

The General Conference of the New Church  
**Home Worship Services for July to September 2017**

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Home Worship Services for July 2017 by David Lomax

The last time that I wrote something for the Home Worship scheme I looked at the first five chapters of John's gospel. This time I will be looking at passages taken from chapters 6 to 10. Each of these chapters is quite long and contains some lengthy passages of teaching. You may find that you need to spend quite some time reading them – I suggest that you do so in each case before you read the thoughts on each chapter which follow below.

2nd July John 6.25-59 Apocalypse Explained 146

In what I wrote previously I talked about "flow" in John's gospel, a sense of the Lord coming through to us, especially in the images of light, spirit and water (and wine) referred to in these early chapters.

It feels as if the mood begins to change in the second half of chapter 5, after the healing miracle at the pool, where the water is "stirred". The fact that Jesus has healed on the Sabbath encounters some resistance from certain quarters. In each of the next five chapters, there is substantial discussion about who Jesus is and what he is doing. This is expressed mainly in terms of the reactions of concern of the Jewish religious leaders of the time or people at large.

If we are to apply this to ourselves, we need to acknowledge the parts of ourselves which "resist" the coming of the Lord and his power to bring healing and deep spiritual insight. This is not always easy territory for us. Just as Jesus needs in these stories to work to open up a channel, in spite of the way that the religious tradition should already provide this, so we may find that parts of our nature work against the Lord flowing into us.

In chapter 6 we are brought right up against this in what Jesus tells people about bread. In Apocalypse Explained 146 Swedenborg talks about this mainly in relation to the "hidden manna" of Revelation 2.17. However, he also quotes some of this section from John in which Jesus talks about himself as "the bread of life". Here is where he quotes John chapter 6:

'The "eating" of this here ["hidden manna"] signifies the delight of heavenly love, for this is appropriated by the Lord's Divine Human to those who receive Him in love and faith; also from the signification of the "hidden manna," as being the Lord in respect to His Divine Human. That this is "manna" is manifest from the Lord's own words in John: Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written, He gave them bread out of heaven to eat. The bread of God is He who cometh down out of heaven, and giveth life unto the world. I am the bread of life. Your fathers did eat the manna in the wilderness, and they are dead. This is the bread which cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. I am the living bread which came down out of heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever. The bread that I will give is My flesh (John 6:31-58).'

We shall come back to thinking about the Divine Human in more detail in some of the later sections. Let us finish this section with this short prayer:

*Lord, May we be able truly to open ourselves to your love, so that it can flow into us and give us life. Amen.*

9<sup>th</sup> July John 7.14-24

The challenges to the sense of “flow” suggested by people baulking at Jesus as the Divine Human come out even more strongly in the following chapter: verse 19 talks about people trying to kill Jesus and the following verse brings in the sense of Jesus being “demon-possessed” which subsequently becomes a recurring theme over the next few chapters.

We may not always associate “flow” with bodies of teaching such as we read in this chapter and the surrounding chapters. But Jesus says very clearly in verse 16 that the teaching comes through him but is not “his own”.

One way of thinking about the Divine Human is as a channel or, to make the image more physical, as a pipe. This idea of the teaching coming “from the one who sent me” points towards this. This also explains why part of the Apocalypse Explained reference we read previously talks about something *being appropriated by the Divine Human*.

We can think about a pipe in a number of ways from our experience: it provides a way of getting something from one place to another; it creates a narrow focus, but that focus can also seem to have a degree of constriction. There are passages in the gospels (especially in John’s gospel) where Jesus talks about himself and “the Father” as if they are completely separate. In these, Jesus is suggesting that he, as the Divine Human, can act like a channel. However, he is also able to identify himself as “one with the Father”. These particular references concentrate more on what is coming through rather than the channel itself.

If the balance becomes too much focused on the channel itself or for its own sake, something will be lost. Perhaps this is why, when Jesus is talking about circumcision (which suggests purification or, in Swedenborg’s terms, the process of regeneration or spiritual development), he reminds people that it was “from the patriarchs” that this came and not just from Moses, challenging them to expand their idea of this.

