

*“Affluence, Joy, and Thanksgiving”*

October 2008

Hymn                      As the deer pants for the water...

VU 766

Scripture                Psalm 42

Verses 2 – 4 (New International version)  
“My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When can I go and meet with God?

My tears have been my food day and night,  
while men say to me all day long,  
“Where is your God?”

These things I remember as I pour out my soul:  
how I used to go with the multitude,  
leading the procession to the house of God,  
with shouts of joy and thanksgiving,  
among the festive throng.”

Prayer                Let us pray – Creator, we come to offer our thanksgiving. In your presence our faith is warmed, our hopes rekindled, and our purposes strengthened. May your presence hallow us in this season of thanksgiving, that our hearts may be lifted to the joy that the days deserve. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Lesson                Some years ago John Ruskin, an articulate dreamer wrote, “Wealth, well used is a fisherman’s net gathering men’s souls out of the deep. By the strength of our possessions we shall direct the acts, command the energies, inform the ignorance, and prolong the existence of the human race.”

In many ways we inherit the legacy of that dream, in hospitals, schools, parks, and patios. In these we have good cause for thanksgiving. Yet we know there was a flaw in Ruskin’s dream. He came to the same realization in his own lifetime and wrote, “The pursuit of money is the most cretinous, speechless, paralyzing plague that ever touched the brains of mankind.”

To make wealth the central dream of life is to violate God’s order of life. A European commented on the spiritual poverty in the midst of material wealth that he found in North America. “It seems to me that the deepest questions you ask are, ‘How can I lose weight?’, ‘Where can I park my car?’, ‘Where can I find a cheap vacation?’”

Here are six lessons that Jesus taught that apply to our age of affluence:

1 – Material goods are a gift of God to be accepted with joy and appreciation. Man does not live by bread alone, but we are told to give thanks for our daily bread, the symbol of all good gifts.

2 – Material possessions were not intended to be the primary objective in life. Although this may draw laughs, North American life is largely based on the assumption that the accumulation of assets is the primary goal of life.

3 – When Jesus said, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God”, he was talking of a life-shaping experience of yielding our wills to God’s will in a manner that sets out our priorities of all of life.

4 – The Kingdom of God is a kingdom of right relationships. Caring for others as creatively as we are able to will bring life’s deepest satisfactions.

5 – Our Thanksgiving celebrations, whatever they may be, are a reminder that richness of life consists of appreciating what we have been given, rather than in what we gather.

6 – All we possess has been given in trust and is to be shared.

All these are familiar thoughts. They become challenging when they are no longer mere sentiments but are measuring standards for daily living.

*(based on material from ‘Fire in the Bones’ by Robert A. Wallace)*

**Discussion**     Talk about Jesus’ six lessons listed above.

**Prayer**             Let us pray – Good and gracious God, giver of all things we bring our prayers of thanksgiving. Now hear our requests, we pray. Bless those who live under the shadow of oppression, those whose lives are threatened by hunger, those whose hopes are shaken by sorrow, those whose days are threatened by anxiety, the overworked, the underpaid, the unemployed, and the unemployable. Bless the countless refugees in squalid camps around the world, the homeless in city parks and streets, single mothers trying to make this season special, those who eat Thanksgiving dinner alone, whether in small flats or in sumptuous surroundings, those in isolated outposts, all for whom thanksgiving is a struggle. In our own thanksgiving, may we be aware of these our brothers and sisters. Through Christ we pray. Amen.

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

**Book of the month**     ‘The Pillars of the Earth’ by Ken Follett