

## ***“Filling a need ”***

June 2008

Hymn            “I need thee every hour”        VU 671

Scripture       Ephesians 2: 8 – 10

Ephesians 2:10        “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Prayer            Let us pray together - O God, you have made each of us in your image to help to carry out your work here on earth. We need you and we need other people to achieve the anticipated result. Be with us here today and every day as we strive to do what you would have us do. Amen.

Reflection        There is a parable of a man whose wife had been captured by a king and brought to his castle as a slave. The man set off with his five-year-old son to rescue the woman. During their trip the father had to carry his son because the boy was too young and too small to walk all the way. Finally, the two arrived at the castle. The castle gate was closed, but there was a small narrow window in the wall alongside the gate. The boy realized that he was small enough to fit through the window; he climbed up the wall and through the window and opened the gate for his father.

We all need each other. Living a life without ever needing someone, using someone, or being used by someone is rare. If you’re a fair person usually you will find an equitable solution. But you may end up employing others’ talents. Then you should be generous. People resent being “ridden”. But even the best and most merciful rider is still the rider. Such relationships are inevitable. Soldiers fight, generals get stars; research associates discover, professors get promoted; salesmen move merchandise, CEO’s receive large bonuses. Of course it is likely that at one time you carried others: once, you were a soldier, or a research associate, or a salesman. Hopefully you were used for good causes.

Contribution from one generation to another is fine, but not sufficient. You must also deliver now. You must take care of your soldiers, associates and salesmen if and when you become the rider. Compensate them, share your glory, recognize their efforts in your success or help them in other ways. This is not totally charitable or altruistic behaviour. In a larger arena you may still need help in the future and perhaps you’ll receive it from a totally unexpected source.

Riding others may be inevitable but the rider and ridden must safely arrive at their destination together. You may not be able to carry the ones who carried you, but think of their souls as an extension of yours and show an equal degree of attention and interest in their souls. Jobs may be defined differently but each is unique in its contribution to the overall mission.

*(based on material from “The Spirit of Happiness – discovering God’s purpose for your life” by T. Byram Karasu, M.D.)*

Discussion            In what ways have you carried others?  
                          In what ways have others carried you?  
                          How have you thanked others for what they have done for you?  
                          How have you thanked God?

Closing prayer        Let us pray – O God, we thank you for this group of men who work and play and laugh and cry together as we listen and learn and act together in your name. Each of us needs to be carried much of the time and occasionally each of us is able to carry another for a short time. Help us to hear the needs of one another and give us the humility to allow ourselves to be carried and the strength to carry others. These things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Coming event         Kairos 2008 for young adults (18-30) at Five Oaks in August

Book of the month    "The Spirit of Happiness" by Dr. T. Byram Karasu in which the author explores the psychological barriers that prevent so many of us from allowing faith to become an integral part of our lives and from becoming truly serene and fulfilled human beings.

## *“fellowship and friendship”*

June 2009

Hymn            “Love divine, all loves excelling”            VU 333

Scripture        John 15: 9-16

Verse 15 – *I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead I have called you friends, for everything I learned from my Father I have made known to you.*

Prayer            Let us pray – God, we look to you as parent of us all. May your love, your careful providing, your compassionate concern for us, your firm expectations, make us glad offspring. Open to us your vision of parenthood and make us, as you are, willing to offer ourselves to our children, through Christ our Lord. Amen

Lesson            One of the most touching of Jesus’ conversations with his disciples occurs late in his ministry when he says, “I no longer call you servants, but friends.” Deep friendships were valued in his world. Aristotle had already commented that “without friends no one would choose to live, even though he possessed all other goods.” Friendship grows out of common interests. Sydney Smith, the flamboyant English of the 1890’s was once at a dinner. When the woman next to him stated that she did not like gravy, he leapt to his feet and said to her, “Neither do I! Let us pledge a life-long friendship!” This is a facetious story, but one that illustrates that common convictions, shared interests, insights, tastes, and enjoyments determine friendship. At the heart of it is simply the enjoyment of being together, thinking, feeling, grieving, and laughing together.

