and an end to all the “isms” that we use to demean and subjugate each other.

The images faded and Audrey turned to walk into the new cathedral to pray and to meditate. She remembered the story of a little girl who was just two years old when Hiroshima was bombed. As the girl lay in her bed 10 years later, still dying of radiation sickness, the little girl remembered the Japanese tradition that if a person folds one thousand paper cranes she will be granted a wish. She wished for peace more than anything else and began folding paper cranes. She died as she was folding her 645<sup>th</sup> crane. In the peace park in Hiroshima there is a statue of the girl and it is always covered with fluttering paper cranes, folded by others who share her dream for peace on earth.

God calls all who follow the way of love to live in peace. That love compels us to reach out beyond any borders to all people. Keeping the commandment of love includes standing against fear, greed, oppression, racism, sexism, homophobia, war, imperialism, and all forms of hatred. The invitation is for us to follow Jesus and do the works of justice so that we can be at peace with one another. To practice the peace that Jesus

taught is to experience resurrection, new life and new hope. By our actions we are called to transform our world into a place of non-violent love, a place of peace where all children can live and play in security and without fear.

**Discussion**     What have you experienced in Coventry Cathedral or a place like it?  
How can we contain our greed that calls out for more? And more?

**Prayer**           Let us pray – Merciful one, our hearts long for your forgiveness. Touch us with your healing, cleanse us of our guilt, and renew our spirits that we may serve you with joy all our days. Amen.

*This meditation is based on material from “There is a Season” by Betty Radford Turcott*

**Coming events**   **watch for fall rallies in your area**

**Book**             **“Your God is too safe” by Mark Buchanan**

## ***“Synergism”***

November 2008

Hymn “Let us break bread together.... VU 480

Scripture 2 Corinthians 12:5-10

Verse 10: “Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.”

Prayer Let us pray –We give thanks, O God, that as we gather we know ourselves to be among friends. We thank you for the encouragement and understanding that they bring to our lives. We thank you above all though for the presence of Jesus, in whom is fullness of understanding and the richest of encouragement. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Lesson In ancient Greek literature there is a story that shows the power of working together, or synergism.

*An aged, dying father called his seven sons around him. He gave each one a stick and told them to break it. Each son easily broke his separate stick. The old father then bound seven sticks and gave the bundle to his eldest son and told him to break the bundle. The eldest son could not do it. Then the second son was commanded to try. He could not, nor could any of the rest. “So is it to be of you,” said the father. **“Alone you are weak, together you are strong.”***

Synergism is derived from the Greek word “synergos” meaning “working together”. It means that by joining with others, common objectives can be more easily accomplished. There is strength in numbers when you multiply your efforts through others.

The Christian church, men’s ministries and AOTS work best when we work together. The mission of reaching out to people of all ages, of all races, of all genders, of all places, has greater effectiveness when we join hands in a common effort. Using the power of synergism, the seeker, the poor, and the ill, can be helped, can become part of your community and can learn about the love of Jesus.

Synergism also combines the talents of individuals. Those who have computer skills are teamed with those who have gifts in teaching or public speaking. Ministers can be teamed with laymen. Those with talent in music or in art can be used in a group effort in a presentation. People working together are not only more effective, they can reach a goal faster and more effectively. Working together is summarized in the pooling of our talent, money, and resources toward one common goal.

Synergism does not mean we have to be alike, think alike, or believe the same things. Synergism does mean that we are willing to work side by side, respect one another, and combine our talents and energy.

How does synergism begin? It starts when you as an individual or group volunteer to help another individual or group. Alone we are weak. Together we are strong and can accomplish great things, including sending kids to camp, improving camping facilities, supporting hospitals, working with our neighbours and through these activities, developing our discipleship and spreading the gospel.

(based on material from "*Dear Lord, they want me to give the devotion again*" by Schroeder and Groth

**Discussion** Discuss how synergism has worked successfully in the past.

Share a local goal you believe can be accomplished by working together.

Share a goal which would require working with men in neighbour congregations

Share a goal which could be accomplished with a provincial or even a national effort of men working together.

**Prayer** Let us pray – O God of mercy and tenderness, but God also of strength and vision, we ask your presence with all who seek to understand the changes and newness that surrounds our lives. Give us the humility and understanding that we may work together here and across our wonderful country. We are grateful for those who have been sensitive enough to your leadership to risk disfavour while they followed the conviction they believed were your gifts to them. Keep us open to new ways of dealing with life that more of your people may know the joy of accomplishment and fulfilment. Through Christ we pray. Amen.

