

Hymn

Scripture Romans 4: 1-17

Verses 4-5, ‘If you’re a hard worker and do a good job, you deserve your pay; we don’t call your wages a gift. But if you see that the job is too big for you, that it’s something only God can do, and you trust God to do it – you could never do it for yourself no matter how long and hard you worked – well, that trusting–God–to–do–it is what gets you set right with God, by God. Sheer gift.’

Prayer Let us pray – Creator God, you created humankind to work hard and do a good job, but some of the jobs you offer are too big for our imaginations. Help us to let go of some of our pride when we see that we can’t handle a job alone which we know you want to have done. Show us how to share that job with others. We thank you for hearing our prayers when we ask for guidance. Help us to see that guidance in whatever form it is given as we attempt to follow in Jesus’ way, Amen.

Lesson The story of Abraham and Sarah, which begins with Noah in Genesis 9 twists through many chapters of Genesis. With the story of Abram who becomes Abraham and Sarai who becomes Sarah, we meet God who promises new life to those who hear, trust, and follow. There are no guarantees of what the future may hold, only the promise of an ongoing mutual relationship for those who stick with it.

The story of Abram having to leave the world of his ancestors impressed Paul more than a thousand years after Abraham’s death. In becoming a Christian missionary, Saul the Pharisee had made a radical break with his culture and the faith of his ancestors, and had entered into a new relationship with God, founded on God’s promise of new life in Christ. Abraham and Sarah had set out into an unknown future with no map; they had to think “outside the box” and so did Paul.

Lent is a time for engaging our new life in Christ more deeply, risking new levels of trust. The purpose of Lent is not to dwell on suffering, or to spend 40 days bemoaning our sins and wickedness. Lent is about engaging in the ongoing process of renewal, regeneration and new birth. It is about encouraging us to trust, and to risk, going forth and being sent out with promise of new life.

Lent may require us to “think outside the box” of Christian piety and religiosity as we do this, just as Abram and Sarai had to break with their past, and Saul the Pharisee with his. When Saul the Pharisee became Paul the Apostle as we know him, he brought new words, images and community structures into being by trustfully following Jesus into new life. At this point in the 21st century, God may well be inviting us to rethink how we do ministry with men in light of the socio-geographies of the times we live in.

Lent is for listening for that call in our own lives. Lent is for careful thinking about how to step into the as yet unmapped future for AOTS and promoting ministry with men. Lent is for seeking to deepen our relationship to God and trust the picture of new life in Christ. And lent is for identifying the breaks with the past that we need to make in order to respond to the promises of God.

Discussion What are the walls which form the “box” in which we find ourselves?
List the ideas (wildest dreams) which God may be inviting you to consider.

Prayer Let us pray – God, we love what we have within the groups of men we know as AOTS. Help us to share what we have, what you have given us, with others. Help us to identify ideas and assist us, coax us, prod us to make things happen to speed the coming of your kingdom here on earth. Amen.

This meditation is based in part on material dated 2005 from Rev. A. V. Askew of the Episcopal Church

Coming events ‘Breaking the Ice’ - Manitou Conference
‘Maritime Men’s Conference’ – Maritime Conference

Book of the month the book of Genesis – ‘relive’ the “origins” stories

“How bright is your light?”

February 2009

Hymn “A light is gleaming” VU 82

Scripture Matthew 5: 14 - 17

Prayer Let us pray – Surprising God, whose love leads us to new experiences, help us to be open to your appearance among us and within us. Let us sense your glory in the sights and sounds of this day. Confront us with your law and the prophetic word, that our lives may more fully reflect your purposes. May your Spirit move us to speak of the light that you reveal. Amen.

Lesson No one would have been surprised if Nelson Mandela had emerged from his years of captivity a bitter man, but instead he turned inward, examining his soul, and finding moral courage and insight. It is from him that we receive these words of encouragement:

“Our worst fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, “Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?” Actually, who are you *not* to be?

