

## *“Your spiritual guide”*

March 2008

Hymn                      We meet you, O Christ                      VU 183

Scripture                      Mark 16: 8 - 16

Verses 10 – 11, ‘She went out and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.’

Prayer                      Let us pray – God of resurrection, you have rolled the stone away and the tomb of our world has been opened wide. With the dawn has come a new creation. Let our celebration today empty our tombs, renew our lives, and release your power, through the risen Christ we pray. Amen.

Lesson                      Two young men are hurrying away from a city where a friend, another youth, has just met a violent death. They are grief-stricken and in shock. Unable to comprehend what has happened and fearful for their own safety, they have decided to run away, just as any of us might do when confronted with pain and confusion. They go over the incident again and again in their own minds and in their frantic conversation.

Suddenly they are joined by a mysterious stranger who asks what is upsetting them. The men come to a stop in astonishment that someone might not share their troubles, but the stranger proves a good listener. He allows them to tell their story and express their feelings without interruption, and then he interprets it for them so that they begin to see the meaning of the terrible event they have witnessed. So helpful is this stranger that when he tries to move on they plead with him to stay. After spending further time and sharing a meal with him, the two men resolve to abandon their flight and return to the city. Their earlier decision to run away now seems misguided.

As Christians, we recognize the story of the encounter of the disciples with the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus. It is also one of the classic texts on spiritual direction. The stranger is a model guide who walks alongside the men without imposing his presence on them. He listens more than he speaks. He empathizes with them, taking their pain seriously, but shows how it can have inner meaning that is greater than the hurt it inflicts.

It is important, however, not to dwell too much on the suffering of the individuals in the story. The point is that they have come to a crisis in their spiritual lives and do not know which way to turn. The stranger gently helps them to discover the way for themselves.

The word crisis, rather than suggesting some kind of disaster, originally referred to the need to make a judgment concerning taking one course of action or another. The decision to take our spiritual lives seriously is a kind of crisis, in that sense, and one for which we might feel the need for guidance. The principal guide is the Holy Spirit acting upon us and acting within us, but at some stage we might want to have a “stranger” to speak with.

Prepare yourself. Be ready. At some stage you may need to listen to the “stranger”. At some stage you may need to be the “stranger” for someone else.

Discussion    Talk about the empty tomb.  
What is different in your thinking of Jesus as a resurrected being?

Prayer        Let us pray – Eternal God, you call us to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go in courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us, and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

*This meditation is based in part on material from “Vacations for the Spirit” by Alan Walker*

**Coming events    Central Region Roundup    25 – 27 April, 2008        Jackson’s Point, Ontario**

**Book of the month        The gospel according to Mark – ‘relive’ Jesus’ life on earth**

## ***“Lent”***

March 2009

Hymn            “You servants of God”            VU 342

Scripture        *“When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do what I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”*     John 13: 12 - 17

Prayer            Let us pray – Gracious God, we know Jesus was lonely and tempted and yet willing to sacrifice his life for all humankind. We often feel incapable of walking the path that he followed. Help us now, as we look again at one of the final acts of his earthly life. Accept our feeble attempts at discipleship through him, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Lesson            We are in the season of Lent. The word “Lent” comes from lengthening, as in the lengthening of days as spring approaches. The season of Lent lasts for forty days plus six Sundays and ends with Easter which was set by the Council of Nicea in 325 as the first Sunday after the first full moon of the spring equinox.

Lent has been traditionally a time of self-denial, of fasting and praying. It is also a time when we reflect on the last days of Jesus’ life on earth. It is a time when we wonder if we are really deserving of the name “Christian”. We wonder just how well we are doing in following the teachings of this man we call the Christ.

One of the most difficult of Jesus’ teachings for us to follow is one we read about in John’s gospel – the washing of feet. Many of us have allowed ourselves to almost “write off” this command of Jesus on the basis of the cultural and climatic conditions that no longer apply to modern society – especially modern Canadian society. We no longer wash people’s feet when they arrive at our door, nor do we have servants to do this for our guests. This allows us to ignore the symbolism of the story, which is service to others.

Some faith communities have experimented with foot washing, or have substituted hand washing. A bowl of water and a towel placed on a table while the story is being read can also be quite moving. We do not need to re-enact the foot washing – we need to think about what such a servant attitude means to us. The visual aid helps us realize what that act must have meant to the disciples. Here was their master, acting as their servant. We who claim to have no worldly master or mistress, and who are unlikely to be able to afford servants, find it difficult to appreciate this role reversal of Jesus.