We can perhaps start to see how, even if we see ourselves as a potential channel for God or of higher things, we can find ourselves focusing more on ourselves and less on what is able to come through us. You may like to finish this section by meditating for a few minutes on this sense of a channel and what comes through it and how we can see Jesus referring to this in what he says.

16<sup>th</sup> July John 8.48-59 Arcana Caelestia 10579/2

In chapter 8, the frustration of those around Jesus seems to increase. Even those “who had believed him” struggle when he talks about setting them free (verses 32 & 33). They refer back to their religious tradition and the importance of Abraham. This comes back later in the chapter, when Jesus is talking about death (e.g. in verses 52 & 53).

Throughout the chapter Jesus refers to his Father and this seems to come to a head in these later verses. In some ways, this perhaps links back to what we were thinking about in relation to the previous chapter.

Here the emphasis is more on the unity of or connection between Father and Son. This is perhaps strongest in verse 58. This is what Swedenborg says about this verse in Arcana Coelestia 10579:

'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it, and was glad. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am (John 8:56, 58).  
From this it can be seen that the Lord as to the Divine Human is Jehovah who is seen, and thus that He is the "face of Jehovah."

"I am" seems to put the emphasis on a living relationship, as does Swedenborg's presentation of the Lord as "the face of Jehovah".

In some senses, it is very strange to think that we might do this, but I wonder how often we put our faith in "Abraham", something from the past to which we refer back, rather than a part of our faith which is living now, which we might think about as the eternal "I am".

We read in chapter 6 about manna, which has to be collected fresh every day (other than the Sabbath). Perhaps this chapter also, if in a different way, talks about our need to see how our faith can change and evolve. Intriguingly, this chapter is bookended by references to stoning – stones have a value in being solid and constant (and are thus able to be a "rock" or foundation) but they also have a limitation compared to something which can grow or move.

*Lord, we ask that we may give you the opportunity to help us to move forward and develop in our faith and that we may open ourselves up to you at those times in life when you open new doors for us. Amen.*

23<sup>rd</sup> July John 9.1-41

I have included the whole of this next chapter to read, although it is as long as the previous chapters. There are two reasons for doing this. One is that it all focuses on one particular episode and the other is that, when attention moves onto some of the religious leaders of the time towards the end of the chapter, this needs to be read in the context of what has come before.

Up to now, we haven't witnessed a direct criticism from Jesus towards this group, although there has been an opposition which has been simmering. Even here, we may not be dealing with out and out confrontation until the very end of the chapter.

One of the themes which emerges in this chapter is identity and indeed a certain amount of confusion around it. This comes out in various ways: the blind man is asked who healed him; others confirm or question whether the man who claims to have been healed is who he says he is; his parents are aware of Jesus' identity but also of the fact that there would be consequences were they to link him with "the Messiah"; the blind man questions how the Pharisees could not know where Jesus is "from" if they know he healed him.

It seems as if the tensions and undercurrents of the last few chapters have now well and truly come to the surface. If we return to the sense of the Divine Human with which we began, could this represent a tendency on our part to want to operate on a level which both fails to acknowledge what comes through from higher levels and resists living in a way which embodies this?

You may like to spend some time using this chapter to reflect on what this could mean for you.

### 30th July John 10.1-21

The early part of chapter 10 is a familiar story. On the surface it may have little to do with what we have been discussing. However, here the focus on flow comes out rather differently – in the sense of the sheepfold and the gateway within it.

There is also a strong link with the theme of identity when Jesus talks about the sheep “knowing his voice” (verse 4). Later in the chapter, this is contrasted with those who are not his sheep (verses 26 & 27).

As a closing prayer, you may like to use the following extract from Psalm 118. It combines both a reference to gates and stone, the latter used in a different way from that of stoning, an image which recurs in the second part of chapter 10.