The deeper the sharing, the deeper the friendship. Thomas Hughes wrote, “Blessed are they who have the gift of making friends. It involves many things, but above all the power of going out of oneself and appreciating what is noble and loving in another.” Or as Henry Ford succinctly put it, “My friend is the one who brings out the best in me.”

Being a friend means taking risks. To have a friend means to run the risk of being told things about ourselves we prefer not to hear. Proverbs has a wise saying, ‘the wounds of a friend can be trusted....’ On the other hand, there are few experiences as painful as being let down by a friend. Therefore, some would prefer not to risk it. A minister, Leslie Weatherhead noted in a sermon that a parishioner who prayed about a problem seemed to get no help until he discussed it with his friend. Weatherhead quoted him a line from Browning. “Hush, I pray you, what if this friend happens to be – God?” and adds, “He who speaks to me in the wind, cannot he speak more clearly in the vibrant tones of a friend?” Jesus would have said so.

In our friendships, God finds one of many ways to make contact with our lives. We believe that some of God’s nature is revealed through friendships; in them we see God as trustworthy, enjoyable, and committed to our good. No wonder a favourite hymn is, “What a friend we have in Jesus.”

Prayer-in-action      Examine David and Jonathon's friendship in II Samuel 1. Pray about it and examine how you can broaden your fellowship group by making friends with more of the men in your church and your community.

Prayer              Let us pray – Our God, day by day, in the deep places of our own hearts, we thank you for the gifts of life and livelihood, family and fortune. Week by week, we gather in our churches to thank you for the world in which we live and all that it contains. Month by month, in the fellowship of this group of AOTS men, we become aware of the subtle gifts of friendship, the listening ear, the shared experience, the tender yet strengthening touch, the affirmation of the group's interest and confidence, and the assurance of your presence as we meet. And so we thank you this month for the gift of friendship, the strength and confidence it brings to our lives, and the amazing assurance that you, too, are a friend. Amen.

## ***“Let me see now!”***

June 2010

Hymn “Teach me God to wonder” VU 299

Scripture *Psalm 8 (The Message)*

God, brilliant Lord, yours is a household name.

Nursing infants gurgle choruses about you; toddlers shout the songs that drown out enemy talk, and silence atheist babble.

I look up at your macro-skies, dark and enormous, your handmade sky-jewelry, moon and stars mounted in their settings. Then I look at my micro-self and wonder, why do you bother with us? Why take a second look our way?

Yet we’ve so narrowly missed being gods, bright with Eden’s dawn light. You put us in charge of your handcrafted world, repeated to us your Genesis-charge, made us lords of sheep and cattle, even animals out in the wild, birds flying and fish swimming, whales singing in the ocean deeps.

God, brilliant Lord, your name echoes around the world.

Prayer Let us pray – O God, we long to see a world at peace, where people live in harmony. We need to see balance in our lives and in nature. We struggle to find grace in our world of confusion. Help us to see your presence around us in the world and in the people we meet. Amen.

Lesson What does it mean “to see”? When a blind friend says “I see now what you mean”, what is he really saying? What about “I’ll see you later”, or “See if you can fix that problem”.

What in the world do you see? It depends on who you are, what you are thinking at that particular time, but mostly on your point of view.

In Betty Radford Turcott’s book, “There is a Season”, she notes examples of how scientists, historians, accountants, and theologians see the world.

Scientists look at the world from a scientific point of view. They see a world that can be explained by theories and formulae. Creation was a “big bang”. Light is broken into different colours with different wavelengths. Substances can be broken down into different symbols and numbers. Sound patters can be written on paper. We read their reports and hear the complicated explanations. The scientist sees the world and we marvel.

The viewpoint of an historian is different, enriched by her knowledge and background. She looks out at the port on the ocean and sees what it was like when different civilizations were in control of the geographic area. She sees the world in terms of great events. Events are reported in terms of lasting effects on humanity. Wars are analyzed for the root causes, the humans and war machines involved and the final outcome. The historian sees the world and sometimes we tremble.