There is no doubt that Christians are called to *serve*. Lent is a time when we can evaluate our service, seek new ways to serve, or be strengthened to continue the service we are doing.

**Discussion** In small groups, talk about ways that Christians today express their faith in action during the Lenten season. Include small actions as well as larger contributions. Be intentional in naming ways you will serve during the next few weeks.

**Prayer** Let us pray – O God, washing one another's feet seems such a small gesture of service, but sometimes it is difficult to accept this kindness from another person. Help us to know how to accept, and help us to know how to give, that we may follow the example of Jesus as one that serves. Amen.

## ***“Towing and healing – the dance of the Spirit”***

March 2010

Hymn                      “for the healing of the nations”                      VU

Scripture                *Luke 8: 49-56 (New Living Translation)*

While he was still speaking to her, a messenger arrived from the house of Jairus, the leader of the synagogue. He told him, “Your daughter is dead. There’s no use troubling the Teacher now.”

But when Jesus heard what had happened, he said to Jairus, “Don’t be afraid, just have faith, and she will be healed.”

When they arrived at the house, Jesus wouldn’t let anyone go in with him except Peter, John, James, and the little girl’s father and mother. The house was filled with people weeping and wailing, but he said, “Stop the weeping! She isn’t dead; she’s only asleep.

But the crowd laughed at him because they all knew she had died. Then Jesus took her by the hand and said in a loud voice, “My child, get up!” and at that moment her spirit returned, and she immediately stood up! Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were overwhelmed, but Jesus insisted that they not tell anyone what had happened.

Prayer                    Let us pray – Great Healer, you have made us for health, for wholeness and for holiness. We know that you do not will the pain or suffering of your children. We earnestly pray for friends and family. May your spirit bring healing to those ailing persons we name in our hearts. Give them patience and serenity, knowing that you are near. May they be assured that underneath are the everlasting arms. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Lesson                    The healing miracles in the Bible are told in abbreviated form. They are there to witness to the healing powers that God has written into human life, and which Jesus relied on to bring relief to sufferers. In these stories relief is often immediate. Life today contains the same potential for recovery, but it occurs at a pace that belongs to daily life rather than miracle stories.

Sometimes we have to be towed, or pushed, or pulled until our spirit begins to dance and we begin to heal. Sometimes it is a member of our family or a friend that hits the right notes for the dance to begin. Sometimes we do not recognize the cause.

There are stories about a Father Peter Rookey having the gift of healing. As a youngster, he was blinded when a firecracker rocket exploded in his face. He promised he would become a priest if he could see again. His family prayed for him continuously. In about two years, his sight began to come back and eventually he could see well enough. As a priest he has healed many people.

Father Rookey does not feel responsible for the healings nor does he feel responsible for those who are not healed. God’s mercies are indeed a mystery. Father Rookey’s job, like our job, is to be faithful and to leave whatever healings take place to God. After all, the great healing is to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, and God knows best how to accomplish this within each soul.

Father Rookey spends a great deal of his time in prayer. When he prays for healing, he prays with the people seeking healing. He prays what he calls “the Miracle Prayer”, which is essentially a prayer of conversion: “Lord Jesus, I come before you just as I am...I repent of my sins...Lord Jesus, I accept you as my Lord, God, and Saviour. Heal me, change me, strengthen me in body, soul, and spirit.”

Sometimes it is us who need the healing. To be without one’s normal strength, reactions, resilience, is to be in chaos. Nietzsche wrote, “Chaos trusted becomes a dancing star.” Miraculously the Holy Spirit is present to bring order and shape out of the chaos in our own lives.

Psychiatrist David Spiegel states: “We are dependent for our emotional well-being, and it turns out in a lot of research, for our physical well-being, on our relationships with other people. Connect with people. Cope by seeking support from others.”

We are wonderfully made in the image of God. Jesus often used the phrase, “How much more....” when talking about the extravagance of God’s love. How much more than anything else we can know is God’s care for each of us who are not simply God’s creatures but God’s creations. Health, wholeness and holiness come from the same word-root. They obviously belong together. Our God-given human heritage allows us to seek sustenance through prayer and supplication during our time of restoration to wholeness.

**Discussion** In what ways are you a healer? In what ways is your AOTS or other men’s club a healer in your congregation or community?