You are a child of God: your playing small doesn't serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We were born to make manifest the glory of God within us. It is not just in some of us, it is in everyone, and as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

Discussion In small groups, talk about the following:

- What are we doing as an AOTS club to reflect the light of God?
- How am I as an individual brightening our world?

Prayer Let us pray –Our God, only when we are willing to open our eyes to greatness around us do we recognize the smallness within. Lift our eyes to the hills, that we may be humbled by their strength. Direct our gaze towards strong lives around us that we may wish for change in ourselves. Above all, we pray that we may find in the brightness of Christ's own life the thin threadbare shadows of our own goodness. Thus may we give your spirit a chance to grow in us and to bring us closer to your glory. Amen

“the power of appreciation”

February 2010

Hymn “Jesus, United by Your Grace” VU 591

Jesus, united by your grace, and each to each endeared,
with confidence we seek your face, and know our prayer is heard.

Help us to see in each a friend, each other’s cross to bear,
let all their friendly aid extend, and feel the other’s care.

Up unto you, our living head, let us in all things grow,
till you have made us free indeed and faithful here below.

Drawn by the lodestone of your love, let all our hearts unite,
let us toward each other move, and move toward the light.

Scripture (*Ephesians 4:1-3 and 30-32 from The Message*)

“In light of all this, here’s what I want you to do. While I’m locked up here, a prisoner for the Master, I want you to get out there and walk – better yet, run! – on the road God called you to travel. I don’t want any of you sitting around on your hands. I don’t want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere. And mark that you do this with humility and discipline – not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences.

Don’t grieve God. Don’t break his heart. His Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for himself. Don’t take such a gift for granted. Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, and profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.”

Prayer Let us pray – God, like a baker, you bring the leaven which causes our hopes to rise. With your strong and gentle hands, shape our lives. Warm us with your love. Take our common lives and touch them with your grace, that we may nourish hope among humanity. We pray trusting in your name, through Jesus our Christ. Amen.

Lesson In her book “Keep on Kicking as Long as You’re Ticking”, Nell Mohny has collected a group of brief stories she has written. Each story is about an inspiring person who is either battling cancer, depression, or a failed marriage, and who has found the Christian faith to be the answer. Nell’s love for Christ and for people crosses all denominational barriers.

One of her stories is titled “The Doctor’s Office”. It concerns an experience she had in a doctor’s waiting room while she was waiting for her appointment. An excerpt follows:

As I hesitated for a moment in my writing, I heard a female voice say, “When you take time for a deep breath, I’d like to tell you something.”

Glancing to my left, I looked into the warm and friendly face of a woman I'd never seen before. She introduced herself as Shirley from Georgia. She thanked me for my Sunday articles and told me that she had a scrapbook full of them. She also told me that her husband died after a ten-year struggle with cancer. The disease was in various parts of his body, but it was brain cancer that finally took his life.

Then she became specific about the articles that meant the most to her during that time. She mentioned the ones I had written about attitudes, encouragement, faith, and particularly the ones in which I shared my own struggle with this devious disease called cancer. The funny thing was that I had come into the doctor's office feeling fatigued and not too well. By the time I was called back to the examining room, I was already feeling better. The medicine had been a sincere dose of appreciation.

Suddenly it occurred to me that the things I had always believed about appreciation were absolutely true. Sincere appreciation lifts the spirit, motivates, provides hope, and allows the recipient to renew his or her belief in themselves. Then I thought of the persons who have influenced my life for good. They were people who obviously saw my faults, but believed in me anyway and helped me to believe in myself. This didn't mean that they didn't correct me or offer constructive suggestions. But they did these things without anger and in an ambiance of appreciation.

When we get together with others, such as our fellow AOTS men, we have an opportunity to express as well as to receive appreciation. Even just listening to one another we show respect and sincere appreciation of that person as an individual. I find that careful listening makes me feel as good as being heard.