- 19** Open to me the gates of righteousness;  
I shall enter through them, I shall give thanks to the LORD.
- 20** This is the gate of the LORD;  
The righteous will enter through it.
- 21** I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me,  
And You have become my salvation.
- 22** The stone which the builders rejected  
Has become the chief cornerstone.
- 23** This is the LORD'S doing;  
It is marvellous in our eyes.
- 24** This is the day which the LORD has made;  
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

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**Home Worship for August 2017      Experiencing God** prepared by the Rev Mary Duckworth

### **Sunday August 6      Experiencing God through Creation**

*See the flowers of the field, how they come up; they do no work, they make no thread: But I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. Matthew 6:28-9*

A lowly flower, yet adorned more beautifully than any of us could dress ourselves. How could we? God gives every flower its dress. Divinely clad, it expresses something of the Divine. Even King Solomon, renowned for all his riches and great wisdom, did not look as glorious as a common flower!

*Take a flower and look at it. [Or a leaf, twig or stone or whatever is at hand.] Sit calmly and quietly and gaze upon it. Just look. Still your thoughts and just be in the presence of the flower. Stay with*

*it. Don't try to make anything happen. Just allow things to be. Observe the flower. Stay as long as you wish like this just drinking it in.*

*When you have looked long enough, pick up a pencil and paper and just let the pencil write what it will. Don't think about it. Let it express what comes to it.*

We are surrounded by expressions of the Divine in nature, all revealing some aspect. The grandeur and majesty of mountains evoking awe and wonder at God's power and might. Refreshing rain cleansing our minds of polluting thoughts by each drop of truth. Rock and stone providing solid bases on which to stand and build our lives and make our homes. What firmer foundation than knowledge of God and his ways!

*'Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.' Matthew 7:24*

Trees express our whole way of life and growth in their cycle of seed, shoot, leaves, flower, fruit and seed again. Our life cycle and God's interaction with us is mirrored in this seasonal cycle of trees beginning with a seed of truth and culminating in fruition – goodness in our lives. The seasons reflect the warmth and light of God's love and truth and our closeness or distance as we move towards or away from God. Animals generally represent good affections. 'The Lion of the tribe of Judah' and 'the Lamb of God' are terms referring to divine power and innocence.

Streams provide water to drink and refresh us internally. God's water of life is imbibed by and sustains all creation. We can drink in this life from nature when in the countryside and gain a sense of refreshment and invigoration after a walk in the country, or by simply being there soaking up the divine presence in the life around. It calls forth the divine in us. A link is made strengthening our awareness that we are part of God's creation alongside the earth, plants and animals. This calls forth a respect for and honouring of creation alongside humankind.  
*Take a walk or sit in the countryside. Observe the life around you and sense your oneness with it.*

We can be beautiful too, as flowers are - not so much in how we dress, how we appear, as in how we also reveal the divine within: goodness, truth and beauty. The divine appears when we behave lovingly towards each other; when we do what is right and true even when this is against the opinion of those around us. [Jesus did many things counter to those around him.]  
*Let your beauty shine forth as your flower. It reveals its intrinsic nature, as will you.*

**Sunday August 13    Experiencing God through Others    Matthew 25:31-46**

*I was hungry and you gave me something to eat... Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.    Matthew 25:35, 40*

We are all God's children. He created us. He is our Father. We have a kinship with our fellow human beings. Yet how often do we sense it? With our friends certainly. The girl on the check-out? The person next to us on the bus? Everyone at church - or is there someone we'd rather keep away from? The beggar on the street? The foul-mouthed drunkard?

*Think of two or three people who have had an influence on your life, who were role models, whom you looked up to. What was it about them that you valued, honoured?  
Now think of those you dismiss from your mind, hardly even looking at them. What are you dismissing, not even willing to acknowledge? Might there be something of God in them that is*

worthy of recognition? Some spark of life waiting to be kindled? Can we look to broaden our breadth of vision and try to see as the Lord sees, responding as he calls us to respond?

