

## **Easter Sunday**

Devotion for April 2014

Hymn: Jesus Christ is Risen today VU 155 Vs 1, 3 & 6

Scripture: Matthew 28 vs.1 to 8 St. Mark vs. 9 to 16

Reflection:

What a surprise! What a shock! Jesus was gone and then when he did make an appearance his most faithful followers did not recognize him. They failed to get the message and even confronted with proof, did not believe. Well, do you suppose we may be the same? Good Friday is the darkest day in the new testament and Easter Sunday the most glorious, and yet we have our doubts. So, one must ask the question, what does it take, what will it take? We have to touch, feel, see, then like Thomas we believe. Each of use at some time in our lives experience an incident, a happening, that we can only describe as a miracle. A miracle we can not explain, but experienced, so we believe. Was the resurrection of Jesus one of those unexplained miracles or just a really amazing tale telling a lesson in faith? You decide! Amen

Discussion: What kind proof do you need in order to believe?

Hymn: O sons of God VU 171 Vs 1 5 & 6

Prayer: Lord, we see so we believe, we touch so we believe, help us have the faith to truly believe. We thank you and ask in the name of the risen Christ. Amen

Devotion for August 2014

Hymn: VU 516 Come You Thankful people Come,

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians Vs 5:18

Reflection:

Harvest time is here. Do we take the time to reflect on what that means? What abundance it provides for some of us, but not all. The bible testaments, old and new, are full of stories about planting, gleaning and harvesting. Some stories are actually about food and some about harvesting for our faith. Some like Leviticus 23:22 are about those who have nothing but pick up our leftovers, sort of like our modern street people or many others living on the poverty line.

Discussion

You know, sometime I think we are so blessed, so well off, so lucky perhaps, that we forget to be thankful. We don't even realize the abundance we share and just take it for granted, because of who and where we are. Are we truly thankful?

Hymn VU 236 Now Tank You All Our God

Prayer. Lord, provider of all things, open our hearts, our eyes, so we may be truly grateful for all your bounty. Amen

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# Message of Love and Peace

Devotion for December 2014

Hymn: VU 6 A Candle Is Burning

Scripture: Luke 2 1-29

## Reflection:

What else would one talk about in December, but Christmas. By now we all know that there was no Christmas in the new testament, and no Christians either. Theologians pinpoint either March or April as the real time for the birth of Jesus. December 25<sup>th</sup> was chosen sometime in the third century to satisfy the pagan winter solstice celebrations, and the new group known as Christians who believed in the virgin birth. Christmas has a number of tradition, each with its own story, the tree, yule log, candy canes, holly and Christmas cards. Of course Santa, and each of these developed separately and at different times. The most recent tradition of course is SHOPPING. Santa had various costumes and colours over the years but his traditional suit and colours, pretty much accepted worldwide now, can be attributed to a Coke-A- Cola add in the 1930's. For years now most theologians dispute the virgin birth story, and many other stories in the New Testament. Sort of makes one think, doesn't it, if none of that is true why do we believe, why go to church, and perhaps that knowledge, or current thought is why the massive decline in church attendance. Well, we each have our own thoughts, our own rationale for what we do and how we think, but no one can dispute the love, the truth and legacy that Jesus left. Believer or not, what Christmas stands for is a message of love and peace the whole world believes and some day may even practice. Merry Christmas.

Discussion: What does Christmas really mean for you?

Hymn: VU 43 Go Tell It On The Mountain

Prayer: For the gift of Jesus may we always be thankful. Help us Lord to reach that day when the whole world, no matter their belief lives the message of Christmas. amen

## **“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

January 2014

Hymn 253 Be thou my vision

Scripture; Geneses 3: 1-6 & Matthew 6:33-34

Reflection:

Well New Years Eve, at least in our modern world, is a time to celebrate. Celebrate past victories, leave a bad year behind if that fits, and more importantly look to the future. We can suggest that was what God was doing "In The beginning", was looking forward to a new beginning, even akin to a new resolution. . Like us making New Years resolutions Adam & Eve ignored God & broke his resolution. We look back over the last year and wonder if we did the same as Adam & Eve, , then look ahead and promise to do better. A new beginning always feels good, and usually we sincerely believe we will honour our commitment, only to find the next morning that giving up smoking is harder than we thought, that being nice to aunt Lucy is not really an option. The only thing that is clear is we will not suffer another hang over. It takes guts, determination and a lot of will power to keep our promises for a new beginning. Just think how tough it would be if, like Adam & Eve, we had a snake to egg us on. So the solution for most of us, focus on that new beginning, not the end of it but the journey. "Therefor take no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the is the evil thereof."Amen

Discussion.

Each year is really a new beginning, but for what: do you resolve to stop smoking....drink less....be nicer to your relatives.....or be a better person & be a real follower of Jesus teachings? If it is the latter, how do we accomplish that?

Hymn 304 " O Jesus I have promised" Vs 1 and 4

Prayer, well God, yes another year. Another time to resolve to follow your example, to do as you taught. You know our resolve is sincere, but our humanity is weak, we need and ask for your help" your help to make us the person we want to be, to keep those commitments to you and to ourselves. Be with us lord as we go about our daily tasks and be our conscience as we try to do as you taught. Amen

## "New Heights"

Devotion for July 2014      "He's Gone!"