Over the many years I have been involved in men's groups, both in Presbyterian Men and in AOTS, I have come to appreciate the many spirit-lifting gifts that are freely shared with the group. I have learned a great deal from many great men. I am sure I have not expressed my appreciation as well as I might.

The funny thing is that we each have the power to lift the spirits of others. We have the power, through sincere appreciation, to motivate and enable others to believe in themselves. Let's use the power.

Discussion What are some of the opportunities you have to show appreciation? What are some of the ways you can show appreciation? What can we do for people in desperate need – such as in Haiti? - Or in some of our First Nations communities? - Or on some of our street corners?

Prayer Let us pray – O God, we thank you for your gift of grace, that we are acceptable and loved by you whatever our state of obedience to your word, our level of understanding and our following of your guidance. We would be workers for your kingdom. We would be followers of your great commandments. You have given us the power to appreciate and to love. Give us the courage to use that power wherever we are. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

George Bishop – Spiritual Life Chair

“Ministers - Lay and Ordered ”

February 2011

Hymn “We have this ministry” VU 510

Scripture *Colossians 4: 7-13 (New International Version)*

Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. He is coming with Onesimus, our dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.

My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Prayer Let us pray – O God, we thank you for those who throughout the years have shared their faith with family and with friends and neighbours. We thank you for those we know as ministers, whether ordained, diaconal, or lay. Especially we thank you for those whose service involves other forms of ministry: doctors, nurses, teachers, economists, farmers, homemakers, people in all walks of life, who have worked tirelessly, often unaware of the connection between their worship and work. Grant that together, lay and ordered ministers, we may ever seek to know and do your will. Amen.

Lesson As recorded in Matthew 28, Jesus gave this great commission to his disciples – “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Although these words were directed to the eleven, many other people took up the challenge. People like Paul and his followers. In most of the very early Christian groups there was no distinction between ordained ministry and lay – Paul claimed “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”.

And although, as Christians, we understand we are all one in Christ, we recognize differences in those who have become professional ministers. The professionals, in many cases, have been set upon pedestals and have been revered by their congregations. They have been expected to adhere to almost impossible moral standards.

Lay people have their own valid ministry. But lay ministry cannot be effective without knowledge of the Bible and some understanding of theology. It is necessary to follow the great commandments as found in Matthew 22: 36-40 where Jesus said “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself.”

At this moment in the history of the United Church of Canada, we are invited to respond to the draft of the „Revised Statement on Ministry“ which has come out from GC40. It can be found on www.aots.ca and on www.united-church.ca.

One statement in this document is reflective on our name and belief that each of us, as a follower of Christ, lives „As One That Serves“. The actual statement included in the draft is “The ministry of all is representational in character. It reflects the character of Jesus who is among us as one who serves.”

The draft also quotes from A Song of Faith: “God calls all followers of Jesus to Christian ministry. In the church, some are called to specific ministries of leadership, both lay and ordered; some witness to the good news; some uphold the art of worship; some comfort the grieving and guide the wandering; some build up the community of wisdom; some stand with the oppressed and work for justice. To embody God’s love in the world the work of the church requires the ministry and discipleship of all believers.”

If we believe in the priesthood of all believers, we all share in Christ’s ministry. By our baptism we belong to the holy catholic church, an organization filled with people who have gone into the world, making disciples, baptizing and teaching, confident that their Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, is always with them.

Let us minister as we are called, and trained, and able.

Discussion What is included on your resume for the job of ministry? Have you taken part in Bible study? Have you been a leader in a church activity? Have you used your talents in the kitchen, or visiting the sick, or listening to your neighbour’s problems, or inviting a friend to join you in worship or an AOTS meeting?

Will we take the time as individuals, or clubs, or congregations, or other small groups to respond to the „Revised Statement on Ministry“?

Prayer Let us pray – O God, we pray for all who teach, for all who learn. We pray for those who teach and seek to learn knowledge of the Bible: for students in theological schools, for their professors and mentors, for lay people in Bible study groups and lay training courses, for all who seek to know your will and do it. In Jesus name. Amen.