*Read Matthew 25:31-46 and you will see that whenever we respond to someone in need, the Lord says we are responding to him. The following passage from Swedenborg's Arcana Coelestia gives further insight into its meaning:*

*AC 4958. The reason 'hungering' means being led by affection to desire good is that in the internal sense 'bread' means the good of love and charity, while food in general means good. The reason 'thirsting' means being led by affection to desire truth is that wine and also water mean the truth of faith. 'A stranger' means one who wishes to receive instruction; and one who is 'naked' means a person who acknowledges that no good or truth at all exists within him, one who is 'sick' a person who acknowledges that evil is present within him, and one who is 'bound' or 'in prison' a person who acknowledges that falsity is present, as is evident from many places in the Word where such names are used.*

*AC 4959. The reason the Lord speaks of all these things being done to Himself is that He is present in those kinds of people.*

It is the divine in each to which we need to respond: the good in a person in whatever form it might be, however overshadowed by self-interest. Can we find it in whomever the Lord draws to us? There will be those who nurture us, giving us spiritual food and drink; and those whom we [the Lord acting in us] can lead to freedom. It is a two-way process. If we were only givers, we would soon become depleted. If we were only receivers, what we received would waste away from lack of use. What we receive needs to be given again freely and this in turn feeds us. We can only store things for a certain length of time before they deteriorate. The Lord gives to us moment by moment every moment. He is there in every relationship, every human encounter. He is so close, Jesus calls people his brothers.

*AC 2360.7 All men everywhere, being the neighbour, are called brothers. They are called 'brothers' because everyone ought to love the neighbour as himself, so that they are called such from love or good. And because the Lord is Good itself and views everyone from good, and is Himself the Neighbour in the highest sense of all, He Himself refers to them as 'brothers', as in John, Jesus said to Mary, 'Go to My brothers.' John 20:17. And in Matthew, The king will answer them and say, 'Truly I say to you, insofar as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers you did it to Me.' Matt. 25:40.*

*From this it is now clear that 'brother' is a term expressive of love.*

*Prayer: Lord, help me to put aside my concerns, anxieties and fears, and to trust in your guidance and your way, that I might see with your eyes and respond with your love, compassion and mercy. To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul; in you I trust, O my God.*

*Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. Psalm 25:1-2 Amen*

**Sunday August 20 Experiencing God through the Way** John 14:1-14 Isaiah 43:1-11 Psalm 139  
*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.*  
*John 14:6-7*

People come to know God through their religion, worship and practices: Jews through the Old Testament and keeping the Law; Muslims through the Koran and prayer; Christians through the Bible and keeping the Commandments. We each come to experience God through our own religious practices. We choose our own path, which may be a combination from various ways.

Early in my life I realized that if I felt out of touch with God, I could soon feel connected by reading the Bible, just opening it and reading what my eyes lighted on. It was a relief to do this, to re-establish the relationship with my Maker, Father, Provider and Saviour: no longer alone - loved. Favourite passages are like coming home. They affirm who God is and assure relationship with him. 'Do not fear... you are mine,' from Isaiah, and 'O Lord, you have searched me and know me.' *Read Psalm 139 and Isaiah 43:1-11.* The Psalms express every kind of emotion, providing a wonderful source of prayer and praise, however we are feeling.

Remembered sentences from constant repetition in Sunday School are wonderful reminders at bedtime. I recite whatever comes to mind: 'O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth' [Psalm 8:1]; and 'Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.' [Ps.16:11]. They rise from my depths - a calming, soothing connection as I go to sleep. Daily reading of God's Word before rising in the morning gives me a sound foundation for the day. At times during the day I turn my heart fleetingly to the Lord as I need help or give thanks and praise for the friends he draws to me and his wonderful provision.

The Writings of Swedenborg, especially *Arcana Coelestia*, can deepen our understanding and appreciation of the Word of God. We can see how the Old Testament passages in their inner meaning reveal Jesus's spiritual development as a man upon earth. Similarly they describe how we might develop spiritually as we follow the Lord's way. He is the Way as he says in John [see above]. This does not mean that other religions and faiths are wrong. Many ways can lead us to truth and life. There are twelve gates into the Holy City [Revelation 21:12]. A different emphasis in another faith can open up a new area in our life not previously focused on. Hinduism opened up for me an appreciation of God's presence everywhere. It didn't make me a Hindu but broadened my concept. Involvement with other Christians opened up my prayer life. Learning to pray in silence enabled me to listen to God rather than thinking of prayer as talking to God. Ignatian prayer led me to a more imaginative relationship with the Lord such as imagining I was a biblical character encountering Jesus and spoke with and listened to him. 'Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.' [Matthew 6:8]

