

Home Worship November 2017 - Alan Misson

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Sunday November 5th 2017 Here I am

*And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "**Here am I.**" Then he said, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. **Genesis 46:2,3***

*And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "**Here I am.**" **Exodus 3:3,4***

*Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "**Here I am,** for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the young man. **1 Samuel 3:7,8***

*And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "**Here I am! Send me.**" **Isaiah 6:8***

There are many places in the Bible where we can read the words "*Here I am*" uttered in very different situations by very different people as a response to God's calling them.

We have Jacob about to leave for Egypt with all his family as his name changes to Israel; Moses standing in front of the burning bush; Samuel waiting patiently to hear the voice of the Lord as instructed by the priest Eli; and Isaiah witnessing a life changing vision. In all cases there is a marked change in the life of the person who responds "*Here I am*". But we can also see in these stories something of our own responses to the Lord's calling.

Our readings give the impression of the Lord calling us through some external event in our lives that is 'out there' but the spiritual reality is that the Lord calls each one of us from deep within, from his presence as the life and love at the core of our being. It is to this inner calling that our whole being right through to the most external aspect of us needs to respond with "***Here I am. Send me***"

This is the same quiet inner calling that Elijah experienced when he found the Lord speaking not in the *wind*, or an *earthquake*, or *fire*, but in a *still small voice*. We are all very different people and the Lord speaks to us and calls us in ways adapted to our own needs and circumstances. We might imagine that only some people such as ministers and priests have a calling from the Lord but we would be mistaken. We are all called by the Lord to fulfil the very particular and personal mission each one of us has that ultimately can lead us to the special place he is preparing for us.

In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, help me to continue to listen to your still small voice calling me to serve you. And, whatever my circumstance, help me to answer 'Here I am. Send me'. Help me to

realise that serving you doesn't need any great activity on my part – after all I can serve you by being ready to listen caringly to someone else expressing their worries or concerns. And, if I am the one being cared for, I can receive that care with a happy and smiling face. Lord thank you for calling me to serve you. Thank you also for giving me the courage, strength and confidence to respond - 'Here I am. Send me'

Sunday November 12th 2017 Remembrance Sunday

For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
Isaiah 55:12

On Remembrance Sunday we traditionally take time to reflect on those who made the ultimate sacrifice in the two world wars of the last century. And yet we all know that wars have continued around the world to this day. Just consider this country - 36,000 British service men and women have died as a result of conflicts since the 2nd World War and they are continuing to die. Is there to be no lasting real peace? Jesus tells us:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. **John 14:27**

Jesus is making a contrast between the peace that we are familiar with as a result of not being directly involved in a war for the last 70 years and true peace that only he can give. It is perhaps a very common view that peace is something we seek to bring to a country first and then hope that out of that overall peace, communities and families and ultimately individuals will themselves find peace. But is this the best way? The Chinese philosopher Confucius said:

First there must be order and harmony within your own mind. Then this order will spread to your family, then to the community, and finally to your entire kingdom. Only then can you have peace and harmony.

Confucius is making the point that peace needs to start with us and surely this is what Jesus is also saying. He is offering us his peace which transcends any form of peace the world can give. But what is this peace?

Think of those times when you truly felt truly at peace and you will know what peace it is that Jesus gives. It is the peace that comes when our hearts and our minds are at one – when there is no conflict between what we feel and what we think – when, for example, we desire to do good for others and know it is the right thing to do. Emanuel Swedenborg describes this coming together of hearts and minds or will and understanding as the “marriage of goodness and truth”. And this can only arise as we open our hearts and minds to the Lord and come close to him. It is then that we are able to receive the peace that only he can give.

Here is a quotation from **Heaven and Hell 290**:

Peace actually flows in from the Lord into the very core of individuals, who are focussed on heavenly good, and from that core comes down and spreads into their lower natures, causing peace of mind, relief of the spirit, and a consequent joy.

This is surely the same peace that the Psalmist had in mind when he wrote:

Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, as I look around our world I cannot fail to see so many people who face conflict – whose lives are disrupted, shattered and destroyed by the affects of war and other atrocities in all their terrible forms. I pray Lord for your peace to enter our world more fully so that people of all nationalities, races and religions may live in harmony rather than in conflict. But I am also aware Lord that inner conflict exists in the lives of many people and perhaps in someone known to me – the inner conflict that arises from anxiety, doubt, lack of self-confidence or the damage caused by bad life experiences.

If I am able Lord, help me to try and ease the burden of anyone I know who suffers such inner torments and conflicts and help bring them the peace that you alone can truly give.