**Coming events** See [www.aots.ca](http://www.aots.ca) coming events section

**Book of the month** 'Dear Lord, they want me to give the devotion again'  
by John D. Schroeder & Shane M. Groth

## *“Advent Conspiracy”*

November 2009

Hymn “Sleepers awake!” VU 711

Scripture John 4: 24-26

‘For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth. The woman said, “I know the messiah is coming – the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” Then Jesus told her, “I AM, the one speaking to you.”’

Prayer Let us pray together – O God, as we prepare to celebrate Jesus birth, keep us from being caught up in the glitter and excess that has become so common in our consumer society. Change our thinking. Change our actions. Change our lives. Help us to become part of a conspiracy to overcome the greed and meet the need. Amen.

Reflection The season of Advent is almost upon us. Will this year’s preparation and celebration be the same as the past many years?

Everyone wants Christmas to be meaningful, but instead it becomes “Shop, Shop, Shop”, credit cards, traffic jams, to do lists, useless gifts, then off to church “Noel, Noel, Noel”. Sometimes we’re glad just to survive it.

Did you know that North Americans spend more than four hundred billion dollars on Christmas every year – EVERY YEAR?

So we ask – How did Jesus celebrate? Did he present a bottle of wine to everyone he visited? Did he bring gifts of frankincense and myrrh? No! But Jesus gave! He gave of himself, his time, his presence – he even gave himself.

What if you bought fewer gifts? And instead of buying those gifts, you gave something valuable, like your time, to your family, your friends, the lonely? And what if you used your talents to make gifts, like when you were a kid?

And remember that money you didn’t spend on gifts? What if you gave some of it away to the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lonely, those looking for the opportunity to learn?

What if we give a portion of what we would have spent on gifts to the Dondi\* project to help some of the children in Angola receive an education?

Spend less on gifts, give more presence of yourself, love like Jesus. It began with worship when Jesus was born and the shepherds and the wise men came. It begins with worship even in 2009. Worship fully, spend less, give more, love fully.

In this season of Advent you are free to worship, to live, to breathe, to give, to love, to laugh, to celebrate, to conspire. Enter the story. Be part of the Advent conspiracy.

Discussion \* The Dondi project is a fund-raising project of the Men’s ministries network, in conjunction with the M & S Fund and the National Offices of the United Church of Canada and through coordination with a sister church in Angola, to rebuild a mission school which was started by a predecessor of the United Church in Angola early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For details see [dondiproject.wordpress.com](http://dondiproject.wordpress.com).

How can we bring the men of our neighbouring United churches together to join in the fund-raising to help to bring education to more of the children in Angola?

What can we do as individuals and as a group of men?

For next meeting learn more about the Dondi project.

Closing prayer        Let us pray – O God, we would seek to love like Jesus – to give of ourselves and not just buy gifts because we always have. We ask that you be with the families in Angola to whom we are trying to bring hope for their future. Help us to understand and take action in bringing together men of our churches and our communities that we might conspire to change our mindset of excess to a mindset of filling some of the needs of others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## *“Rough waters, a hard place”*

November 2010

Hymn                                    “Will your anchor hold”                                    VU 675

Scripture                                    Mark 4:35-40 (New International Version)

That day, when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” Leaving the crowd behind they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There also were other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the waves died down and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

Prayer                                    Let us pray – Compassionate God, we are not sure of ourselves. Life can be hard and our faith is still in the growing stage. We’re OK when it seems calm, but rough waters still frighten us. We need to feel your presence in this our boat. Strengthen us, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Lesson                                    Our reading from the gospel according to Mark is highly symbolic. The disciples are all in a boat with Jesus, trying to get to the other side of the sea, when a wild storm whips up and threatens to smash the boat and drown them all. In the gospels, and especially in Mark’s gospel, being in a boat together, and especially in a boat with Jesus, is a symbol of being in the church. That’s why the world council of churches uses the boat as their logo. We’re all in the same boat, it is saying. So our story is a picture of the church. The disciples are trying to get to the other side of the sea. The story doesn’t say whether they are going home or going away on a mission. But it presents an image of the church trying to make progress, trying to get somewhere. And soon they’re not making much progress. There is a wild storm, and a storm at sea is a very frightening image to the people of Israel.

So here we have a boat load of Christ’s followers, the Church, trying to go where Jesus has called them to go, and the forces of darkness and chaos have risen up to smash them to pieces and sink them. It is a picture of our endeavours to live the life of discipleship in the Church. All too often it feels as though it is all in vain and our efforts to brave the sea and make it to the promised land on the other side are going to see us driven back where we came from, or swamped and drowned. And where is Jesus when all hell is breaking loose around us? He seems to be asleep and not paying attention to our problems. A lot of help He is.