Once we have some idea of the Lord's way we can try to develop it through reading, prayer, meditation and worship, absorbing his words and letting his love sink into us. So it is that we need to reflect and examine ourselves, and become aware of how we are not following the Lord – not being as honest as we might, and not as kind and generous as opportunity affords. We can try to discover what is preventing us – what attitude or habit, rather than blaming circumstances or others. *Teach me your way, LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors. Psalm 27:11*

**Sunday August 27    Experiencing God directly    John 15:1-17                      John 14:15-21**

*'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.    John 15:5*

This is such a strong image of connection. It is so obvious that the branch depends on the tree and is supported by it. It cannot live once it is cut off. We are used to thinking of God as so different from ourselves and hence separate. He is infinite, eternal, all-knowing, all-powerful, love itself and wisdom itself. We are miniscule in comparison, finite receivers of life from Life itself. How can the finite know the infinite? At one level we can't. At another we can have an inkling. The Divine came on earth in the form of Jesus Christ, so we can know something of the divine nature from this revelation through him.

The image of the vine and its branches is one we can grasp. The closeness and dependency is obvious. Our life is directly from the Lord. It depends on being fruitful. A branch is no good if it bears no fruit; neither is our life, if we don't put it to good use, serving the Lord and others. Our branch will be cut off, severed from its source, of no further use. Put this way we see clearly how, put to good use, our life draws on its source and lives from it and is sustained by it. The Lord supplies all our needs for a fruitful life. He cannot sustain a useless one. He is the source of life. We have the freedom to choose to be filled with it, or to limit it to mere existence, or pervert it through destructive tendencies such as anger, hatred, resentment or abuse.

*Read the following visualization slowly, giving yourself time to imagine and feel. Sit comfortably and relaxed.*

*Imagine you are a branch on a bush or tree. Feel your strong connection to the trunk... how you stretch out to the air around... sometimes touching another branch... Feel the rain coming down... washing you... the warmth of the sun... making your buds swell and open into leaves... then other buds develop and open into flowers... Picture their petals... Smell their scent... Over time you watch the petals fall and fruit form and grow... Notice how their shape and colour changes... Some are pecked by birds... nibbled by insects... some fall... some are picked by the gardener... Sometime later the gardener approaches carrying pruners... How do you feel? He cuts off parts of your branch... How does this affect you? How do you feel towards him? Let him know...*

For a more personal image of our relationship with the Divine read *John 14:15-21*. Here we have a sense of the divine within us. *Doctrine of Life 102* explains this as follows:

The Lord loves man and wills to dwell with him, yet He cannot love him and dwell with him unless He is received and loved in return. From this alone comes conjunction. For this reason the Lord has given man freedom and reason, freedom to think and will as of himself, and reason in accordance with which he may do so. To love and to be conjoined with one in whom there is nothing reciprocal is not possible, nor is it possible to enter in and abide with one in whom there is no reception. As there are in man, from the Lord, reception and reciprocation, the Lord says:

Abide in Me, and I in you ([John 15:4](#)).

He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit ([John 15:5](#)).

At that day ye shall know that ye are in Me, and I in you ([John 14:20](#)).

The Lord also teaches that He is in the truths and in the goods that a man receives, and that are in him: If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you... If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love ([John 15:7, 10](#)).

He that hath My commandments, and doeth them, he it is that loveth Me and I will love him, and will make My abode with him ([John 14:21, 23](#)). So that the Lord dwells in a man in what is His own, and the man dwells in those things which are from the Lord, and thus dwells in the Lord.

*Meditate on these words letting them seep into you. Take them into your heart and feel Him there.*

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## **Home Worship Services for September 2017** **Prepared by Gwen Hardy**

### **September 3rd Creativity**

Please read Genesis chapter 1

The account in Gen.ch1 is not about the creation of the natural world, but a wonderful symbolic outline of the progress of a person's natural and spiritual development. What follows is a very brief outline of those six days and my understanding of its spiritual meaning.