Sunday November 19th 2017 Like trees walking

*And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had spat on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Do you see anything?" And he looked up and said, "I see men, but they look like trees, walking." Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. **Mark 8:22-25***

The healing of a blind man at Bethsaida is one miracle that only Mark records and there is no trace of it elsewhere. But perhaps the most important difference about this miracle of healing is that Jesus appears to take two attempts to fully heal the man. This suggests that there is something unusual about the miracle being performed and more importantly about its meaning for us.

As with many miracles there are other people involved in this story whose faith in Jesus is sufficient to encourage them to bring a blind man to Jesus and to beg him to touch him. Note that their request is that Jesus should just touch the man – they fully expected this would cause him to be healed. Whilst this is a miracle of healing of a man who is blind it is really a description of how we can be healed when we are in the spiritual state of not being able to see or understand the truth about how our lives should really be lived.

Physical blindness is a terrible affliction which none of us can really understand unless we suffer from it or have experienced some temporary problem with our sight. But spiritual blindness is a far more common experience because we all suffer from it – we are all at times 'blind' to the truth and fail to see and understand those things that could transform our inner lives. And one of the reasons we fail to see and understand is that we are stuck in a way of living that prevents us from seeing things differently. In such a situation we need to be led away from our current way of living before we can be healed, just as Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village.

In the story the blind man recovers some of his sight, sufficient to see people as trees walking. It is an incredible transformation but it is not complete, things still seem rather vague and obscure.

This miracle of healing is really about the way we can be spiritually healed and move from being 'blind' to the truth through to loving the truth for what it can achieve in our lives for others. This change takes place in two stages. The first is represented by the man's initial healing after which he sees people as trees walking, because walking in the Word always relates to life as it is lived. If we walk in the Lord's way we are living according to his teachings. With the Lord's help we can begin the first phase process of spiritual growth. It is

however a very limited way of living – it is only a dim and obscure vision of the truth. There has to be a second phase in our spiritual development.

Jesus lays his hands on the man's eyes again and the man sees everything clearly. This second phase is about love. Whereas the first phase involves simple obedience to the truth this second phase of our spiritual enlightenment involves love – a recognition that life is not to be lived from knowledge of truth alone but from the love of what that truth can do in our lives. This is true enlightenment – and we will then clearly see.

Prayer

Lord there are times when I need your healing presence in my life, not only when I am physically ill but also when inner and deeper problems beset me – when I am filled with:

anxiety, doubt, darkness and depression, concern for the future, helplessness, loss of control over life.

Help me Lord when I face such inner problems to place my trust in you, to hold firmly onto your hand and to let you lead me to a better place – to a state where I can be healed by ever greater confidence and trust in your eternal providence.

Sunday November 26th 2017 Internal Worship

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. John 4:24

If possible please read John 4:1-30.

The account in John's gospel of Jesus at the well talking with the woman of Samaria provides a profound insight into Jesus as the source of living water – a spring of water welling up to eternal life. As with the parable of the Good Samaritan, part of the story hinges on the gulf that existed between Jews and Samaritans. But my concentration is not on living water nor on the Jew/Samaritan divide but on the words that Jesus speaks near the end of this account - *God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth*. Here we have a considerable emphasis on the need to worship God in spirit and in truth.

These words of Jesus involve the Greek word *pneuma*. It is the word we know well in pneumonia, a disease of the lungs, and pneumatic which is used in relation to vehicle tyres. So it is not difficult to see that the word involves air and breathing and can mean the movement of air or the wind or the breath of nostrils or mouth as well as the traditional meaning of spirit. But when we talk about God's spirit and the Holy Spirit and also about our own spirit what are we referring to?

Are we not talking about what animates, fills, influences and gives life both to God and also ourselves? So perhaps we should describe *pneuma* as the living, breathing essence of God and also as what God gives to us. Genesis 2:7 describes it this way:

... then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

It is in this spirit, a living breathing essence, that we must worship God.

Emanuel Swedenborg describes worship as being either external or internal. External worship is what we take part in at church or in a small group or perhaps on our own. Internal worship, which can also be described as true or real worship, springs from love and exhibits

itself in outer actions of caring for others and faithful living. It is exactly what the prophet Micah reminds us of when he says:

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8

How we lead our daily lives reflects the living breathing essence within us and if this spirit within us is guided by the truth then we will do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God. We will worship him in spirit and in truth. In Arcana Caelestia 7038, Swedenborg writes:

Useful deeds are the principal ways of exercising charity and the principal means of worshipping the Lord. Going to church regularly, listening to sermons, and saying one's prayers are also necessary; but without the useful deeds they have no value at all, for they do not constitute a person's life but teach what that life ought to be like.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, when I am weary, give me your strength. When I am weak, give me your power.

When I stumble and fall, steady me. When I am low, lift me up. When I concentrate too much on myself help me to see those around me who need my care and attention.

Lord, help me to worship you in spirit and in truth by always doing my best to put the needs of others before my own needs. Help me to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with you all the days of my life.