Hymn: Walk with me    VU 649

Scripture: Acts 1 7-13 & 2 1-5

Reflection:

They were alone, felt abandoned and in despair. No idea of what comes next or what to do. Does that fit a lot of churches today? Church closings are a very common occurrence. Pentecost however, set the disciples on a new path, a new journey. Perhaps that is what will happen with our current upheaval. Are you in despair over the declining attendance in your congregation, is giving up and closing the doors your solution? Or have you been smitten with tongues of fire and a wind that blows your imagination to new heights? This United Church creed, history, UCW and AOTS are worth preserving. We can see the bright light in this darkness: just get into the modern world and continue Jesus mission. It will be a different road, but one we can set our GPS on and GO.

Discussion

In what direction are you heading? Pining about yesterday or offering solution for the modern world that God still lives in?

Hymn    One more step    VU 639

Prayer.

Well God, as the song goes, "You gave me a mountain this time". I guess the question is, do we have the faith to climb it? We are certainly looking at something new. Something different and Lord we sure don't know what it is. Like the twelve we feel lost, abandoned, but we also know those tongues of fire have already landed on some, that wind will eventually affect us all and the message spread by Jesus will emerge, in a different form, but the same message of love will prevail. Thanks God, 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

## First Day of Spring?

Devotion for March 2014

Hymn: For the Beauty of the earth VU 226

Scripture: Job 37.6    Genesis 8:22

Reflection:

We all know March holds the first day of spring, but when it is still blowing and snowing it is hard to believe that spring will actually come. However we have faith that spring will come, we know it will. And before spring arrives March 17 rolls around and almost the whole world is united by being Irish and green, for a day. For such a secular bunch that the world has become it is interesting to note that it is saints that bring us together: St. Nicholas, St. Valentine, and then St. Patrick. Well perhaps no longer is it who they are or were, that unites us, but what they represent to the modern world: presents, chocolates, and finally green beer. But you know it was not always that way. When the Catholic Church reigned those saints, at least St Valentine & St Patrick were revered for what they did and not for chocolates and green beer. Times change, we give chocolates on the appointed day and some still turn to green beer on March 17, and we all still have faith that spring will arrive. What is in question is, do we still have faith in Jesus? Church membership is dwindling, but it is not yet down the tube, and you know that does not equate to people not having faith in Jesus. Amen

Discussion: Not the ending to this devotion you would expect, but I don't want to determine your faith for you, so let's talk about how the Christian world still has faith in Jesus, or at least his teaching.

Hymn: As comes the breath of spring VU 373

Prayer: God, our everlasting spring, the constant renewal of our spirit, we ask your help to keep the spirit of Jesus and his teachings in our hearts. If our faith wanders, our resolve weakens, shows us that like the seasons, Jesus is a constant that we can count on as sure as the Robins sing once more, the tulips spring forth and the sun warms our bodies, so will Jesus warm our souls and like another spring that renews the earth, so shall our faith be renewed. 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.

# **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.

# Halloween

Devotion for October 2014

**Hymn:** Great is thy faithfulness VU 288

Scripture: Genesis 8:22

## **Reflection:**

Don't know about you but I really dislike Halloween for a number of reasons, possibly just because I am old and getting grouchy. Not since my days in the country as a kid and out houses etc., have I liked Halloween. Surely though, we all know this celebration started out as a religious festival, well sort of. It has undergone quite a transformation though as it is only second to Christmas for retailers selling junk of all kinds. Sounds pretty cynical does it not? The local dollar store had its Halloween offerings from China out in August. Someone, and I know not who, said that for every cloud there is a silver lining, and guess what, there is a silver lining even with those pesky kids looking for more candy for doing nothing more than disturbing your evening of enjoying a glass of wine and your favourite book. Halloween means another harvest is in the barn, giving us something to be really thankful for and we can look forward to upcoming rest and anticipating the thanksgiving celebrations.

**Discussion;** Halloween has a lot of history, some religious, some not so, but a very interesting part of our Christianity and makes for a great discussion if someone will do a bit of digging into its history.

**Hymn:** All things bright and beautiful VU 291

## **Prayer:**

Dear God, for the beauty of the earth, this wonderful place you have provided for us, may we be truly thankful and forever celebrate your great faith in us and the many gifts you have provided for us.

Devotion for September 2014

Hymn: VU 439 vs 1-3 & 5

Scripture: James 5:4 and Luke 10:7

Reflection:

Nothing spells the end of summer in Canada like Labour Day. You know, in Canada it really started in 1872 when a group of workers in Toronto were protesting. Unions were outlawed at that time. Labour day has progressed from a protest to a celebration enjoyed by all, unions, workers, kids, house wives, retirees and even bosses. From various scriptures it appears labour at the time of Jesus and even in the old testament had no day of celebration. Jesus certainly recognized that, never advocated for a “Labour Day” celebration but simply preached, treat people equally, with respect, and pay them fairly for their efforts. He never advocated strikes nor formal protests, but ignored those laws that were unjust and unfair and urged people to live by his edict, love your neighbour.

Discussion

We should talk about how, if we lived by Jesus teaching would we need the labour movement. If our ancestors did so, would we have evolved into the adversarial system that labour and management enjoy today. The book may be old, but the common sense and teaching of Jesus will never grow old.

Hymn: VU 307

Prayer.

Lord, as one hymn says, “make me an instrument of your peace”, we pray that the day will come when we will truly love our neighbour and a labour day celebration will truly be a celebration every day.

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