Day one is about light and darkness, we are born with no knowledge of the Lord and heaven, we are in darkness, but God says "Let there light be". Light is able to enter our minds when we start to learn about and acknowledge the existence of God.

You will notice that each stage of creation moves from evening to morning.... from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge.

On day two the waters are divided and sky is formed. Water is a symbol of truth and at this stage we start to become aware of our spiritual potential, we begin to separate those things that are worldly or external from those which concern the Lord and heaven.

Day three is a further sorting out process, waters are gathered together forming seas, and land appears, then vegetation appears and starts to grow. When we realise that all truth comes from God it can take root in our mind, producing useful actions represented by seed bearing plants and trees.

On day four the sun moon and stars are created. The sun is the Lord shining in our states of clear understanding, and the moon our faith when things are dark, the stars are the truths we have learned that help to direct us until the dawn.

On day five the seas come alive with fish. The sea of truths stored in our memory starts to come alive with ideas and how to put them into action, and the birds of the air picture our thoughts lifted to higher levels. All these ideas and thoughts come alive and multiply.

Now we have reached day six when animals are created. Fish and birds relate to things of the mind whereas animals picture things of the heart, our desires. When we truly desire to serve the Lord and our neighbour our faith and love are working together like a marriage, a beautiful joining of love and wisdom working in the service of the Lord. This is the culmination of God's work, the creation of man, and he blesses that union giving us control and feeding our true and loving intentions.

This pattern set out in Genesis is a pattern for our creative efforts.....first darkness, then light dawns, "Ah an idea!" followed by many thoughts and then a real desire to act them out in some way.

At present I am reading a book described as 'A course in discovering your creative self', and here are some of the basic principles.....

We are, ourselves, creations, and we are meant to continue creativity by being creative ourselves. Creativity is God's gift to us. Using our creativity is our gift back to God.

When we open ourselves to exploring our creativity, we open ourselves to God.

We may not feel we are very creative in an artistic way, but we are using the Lord's power all the time, from the moment we wake in the morning we are making choices as to how to live that day, what to do, how to react to our circumstances and our fellow human beings. We have choice how to use our talents, whether to develop them or not, or whether to branch out in a new direction.

I feel in a way it is like painting a picture, the picture of our life.

When creating a piece of art the early stages can be the most difficult, where do I begin? What colours etc. and it can also be the same for us, developing ideas and making decisions. There is a great deal in the writings of the church about influx, how the Lord flows into us when we are open to him. In Arcana 1712 it says:- **Man ought not to await influx. He ought still to think, will and act as of himself, and yet ascribe to the Lord every thought of truth and endeavour of good.**

So let us aim to be more creative, for with the Lord there are unknown possibilities.

In that first chapter of the bible there is one phrase that keeps repeating:- '**And God saw that it was good**' May this also be his response to our creative efforts.

**Prayer** Dear Lord may we be fully alive in mind and spirit, confident that you have creative work for us to do, and may we fulfil that work to the best of our ability and offer it back as our gift to you . Amen

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### September 10<sup>th</sup> Work

Work is a theme that runs right through the bible starting with God's work of creation and Adam working in the Garden of Eden, and going right through to Revelation which talks of resting from labours.

Work is a necessary part of life, if no one worked everything would grind to a halt. Our daily life depends on many people working for our benefit, right from those who maintain law and order

through to those who provide our food, and energy, so often we take these services for granted! May we be ever grateful to those who provide these services.

**Please read Luke ch 10 v38-41**

I am sure we are familiar with that account of Martha and Mary, and can identify with Martha, here were guests waiting to be fed and there's Mary just sitting and listening to Jesus. I know I have been guilty of Martha's attitude while entertaining. Also while preparing this piece that same attitude was evident, I had many thoughts and ideas but they were all jumbled up not in any order and the dead line was approaching. When we get in this kind of situation it is tempting to say "Oh what's the use?"

