

Home Worship for June 2018 by the Rev Christine Bank

Sunday 3rd June

Change must go on

Read Genesis 2: 15-17

Think of your favourite piece of music, it may be an enduring tune that means something significant in your life or it could be the latest and most recent 'favourite' in a long line of enjoyment which will soon be displaced by something else.

The latest music is always evolving and changing – the sounds I enjoyed in my teens can easily remind me of those years but I can't claim it all sounds as exciting when I listen to it now. It was very much what was around at the time and each new generation finds its own expression or voice which can often seem designed to annoy or even challenge the previously accepted boundaries.

Spiritually there are always challenges, and while life evolves and discoveries change the way the world functions, there are some timeless values and desires we still recognise from the earliest parts of the Bible. They are still uncomfortable challenges for us too.

Genesis 2: 16-17:

And the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.'

The newly formed 'celestial man' in this part of the Bible is told to rely on the Lord, with the trees in the garden being the perceptions explained in **AC 80**: *He is also permitted to acquire a knowledge of what is good and true by means of every perception from the Lord, but he must not do so from himself and the world, nor search into the mysteries of faith by means of the things of sense and of memory-knowledge which would cause the death of his celestial nature.*

Human nature has of course meant we live with the consequences of eating that forbidden fruit and the celestial state mentioned here is lost. Human life clearly goes on and changes, evolves and develops and the Bible leads us into new ways of discovering the Lord's presence with us and His love for us. Trying to 'go back' in our life and undo previous actions is often tempting, but impossible. The world keeps going forward, be it music or any other arena we care to reflect on. We find our own ways and live accordingly. All around us others are finding and developing their own understanding which may be harmonious with or discordant to our way of life. Finding how to adapt to new ways is a constant challenge in life; the Lord knows our nature and provides for it all under His Divine care and mercy.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, as we work to live our daily life may we listen closely for your guidance and recognise that change and development take many forms. You can use it all to further the growth of a heaven of angels from the human race, help us to trust your Providence at all times and be faithful in following the things we know and continue to discover from Your Word. Amen.

Sunday 10th June

Choose wisely

Read Genesis 3: 1-24

The passing of time is a tricky thing to deal with as our memory allows events, or memories of them, to fade or be revisited in ways we can't always control. The way a piece of music, scent or a touch can instantly take us back to a place or time, from perhaps many years before, is something science does not fully explain. Yet it is a real experience for many people and can have powerful force and impact when it happens.

Swedenborg confirms that absolutely everything is retained in our memory somewhere; the Lord doesn't allow any part of us to be lost and therefore the idea it can be rediscovered fits very well with our experience. It also helps with the idea of there being a benefit in reflecting on and reviewing our life, if we are honest with ourselves and are willing to truly learn lessons from our actions, including the mistakes.

The decisions we made, the (sometimes flawed) logic we applied, the enthusiasms which inspired us are all there to be checked off and reassessed when the process of self-assessment takes place. The Lord knows human nature and even as early as Genesis 2 it is there. Hiding in the garden the man blames the woman, the woman blames the serpent. It is always 'someone else's fault'; and so it goes on with the history and prophecy of Old Testament writers highlighting problems and the conflicts, which provide a mirror into our own internal battles and conflicts, as well as a sense of the Lord's presence in the midst of it all.

Our journey through life is to enable us to freely choose to become angelic and to reject the hellish choices we are surrounded by. The Lord uses many ways to prompt us, to awaken conscience and challenge us. Yet at no time does he remove our own free will and eventually we enter the next life as spirits when our true inner natures can be revealed. Accepting our mistakes and then recognising the need to change is the beginning of each individual and ongoing act of repentance that leads on to our spiritual regeneration and development.

HH 422 *A state of heaven for us is the union of what is good and true within us, and a state of hell is a union of what is evil and false within us. When the good in a spirit-person is united to the true, that individual arrives in heaven, because that union is heaven within us. On the other hand, when the evil is united to the false within us, then we arrive in hell, because that union is hell within us.*

Prayer. Lord Jesus, keep us mindful that although the kingdom of heaven is within us the hells are found there too. Enable us to choose wisely and reject the things we know to be wrong in thought or action. Sustain us in difficult and challenging times and give us courage to reflect deeply on the life we are leading, to accept the mistakes we make, and to honestly acknowledge our failings and do what we can to follow You more closely. Amen.

