

Dear receiver of Home Worship material

You will probably have noticed that there is more material than usual for January 2019, those receiving the quarterly package of material will find February and March are the normal number of pages.

This is due to a communication mix up on the amount of material which was anticipated, and having been gifted this amount of work it seemed appropriate to make use of it as intended and at the same time to reaffirm the normal guidelines for the quantity of material will remain unchanged in the future.

Happy New Year from the Home Worship team.

Home Worship

January 13th 2019

by Stephen Thomas

Season of Epiphany

Please read John Chapter 1 verses 1-14 True Light coming into the World

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the Light of the World. You are the light that moment by moment shines within the darkest corners of our minds. Help us to be truly enlightened and to see your light shine within our understanding and then follow your truth along our personal journey to salvation. Lord Jesus Christ, intensify your heavenly light within each one of us so that we may come to discover the true nature of what your truth is asking of us, and so be guided in our actions. Amen

Please read Matthew Chapter 2 verses 1-12 The Visit of the Magi

All our life is a journey. We are constantly searching and looking. Our life needs to be imaged in the picture of the wise men. If we truly desire to lead good and useful lives by following our Lord's commands and teaching, then the truth that we seek in the Word of God will become a guiding light or beacon that will lead us to the Lord. And then when we find him we can begin to truly worship and serve him by offering him our gifts of the gold of love, together with our frankincense of faith through which we can then love our fellows with the myrrh of usefulness and compassion.

THE WISE MEN

When we read the story of the wise men we are reading about the determined efforts that we all make to find the Lord in our lives. We are reading about our efforts to follow a star, to enter his house, to see him there, to fall down and worship him, and to present him with spiritual gifts. Another way to say this is that when we read the story of the wise men, and by wise I do not mean cleverness for its own sake, but wise states of mind and life – states that we all experience as we seek the Lord by putting truth to work in the ways that we think and live. In a broader perspective we are reading about all people the world over who sincerely try to apply the truth to life.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem Herod was king. When the Lord is first born in us as love and compassion, false thinking and selfish habits inspired by hell threaten us spiritually as people. But despite Herod's presence, for many of us the Lord has made His coming. We've begun to make progress towards better ways of thinking and better ways of living. Jesus has been born in Bethlehem – in a growing life of faith in his Word – and his birth bring to us a ray of hope, which enlightens our mind and touches our hearts with the spirit of Christmas.

The wise men that came to worship the Lord came from the East. The fact that they came from the East is crucial to our understanding of the story. In the symbolism of the story the "East" means the Lord and his love. The "East" symbolises all the love that the Lord has planted in our hearts since the day we were born. A love of our parents – our friends – a love for knowledge for example, especially knowledge from the Word of God. It is that love that first moves us to seek the Lord with the intent to worship Him. But if we *are* going to live wisely we need more than the foundation of love. We also need knowledge. Love cannot come forward without knowledge to guide it. In the Word of God truth is the way that love can express itself in useful loving actions. As

well as love, the “East” symbolises all the knowledge that we have learned and which the Lord has stored away in our minds since we were first born.

As we grow the Lord plants day by day these seeds of love in our hearts and when the time is ready for Him to be born in our lives his star appears. One simple truth that we have known all of our lives – one that we have just read from his Word or heard from a friend – will appear miraculously as a guiding beacon. This truth then shines within us. It will have a meaning for us and we shall see how the truth can draw us closer to the Lord. We shall feel a longing to follow that star which will lead us to the Lord in Bethlehem.

After the wise men see the star in the East they make their way to Jerusalem. They announce their intentions, “Where is he who has been born King of the Jews?” – “For we have seen his star when it rose, and have come to worship him”. The wise men’s intentions caused a stir in Jerusalem. Herod the king was troubled and all Jerusalem with him.

Each time we try to follow a star and each time we draw closer to the Lord then our selfishness will stir up within us. Our selfishness hates the presence of the Lord. All of our selfish thoughts and desires will stir up within us to try to resist.

Herod called the wise men to a secret meeting. He asked the wise men to tell him what time the star would appear. Then he tried to trick them into telling him where the Christ was once they had found him. “When you have found him bring me word that I too may come and worship Him.” A LIE!

Our selfishness does not want to worship the Lord but instead to kill him within our hearts and minds! It will tempt us into a betrayal! In our presence with others we can put on a front and it will provide an acceptable face for our selfishness to hide behind.