But that is just what we do need to ask ourselves, what is the use? what is my purpose?

Emanuel Swedenborg has a lot to say on the subject of use.

**To live for others is to perform uses. Uses are the bonds of society..... and uses are infinite in number. There are spiritual uses, which pertain to love to God and love to the neighbour; there are moral and civil uses, which pertain to love of the society in which a person resides and his fellow citizens.....; there are natural uses which pertain to love of the world and its necessities; and there are uses of the body, which pertain to the love of its preservation for the sake of the higher uses. CL 18**

**Please read Matthew ch25 v14-29**

The talents in this story represent our abilities. We all have different talents and for me the key words in that passage are "**He gave each according to his ability**". The Lord never asks too much of us, we can't all be prime minister or heart surgeons, all he wants is for us to willingly do what lies before us each day. Martha's sister Mary sat at the Lord's feet. Whenever we hear of feet in the Word it is saying something about everyday life, the feet being closest to the earth. If we bring the Lord into our everyday life his love can inspire us and those mundane jobs can take on new meaning and purpose.

**Heavenly joy is the delight of doing something which is of use to oneself and to others; and the delight of use derives its essence from love, and its existence from wisdom. The delight of use springing from love by means of wisdom is the soul and life of all heavenly joys. CL 5**

This is a wonderful thing, the fact that we can enjoy heavenly delight when we are serving a use, we don't have to wait until we die to experience a bit of heaven.

**Any one who has love within him is not content just with knowing, but with doing what is good and true, that is engaging in a use. AC 503**

I believe the Lord has work for us throughout the whole of life. Even a baby has to cry to be fed, a tiny innocent baby also influences us and draws out feelings of love and protection. What of old age? Many feel disheartened when they can no longer work, but now their work is of a more subtle nature, their work now is more about the atmosphere they create, one of acceptance and humility when they face difficulties, and patience and gratitude for help received, and also of sharing their wisdom and experience. If we did but know it the elderly could be working the hardest of all!

Let us remember that our attitudes and loves affect those around us, and we can serve the Lord at this deeper level, which may have a more far-reaching effect than we may ever know.

**Prayer** Dear Lord we pray that our work may be motivated by love to you and our neighbour. Amen.

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**September 17th Hope**

**Now abideth faith hope and love but the greatest of these is love. 1Corinthians 13v13**

The dictionary defines hope as- an expectant desire or to look forward to with trust – it's an attitude, and our life is defined by the attitudes we hold.

It's interesting to note that there are many references to hope in the Old Testament but none in the gospels, but this is not so surprising since the Old Testament is a picture of life's falling away from

grace and its longing and hope for a saviour. The gospels however are a record of Jesus' life as 'God with us', he was a fulfilment of that hope. The word appears again in the epistles. After Jesus left this earth there was the hope of his physical return, but in the New Church we think of the Lord's coming in a more spiritual way, a longing for the Lord's loving guiding comforting presence in our hearts and minds.

### **Reading Psalm 42**

The psalmist is in great need. We all have problems to face and we may feel hopeless at times and the Lord may be far from our thoughts as we grapple with the details, but it is then that we need to go within and put our hope in God. Twice the psalmist addresses his own soul and says "Put your hope in God" and at times we should take ourselves in hand as it were and talk to ourselves in the same way.

### **Readings Isaiah 40 v12-14 and 21-22 and 25-31**

The prophet's role was to convey God's words to the people and encourage them to put their hope in him. Those passages in Isaiah give a real sense of God's almighty power which is what we need to be reminded of in our need. That last verse in some translations says "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength", this idea of 'waiting on the Lord' seems to bring the Lord into the present situation, like a servant waits on his master for instructions.

We can't always maintain a sense of trust, and feelings of hopelessness do come over us at times. This is portrayed in the bible when the Israelites were in exile in Babylon for seventy years. Psalm 137 starts "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept" and goes on "How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign place". The prophet Jeremiah sent a letter to them encouraging them to make peace with their situation.