Read Daniel 7: 13-14; Revelation 11: 15-19

After the completion of this book, the Lord called together His twelve disciples, who had followed Him in the world; and a day later he sent them all forth throughout the spiritual world to preach the Gospel, that the Lord Jesus Christ is king, and His kingdom shall be for ever and ever, as foretold by Daniel (7:13-14) and in Revelation (11:15).

Blessed are they who come to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Rev 19:9

This happened on the nineteenth of June in the year 1770. This was meant by the Lord's saying: And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Matthew 24:31

This is paragraph 791 at the end of True Christian Religion and 19th June is known as New Church Day. Some of our New Church denominations and congregations mark or celebrate this day with a degree of formality; others hardly recognise it in their worship life. Whatever level of recognition we accord this date the things written here give us a very clear sense of the Lord setting something in motion and we can place it in our calendar.

That the spiritual world is being brought into an order and a pattern not seen before is quite a claim; yet it is part of the things that set New Church teachings in a different place. Around this period in history it is possible to see changes in the way the world was understood and advances were made in many fields. Trying to link that to a spiritual change as reported above is perhaps a leap too far for many – and it is a tricky area to use to start a conversation or introduce a newcomer to Swedenborg's ideas.

Holding the idea that it is spiritual rather than worldly things that are 'real' is perhaps an easier concept to look at. Recognising that we will remain locked in a mind-set which relies entirely on this world, unless we allow changes to our own spiritual understanding and way of thinking to take place, is setting us on a road to search for deeper and more profound messages.

The Lord is continuing to reach into this world, this reordering and opening up of what is spiritual to enable us on earth to have new insights and better understanding. To be part of that spiritual process and progress is something that is offered to each of us, if we will allow it in our life.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to recognise again the gift of life and the opportunity for understanding and wisdom to grow in us. The love that is truly heavenly can be better expressed in our daily life. As our spirits are nourished these things grow and become more deeply established within us. You set before us all these gifts yet never compel us to accept them. Enable us to see that the best use of our freedom is to seek to follow You and read or listen again to Your Word. Amen.

Read Matthew 6: 25-34; Luke 12: 22-34; Exodus 16: 13-21

Thinking about the day we have in front of us, and not getting too fussy about things that have already passed us by and can't be changed, or anticipating the possibilities for the future is quite a skill. A bit of organisation and planning can help us structure and shape things, but the tendency to worry, to let ideas rattle around inside our thoughts isn't easy to clear out.

Young children seem to move from joy to temper and back to harmony again in a moment, as their interest shifts quickly and their attention span is limited. If only we could be so 'in the moment' with other aspects of our own life. So much time and effort goes into anticipating something, maybe words like dreading or fearing may be closer to how our nervous tension can build up. Yet in the midst of it all we are told very explicitly by the Lord himself not to worry. **Matthew 6: 25-34** and **Luke 12:22-34** both remind us of the lilies of the field and how splendidly they are clothed and in **Exodus 16**, particularly in v19-20, the people are told not to hoard manna from one day to the next as it is given under the Lord's provision for their daily needs.

The inner sense of the Word goes deeper still. Sensible and appropriate forward planning or structured anticipation of the possibilities can be both realistic and helpful to us having some order in life. But spiritually speaking there is more than the day to day organisation of life involved.

AC8478.2 *People are concerned about the morrow when they are not content with their lot, do not trust in God but in themselves, and have only worldly things in view, not heavenly ones. These people are ruled completely by anxiety over the future, and by the desire to possess all things and exercise control over all other people. That desire is kindled and grows greater and greater, till at length it is beyond all measure. They grieve if they do not realise the objects of their desires, and they are distressed at the loss of them. Nor can they find consolation, for in times of loss they are angry with the Divine. They reject Him together with all belief and curse themselves. This is what those concerned for the morrow are like.*

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, you know the way our minds like to feel the sense of control over the things we intend to happen and plan for. Help us to step back enough to accept our plans may need to change, and events that happen under your Providence will eventually lead us into the heaven you have created us to live in. Keep us mindful of Your care while we seek Your guidance to live our lives in the ways that seem best at the time, and within the light of circumstances we can understand or appreciate. As our trust and wisdom increase, may we learn to see the things of daily life in new and more heavenly ways. Amen.