On our journey through life to seek the Lord our selfishness will try to win us over. It wants us to betray the Lord in how we live out our lives and in our attitudes. Trying to twist the Lord’s commands and teaching into ways of false, negative and destructive thought and action. It will even try to make us forget about the truth altogether! Our selfishness may not be able for example to stop us going to church, but it will still try to stop us from enjoying it! YES! KING HEROD CALLS TO US ALL VERY SECRETLY! Our vision can become blurred when we completely lose sight of the Lord we are supposed to be following. When the wise men entered Jerusalem, the star was not shining. A message for us that from time to time our minds are darkened to our new vision of truth.

BUT – the wise men left Jerusalem and when they did, the star appeared a second time to lead them all to Bethlehem. We act wisely when we keep our life on course to find the Lord. Remember that our selfishness is always there waiting in Jerusalem and hoping that we will eventually betray our Lord. But that never stops the Lord’s star from shining. In our personal efforts to stay on course the Lord’s star can appear to us and show us the way.

When the wise men saw the star, **“they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.”** Think of how good it feels when clarity returns to our minds. After we have met with a selfish king in Jerusalem we can have a renewed vision of what we are trying to accomplish in our living. Once again, we see hurtful habits and selfish motivations and false thinking for what they really are. Our perspective again returns and we rejoice. Finally, the wise men came to Bethlehem. They **“saw the child with Mary his mother and they fell down and worshipped him.”** Our first attempts to live out our faith will

lead us to see the Lord in his Word. We can see him revealed in the pages of his Word and we too can feel his presence there more clearly than before.

Like those wise men we enter the Lord's house and worship him when we offer him gifts. Good deeds from the heart which show devotion to the Lord (GOLD). A commitment to follow the truth by acting upon what we believe (FRANKINCENSE). By our obedience in doing our work and by being useful, kind and compassionate (MYRRH). There is no other way to truly worship the Lord and give thanks to him. Using these gifts in our lives is a true sign of our sincere efforts to find our Lord and worship him.

But the Lord's star by itself is never enough to bring us into the Lord's house. It is true that it can lead us to the Lord, but only if we are willing to have it do so – only if we try day by day to follow that guiding star. We cannot enter the Lord's house or truly worship him unless we follow his lead. The wise men followed the star. They searched diligently for the Christ child until they found him.

The story of the wise men does not end with presenting gifts to Jesus. Herod was still alive in Jerusalem and he was still king. So, the wise men were warned in a dream that they should not return to him. They returned to their own country in the East by another route. Each time we search for the Lord and worship him he will protect us. He takes the memory of the star and the memory of the gifts that we have offered, and the memory of the joy that we felt and he stores them away safely within our minds where they cannot be destroyed by our selfishness. Every effort we make to find the Lord is stored up within each one of us, so that it can be used again and again to help lead us to him.

This season of Epiphany, when we recall the story of the wise men, we can be sure that we are reading about just that – wise people here in church and the whole world over, who wake up each morning with a hopeful and determined effort to be guided by the Lord in the way that we think and live. On our journey may each one of us be blessed and guided with the help of our Lord to follow that star that leads to salvation and eternal life. Amen

Final Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, in the middle of the struggles and the uncertainties that this earthly life brings to us, we give you prayerful thanks that one thing always remains constant: your infinite and tender love for each and every one of us. A love that surpasses all human understanding. We give you thanks from the depth of our hearts that you are continually born anew within each one of us, bringing peace and joy that only your love and wisdom can provide. Amen

Home Worship

January 6th 2019 by Stephen Thomas

New Year

Please read Isaiah 43 verses 1-12 Israel's Only Saviour
Please read Psalm 51 verses 10-12 Create in me a pure heart, O God.

Prayer

O Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, our selfish motivations within our plans and decisions over this past year need your mercy. Forgive us Lord for the misused moment that has robbed our fellows and this world of something of your love and joy. Grant us to trust in your loving Providence, your mercy, your life and power of love, compassion and forgiveness that can only renew our human spirit.

Open our hearts and minds to receive you this New Year – a New Year that is given to us now to strengthen our resolve to use the time which you have given to us for the true purpose of bearing witness to your loving commands and teachings. May we bear true witness to our mission this New Year as we follow the pathway along the road of our individual salvation?

Please read Exodus 12 verses 1-14 The Passover

Sermon Address

The Passover

We now come to one of the most important events in the entire history of the nation of Israel; indeed, this event – **the Passover** – marks the real beginning of Israel as a nation. The religious calendar of Israel begins with the Passover. Passover became Israel's New Year's Day and as such it reminded Israel that her life as a community of God's people began with their redemption from Egypt. This event was so important that God told the Jews to change their calendar so that the month of Passover should be the first month of their religious year. It was one of the spring months. Their months were governed by the phases of the moon and do not exactly coincide with any of our months. So, this first Hebrew month sometimes begins in March and sometimes early in April depending on the moon. Our Lord was crucified during the Jewish Passover week; and our Easter comes just after the Passover and not always on the same day of the month.