### **Reading Jer. 29 v1 then v 4-15**

It seems to me this passage is encouraging us to accept the situation we are in. The Israelites were away from their homeland for seventy years, numbers in the bible are significant and seven and multiples of seven signify something that is holy, so maybe this waiting can be a useful time for us, we should make peace with it and trust that the Lord has plans for us to give us a hope and a future. Although the gospels do not appear to have the word hope in them, there are many encouraging passages. The wise men from the east had hope as they followed the star, the old man Simeon had been promised that he would not see death until he had seen the saviour of the Jews, he had hope, and most importantly Jesus gives his disciples hope.

### **Reading John 14 v1-3**

These words are often read in funeral services to give hope and comfort to the bereaved, but we can also take these words for ourselves to use in our daily lives. I believe the Lord has a place of peace prepared and ready for us even now deep in our hearts and minds.

### **Reading John 14 v15-21**

We are getting back to that word love, "**Now abideth faith hope and love but the greatest of these is love**" It seems these words hang together and perhaps should not be taken in isolation. If we put our faith and hope in the Lord and love him, then we can trust that our hopes will be satisfied in whatever way he sees best.

**Prayer** Dear Lord we thank you for your promises to us. May we always look to you in our need and put our hope and trust in you. Amen.

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### **September 24<sup>th</sup> Peace**

There are many references to peace in the bible, early on in the book of Numbers we have that familiar blessing "**The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace**". That says it all, when we are under the shadow of God's blessing we shall have peace.

In the Old Testament the promised Messiah is called 'the Prince of peace', in the Psalm 34 v14 we are urged to 'seek peace and pursue it', and in Psalm 37v3 to 'enjoy' it, and in the New Testament to 'walk in it' Luke 1 v 79, and in the beatitudes to 'make peace' - "Blessed are the peace makers".

Generally peace is understood to be a state where there is no war. Sadly taking an overall look at our world there is war of some kind going on all the time, arguments over territory, and resistance to dominant rulers, in our own country there are disputes as to how our country should be run.

All this is a picture of what goes on in the human mind.

Are you at peace? You may say 'yes I'm at peace', but I'm sure we can all think of things we wish were different, our health or that of a loved one, we may have a disagreement with someone, people get on our nerves, noisy neighbours, loud music, the weather, all the nitty gritty of life, and on a more serious level our minds may be pulled this way and that when our desires do not fit with our principles.

These temptation states are a part of life, Jesus said "**In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world**" John 16 v33.

I'm reminded of the account when Jesus stilled the storm, the wind and waves were tossing the boat and when the disciples woke Jesus he immediately stood up and said "**Peace be still**" and there was a great calm. When things get 'choppy' for us we need to 'wake up' the Lord, as it were, and recall the truths we know that can bring peace to the situation. To help us do this it's good to get away from it all to get a wider perspective on life, Jesus from time to time would withdraw from the crowds. For us it may be a walk in the woods, or a park or just to go into the garden to find some beauty and space, these can all help us to get in touch with God again, and find some inner peace.

To me peace is far more than the absence of war. Jesus was the embodiment of peace, the **Prince of Peace**, so it follows that it must be a living and positive thing. When he was preparing his disciples for his departure Jesus reassured them saying "**Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid**" John ch14 v27

Philippians ch 4 v5-7 touches on this idea of a deeper peace, something that is more than just an understanding in the mind, it touches the heart.

**The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.**

Finally let us go back to that blessing we started with. There are three steps to this blessing:-

**The Lord bless you and keep you**

The Lord wants to bless us all the time but to receive it we need to be open and desire it.

**The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.**

The face tells us so much about a person, it is mainly how we recognize each other, and we are told that in the heavens the face immediately shows the true person, what their state is.

The Lord's face shining represents to me a realisation of the truth, like the light coming on, as if the Lord is showing us a clear way ahead, his truth shining, lighting the way.

**The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.**

This talks of the Lord's expression. When we meet a dear friend we smile, our face is lifted up, we feel the love, so this pictures for me the recognition of the Lord as a very dear and loving influence in our lives.

**Prayer** Dear Lord may we be open to receive the blessing of your peace to give us light and joy in our lives. Amen

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