**Prayer** Let us pray – Creator God, healer, we bring to you our prayers for all in pain, all those who await the result of diagnostic tests, all who face surgery or difficult medical treatment. Sustain those who are taking the first steps on the long road of recuperation. Grant patience and hope, serenity and endurance to those who linger long with illness. We ask your healing, loving, comforting presence with each. Amen.

*This meditation is based on material from “God at the Corners” by Robert A. Wallace and “The Living Christ” by Harold Fickett*

## 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

## **“Dissecting St. Patrick”**

Devotion for March 2015

Hymn: VU 705 For All the Saints vs 1-4 & 5

Scripture: Acts 9: 32: 35

Reflection:

Last month we dissected St. Valentine and sure enough we have another equally famous saint for March. I thought only the Catholic church had saints, but no, just about every major religion has saints, although each one recognizes who their saints are using a different criteria. Well, St. Patrick as you may know, was born in Scotland to Roman parents, and became famous in Ireland making the whole world green every March 17. Since my ancestors came from Ireland close to 200 years ago I don't want to dredge up any bad news about St. Patrick even if he was not really Irish. About those snakes though, the research says Ireland never had any. There are some theories as to the connection with snakes and St. Patrick, but the clover is easier to understand. Apparently Ireland is full of that three leaf green plant and he used it to explain the Trinity. How he explained the odd four leaf one that popped up is never mentioned. I did know the dates he was there but can't help but wonder if Guinness was around then? One thing we all know though, recent saints, the last few hundred years anyway, are man-made and some get that distinction on dubious merit. In my opinion the only real saint I knew was my mother and I am betting lots of you can think of some modern day people whom you consider saints. Forget the Catholic church definition and check out what the bible says and you will find AOTS has been, and is full of them.

Discussion:

Do you have saints in your club?

Scripture: Philipians 4: 19-23

Hymn. VU 707

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for those who have gone before, those saints who are still with us, and ask you give us the courage, the strength and faith to be saints today. amen.

## **“March Weather - Unpredictable”**

Devotion for March 2016

Hymn: VU 625 I feel the Winds of God

Scripture:

Reflection:

At a certain age we are all familiar with, “March comes in like a Lion and goes out like a Lamb”. Do you suppose whoever coined that phrase was thinking of Jesus? After all he was a bit feisty like a stormy March day, chastising his own Jewish brethren for their actions, and even using a whip to drive them out of the temple. However at the end he was meek, mild like a lamb, surrendering without a fight and giving in to his captors: no blustering winds or blowing snow, just submission. One wonders what that says about how we enter and exit life. Do we go through life like March weather: changing, unpredictable, stormy, until one day, finally giving in and surrendering to the will of God?

Discussion

Just another thought to kick around and look at how we approach life, like a March storm sometimes and calm and meek another, like Jesus last days?

Hymn VU 530 All Beautiful March of Days

Prayer: Lord we pray for those who are constantly in a stormy unpredictable life. People, who have nothing, yet can retain their faith through everyday life storms while we complain about a bit of stormy weather. Help us Lord to be forever thankful for our daily existence and not be concerned about a bit of stormy weather. Amen

## **“Born on St. Patrick’s Day”**

March 2017

Hymn: VU 595 We are Pilgrims on a Journey

Scripture: Psalm 100 and Romans 1 16:25

Reflection:

I am told there was quite a discussion in my family about what name I should be blessed with when I was born on St. Patrick’s Day. Also a significant day as my ancestors arrived from Ireland some hundred years earlier. I have since found out that St. Patrick was not exactly who we are lead to believe. He was actually born in England of Egyptian parents, if one can accept the historian’s story. Kidnaped at 12 or 14 he spent ten years or so in Ireland. He escaped but returned to convert all of those heathens. Apparently he had a bit of trouble convincing the north and south to get along and since Ireland had no snakes one wonders how that story started. So today the north and south sort of have a truce but Islam and the rest of the world have taken up that void to still give us a ring side seat in a religious war. All this during Lent!

Discussion:

Does Lent mean anything to you? What do you give up, or sacrifice for 40 days?

Hymn: VU 530 All beautiful the march of days

Prayer: Lord, Lent has sort of taken a back seat in our lives and worship. I often think that to most of the world being Irish on March 17 is more important than observing or even thinking about Lent. Forgive our being human Lord, and may we have the courage in our hearts to spend the forty days in the desert with you. Amen.