When an accountant sees the world, it is through columns of figures, ledgers and balance sheets. He sees “paper” being bought and sold. Profit or loss is the bottom line. Growth is the prime mover. The accountant looks at the world and we question our values.

Theologians see the world with another vision. The world is an expression of God's creative power and compassionate care. Noah saw a rainbow and knew that God had been present in the flood. A poet writing a psalm saw God in the moon and the stars. The people of Galilee met Jesus and saw in him God's mercy and love for humankind. Mary Magdalene met Jesus in the garden and saw God's redeeming action in the risen rabbi.

Today we see through all these eyes. For many it is a composite of all the world views we read about and hear about. As an Easter people, we are striving for a world where there is justice and peace. Acceptance, compassion, hope and love are the bottom line. We see much that causes us pain and concern – we see the world as it is and ask “why?” But also we see hope and promise in the world – we see the world as it could be – as God meant it to be...and ask “why not?”

Discussion    How does an AOTS man see the world?

                  What should we do to see the world as God meant it to be?

Prayer            Let us pray – Loving God, the pain of the world confronts us at every turn. At times we feel the need to shield our eyes from so much suffering. We need to see the world through your eyes of compassion and understanding. Help us to see your face in the face of everyone we meet. Help us to see the world as you saw it in the beginning- whole fruitful, harmonious and good. And help us to use that vision to recreate the world as a better place for all people. Amen.

## ***“King James English”***

June 2012

Hymn                    “Send me, Lord”    VU572  
                              Send me, Jesus, send me, Jesus,  
                              Send me, Jesus, send me, Lord.

                              Lead me, Jesus, lead me Jesus,  
                              Lead me, Jesus, lead me, Lord.

                              I will go, Lord, I will go, Lord,  
                              I will go, Lord, I will go.

Scripture                *Romans 12:1-8 (King James Version)*

                              I beseech ye therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

                              And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

                              For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

                              For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

                              So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

                              Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;

                                  Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;

                                  Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

Prayer                    Let us pray – O God, we feel your hand on us, we feel your presence around us and within us. As we journey toward the future we rejoice in your goodness and seek to share the special gifts you have given to each of us. Thank you. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Lesson                    In the early 60’s, when I was completing my undergraduate degree in engineering at the University of Toronto, I lived on campus in the Knox College residence for a couple of years. Some laymen of the Presbyterian Church of Canada were attempting to organize men’s clubs called Presbyterian Men. The focus was to be on Bible study. We started a small club in the residence. As I recall, the group consisted of students who were going into the ministry - and me.

                              The first passage of scripture we studied was Romans 12:1-8 from the King James Version of the Bible. I had not previously been involved in Bible study, except as a Sunday School student and teacher. It was a new and meaningful experience. The

words seemed to have a special meaning for me and the first verse became my mantra, in “King James English”. „I beseech ye therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.“

Under the guidance of an older man a group of ten laymen from three different rural Presbyterian congregations decided to get together as Presbyterian Men. We were all in our 20’s and 30’s. Some were married and some were single. We were eager for Bible study. Our get-togethers were spiritually uplifting experiences as we shared our understanding of the Bible passages and what they meant in our lives. A book published by the American organization of Presbyterian Men was used as our discussion guide as we came together once each month. I continued in these meetings for several months after my graduation until I moved to a new job more than 200 miles away. It was just the right study for the right men at the right time.

Sometimes Bible study is the magnet that will bring a group of men together. Sometimes it’s specific passages such as Paul’s letters. Sometimes it’s the language of the Bible translation, such as “King James English”. But, regardless of the choice of text, or language, Bible study with your peers tends to move men closer to becoming followers and then disciples of Jesus.

#### Discussion

When was the last time you participated in a group Bible study?  
What Bible passages have a great deal of meaning for you?