So the disciples wake Jesus and accuse Him of showing no concern for their safety, but Jesus speaks severely to the wind and the waves and there is immediate calm. But then he challenges the disciples: “Why are you afraid? Are you still unable to trust?” Whatever storms are battering us; Christ is present and can be trusted to get us through. And while it may look to us as though he is asleep or just doesn’t care, he will still get us through. The only question is whether we will trust him enough to not jump overboard.

The disciples placed their security in the boat, and in the conviction that Jesus wouldn't allow anything bad to happen to them. All of a sudden their security was endangered. They were in the midst of a life-threatening storm. It was something they couldn't fight or flee from. Life was closing in on them. The storms of life were washing them away.

This was exactly what was happening to them in their relationship with Jesus. Opposition was rising against Jesus. Things were working toward a violent conclusion. There would soon be the arrest, the crucifixion. Where they prepared for that?

Jesus on the other hand realized that his security was not in the outward reality. Whether things went smoothly or if the storm raged, his security lay in the inner resources of his life. When Jesus rebuked the storm, maybe he was showing that the power of the Spirit was greater than the outward circumstances of life that conspire to destroy us.

Here is an illustration for you:

There was a king who offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of peace and tranquility. Many artists tried. The king looked at all the pictures, but there were only two he really liked and he had to choose between them.

One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror for peaceful towering mountains all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains too. But these were ragged and bare. Above was an angry sky from which rain fell, and in which lightning played. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall. This did not look peaceful at all. But when the king looked, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There, in the midst of the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird on her nest...perfect peace.

Which picture won the prize?

The king chose the second picture because, as he explained, "Peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. Peace means to be in the midst of all those things and still be calm in your heart."

In conclusion, how big is your storm? How hard is your hard place? How do you deal with it? No matter how big the storm in our church or in our life, we have the assurance today in this story of Jesus and his disciples, that in faith and in the power and energy of the Spirit, we can weather the storm and we can have peace.

Prayer            Let us pray – In our heart, O God, we know you are there behind the rush of life around us. May we always recognize your presence, even when we think our boat is about to sink. Amen.

# **I'm Gonna Live....**

Devotion for November 2014

Hymn: VU 560 O master let me walk with thee

Scripture Proverbs 19:17  
Acts 9:36

Reflection:

Out in the cold! Yes, it is that time of year when every city, large and small seriously think about those on the street. Which church, which group, which organization is going to feed them and house them? History says it was ever thus and according to Jesus it will always be so. An age old problem does not let us off the hook for doing nothing though. Deuteronomy 15:11 spells it out pretty clearly, and Jesus, all through his ministry taught love and compassion for the poor and disadvantaged. I am not aware of an AOTS club that does not have some kind of program to either help feed the poor, and/or educate and cloth them. Seems we are doing as instructed and I am sure as long as an AOTS member exists, will continue to do so.

Discussion: What is your club doing for those on the street and can it do more?

Hymn: VU 575 I'm gonna live.....

Prayer:

Lord, for our warm houses, food on the table, friends and all those things we enjoy, we thank you. Make us ever mindful of those who do not enjoy our comforts and help us to look after them. In the name of Jesus who looked out for those in need, we thank you.

## **“Afraid of Our Faith?”**

Devotion for November 2016

Hymn: VU 587 A Prayer For Hope.

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:12 and Mark 11:24-27

Reflection:

Not sure about other provinces but in Ontario no Lord's prayer in schools and also out in most municipal proceedings as well. No references to Christianity at all allowed. We have become pretty much an atheist or at least an agnostic nation in public; but in Ottawa it is a different story, at least behind closed doors. Each Wednesday morning when the house is sitting there is a Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast centered around Jesus, but open to all faiths. Then once a year there is a National one; next year it is slated for May 17, in Ottawa of course. The public is invited and tickets are available. And you thought we were no longer a Christian nation! What would Jesus's take be on that?

Discussion:

If we are not afraid of our faith why not talk about prayer. Is there really a God to pray to or is it just a mind thing? Does it work? Do you pray and do you have any personal experiences to share? I have, so maybe next time!

Hymn VU 568 Dear Lord Lead Me Day by Day

Prayer: Well Lord, this is difficult. You know we expect instant results when we pray and sometimes that does happen and sometimes it happens and we don't recognize it and wonder if prayer is just a waste of time, or perhaps you are out doing something and did not hear us. We finally learn that our prayers should be prayers of thanks not requests. Our one request should be for the strength to accept, to understand and be thankful. We offer this prayer in the name of Jesus. 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

By: Alex Jackson