George Bishop – Spiritual Life Chair

“Month of Love”

February 2014

Hymn; Jesus Loves me #123

Scripture: Exodus: 20:1- 6 Mark 12: 28-30

Reflection:

We instinctively think of February as the month of love, not because of god, but because of Valentine’s Day. Being Christians we should think of every month as the month of Love, love of god and love of one another. Some of us however, just think of February as cold and wish it would get over so spring would come. Unlike Christmas or Easter Valentine’s day is not a worldwide celebration. Actually only a small handful of countries, including Canada and the US celebrate it. Seems there were more than one St. Valentine in the Catholic Church and Valentine’s Day celebration was in and out of Christianity’s favour. But you know, our concern is not about Valentine’s Day, although our wives may be concerned, but our concern is about the love of god. Jesus said, when questioned about the Ten Commandments that love is the most important. Many chapters in the New Testament talk about love, especially how important it is to love those we don’t want to, specifically our enemies. Well Jesus does not make life easy for us and not one mention of Valentine’s Day or chocolate. What we have though, is the unquestionable love of God. All we have to do is spread it around.

Discussion:

How hard is to love our enemies?

Do you have someone you just can’t love?

Hymn: Spirit of Gentleness #375

Prayer: Father, who loves us unconditionally, we pray that one day we also may have the ability. Give us the compassion, the desire and the ability to do so. In the name of your son, amen

“Flowers and Chocolates”

Devotion for February 2015

Hymn: VU 534 I Cannot Dance, O Love

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:8

Reflection:

We all know the experts categorize love in four parts, love from God., love for our families, our neighbours and finally romantic love. February is noted for the 14th, and a guy by the name of St. Valentine is the responsible party. St. Valentine, a Roman Bishop in the second century was put to death for his views, and actions about Christian marriage. I suspect he never imagined Valentine’s Day as we know and celebrate it. Being resourceful and always with money in the forefront, over the years enterprising individuals in the retail industry have really capitalized on St. Valentine’s Day. Well, we just experienced Christmas with Jesus touting love for all and now we are hit with Valentine’s Day where romantic love has taken over. Somehow I don't think Jesus nor St. Valentine envisioned flowers and chocolates as symbols of love. I don't think anyone though, is against love for one’s spouse, nor upset about chocolates and roses, but presumably love to Jesus and St. Valentine was something much bigger and far more encompassing.

Discussion: Would either approve of St. Valentine’s Day?

Scripture: John 13:34-35

Hymn. VU 419 May the grace of Christ

Prayer: May the love of God permeate our souls, our minds and our thoughts so that we may truly love as Jesus taught. amen

Is February Holding the Short Stick?

Devotion for February 2016

Hymn: VU 530 All Beautiful March of DAYS

Scripture: Rev: 1:8

Reflection:

Ever wonder why February got short changed. I mean they could have given November short shrift or August for instance! Or why not make a couple more months thirty days and tack those two onto February to make it thirty instead of just twenty eight. Even as a kid it never seemed fair to me. People will tell you some scientific reason, like the orbit around the sun, but that is nor the case. It was a couple Roman characters that were responsible. The real scientific reasons for the 365 day year came much later, but still left February holding the short stick. So, days, months and calendars were actually important tools in both Old and New Testament. Other faiths and beliefs have a different calendar than we, as you know. A lot of research has been done to relate historical events and God's dictate in various parts of the bible from Genesis right up to revelations with dates. If one is interested it is a fascinating study.

Discussion

Do you think the seven days in genesis were real and how about the duration of the flood, and of course the most important three days in the new testament? One needs some modern facts from qualified historians but the questions make for a great discussion. According to some experts there is ample proof of the flood and why not, after all our faith is based on the events of three days.

Hymn VU 412 This the day.....

Prayer

Lord we thank you for each and every day. As days roll into weeks, then months and then years we realize how precious each day, each hour is. For the earth, the sun the Stars we thank you God and give you praise each day as we rise. 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