#### Prayer

Let us pray – Creator God, you have made us to think, to study, to love, to steward, and to serve. Guide us as we seek our paths while we continue our faith journeys. We will go! This we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

## "Sunday School Picnic"

Devotion for June 2014

Hymn: VU: 501 Break now the bread of life

Scripture: John 6 9-11

Reflection:

We just had our spring Picnic. It used to be the Sunday School Picnic for most churches, then evolved into the congregational picnic and this year four downtown churches all celebrated, "The Church Picnic", together at a beautiful park setting on the river. The dictionary says a picnic is an informal meal and eaten outdoors, so I wondered what Jesus and the disciples called their very often gatherings to eat along the roads. They did a lot of walking so I am only assuming that often they would have to pick a shady spot along the dusty road and have lunch. Was that a picnic for them, and did the word even exist then? How about the five loaves and two fishes! Now that was a real picnic; a child sharing his lunch with five thousand people. After all, is that not what Jesus taught, share with others, breaking bread together, enjoying one another's friendship. Seems Jesus knew a thing or two about sharing a meal together. Perhaps we need more picnics.

Discussion: Does your church still have a SS picnic, and if not, is it still important for every congregation to hold one just to get together as a church family and celebrate the bonding that breaking bread together provides, especially in a warm and inviting outdoor setting?.

Hymn: VU 550 Bread is Broken

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for the lesson of the last supper, the loaves and fishes, and let us never forget the comradely, the sharing and friendship by breaking bread together in the beautiful outdoor settings you have provided for us. May every one, rich and poor, wherever they reside in your world, some day be able to enjoy a picnic. Amen

## Help Us to Love

Devotion for June 2015

Hymn: VU 608 Dear God who loves all Humankind

Scripture: Galatians 3:28

Reflection:

This afternoon I met Gerry for coffee. We do so often, when he is in town. We served together on a government board a few years ago and became friends. Gerry is Catholic, a practising Catholic. We share much the same political views so that makes a good connection. We talk family, work, cottage, but the interesting thing is we can also talk religion. You all know, that is a difficult subject even within the same faith circle. Was Jesus real, did he actually die for us, what is the future of the Catholic Church and is the Pope doing a really good job? What is happening to the UC? The list is endless but we don't condemn the other view, we don't pull out guns, and we wonder together why the world can't do the same? We think of Jesus at the well and then his directive to spread the word to everyone. Too bad not all have read the story or accept that directive.

Discussion: Religion has been the spark for many, if not all, the world wars since the Jews became Jews and Jesus included everyone. Is there anything, any project, any advertising campaign, social media blitz that AOTS could come up with and work on to stop the world wide carnage and spread the word that , to God "We are One"!

Scripture: Roamns 12: 15-18

Hymn: Psalm 14

Prayer: Lord, one who created us all, different, diverse, black, brown, white, yellow and bronze, help us see each as only different on the outside. Make us see we share the same blood, the same capacity for love as well as hate, and see each one as our brother or sister, and not as an adversary or one to destroy. Help us instil love and not hate, in the name of the creator, amen.

## **“When I can live or Die”**

Devotion for June 2016

Hymn: VU 705 For All the Saints vs 1 & 4

Scripture: 1 Samuel 31:4-6 & 2 Samuel 1: 9-10

Reflection:

As our government struggles, along with the dictate from the Supreme Court, on assisted suicide one has to wonder what the bible says about it. Well, on suicide, the bible says nothing, assisted may be a different matter. In any event my thought is that the government has no business telling me when I can live or die, and should I choose some assistance that is also none of their concern. They meddle in just about every aspect of our lives, while I think Jesus was pretty hands off. Love your neighbour, treat others etc. and if we did that, who needs the heavy hand of government to dictate our lives?

Discussion;

Do you think the government has the right, or is given the authority to tell us when we should exit this world? If so where did they get that from and what does the bible really say about it. If one is suffering daily, regardless at any age, and no cure is in sight who should make that decision besides that person. Remember Robert Latimer? Did he really commit a crime, or help his daughter end years of endless and needless suffering?

Hymn VU 493 Today I live

Prayer:

Lord, we are thankful, grateful and in awe of all living creatures and every life. We pray for guidance and wisdom to make the right decisions when life for us, or family members becomes intolerable. Show us the way and help us make the right decision. 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