The Passover was named from the fact that the houses of the Hebrews were passed over by the "angel of death" in the night when the firstborn son of everyone else in Egypt died, as well as the firstborn of all cattle. It pictures for us the sad and final result of a worldly and selfish life, where there is no possibility of a development of a living faith, which is represented by the firstborn.

For the Jews the Passover was, and still is, celebrated as a memorial of deliverance of their nation from bondage in Egypt. The Lord at his last Passover gave the Christian Church a new feast to celebrate in its place – the feast of the Holy Supper. For the Lord is the Paschal lamb who came on earth, took on our nature with all its temptations and human frailty, and gave his life for us. When we worship him in the Holy Supper and accept him into our lives as our Saviour we are eating the Paschal Lamb, for He called the bread and wine his body and blood. The celebration of the Holy Supper – like the Passover in its deepest meaning – pictures for us our full realisation of our selfishness and just where our worldly and selfish way of life can ultimately lead too. But with the Lord's help and a determination to turn our life around we can then learn to travel along our own hard journey to the promised land of heavenly life under the guidance of our Lord's teachings and commands represented by Moses.

Please look again at Exodus 12v2 "This month is to be for you the first month... of your year."

This is why the symbolism of Passover is the most important and fundamental stage of our religious life. In the Old Testament, the release of Israel from their bondage in Egypt on the night of the Passover expresses the idea of God redeeming the whole of humankind. Israel was escaping earthly bondage to be the Lord's people. We can all recognise this on our own personal road to salvation.

“Look! The Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!” John 1v29

We can all understand that the lamb eaten at the Passover was a symbol of innocence, but we need to realise what innocence really is. Innocence is when we do not seek anything for ourselves, although we are perfectly well aware of all the possibilities of human gain. It is a true willingness to be led by the Lord's love. The love of God is unselfish in the supreme sense, innocent of any thought of self despite His infinite power. God's love seeks only to give the joy of his life to us. The importance of Passover summarises the stress in our personal lives. We each have our old accepted pattern of a moral life in which our selfishness is able to twist to serve our own arguments and purposes. The world appears to demand such moral values and so we use them without really acknowledging our real motive in our living.

But now a demand is being made upon each one of us to accept something totally new. We are being asked to **“feed upon the Lamb of God”** in a real Passover, by taking God's innocent love as our whole life and so denying our selfish pleasures. We are being asked to let this control all our thinking and doing and so change our motive for living.

The blood of the lamb symbolises our true thoughts and desires that must spring from innocence. The doorposts of the house stand for the entrance of our minds. The sprinkling of the blood on the door frames of their houses where they were to eat the lamb signifies for us the safeguarding of our mind from the false and selfish ideas by means of true heavenly ideas springing from the love of God. When the lamb was eaten it was to be roasted with fire, not eaten raw or even boiled. Goodness has to be our first purpose – not just acknowledged but tried and tested! The unleavened bread pictures for us those principles of goodness which are separated from our old worldly false ideas. And the bitter herbs picture our trials and temptations which we must be willing to fight head on and overcome if we are ever to attain spiritual life. In **verse 11** we are instructed to eat the feast quickly in case we have to move in a hurry! We must be prepared to start today or it will never start tomorrow! We must carry into our lives straightaway our acceptance of his teachings and commands.

We can have a new beginning to our year whenever we like. All we have to remember is the realisation of that innocent force of love in Jesus Christ which lives inside each one of us, and then start to reject our selfishness so that His power can work in each one of us. It is never easy to change, but the formula must be to change ourselves, and then our change can then begin to change the world. There is no other way! It must start individually with each one of us here and now! In this New Year of 2019 we must seek to show a true willingness to follow our Lord's commands and teachings and listen to what his truth is asking of us.

Exodus 12v7 is the command to the Israelites to paint the blood of the lamb on the door-frames of their houses. We must show each day of our lives a true compassion, caring and love to our fellows, which we can only do by painting, stroke by stroke, the innocent “blood of the Lamb” onto all we shall be involved with this year. Not just today but always. This is the most fundamental command given to us in Exodus for all time.

Yes, we live out our years, like the Psalmist tells us, as a tale that is told. May the individual story of our lives be one story worth telling. May it also add greatly to the strength of our church in the world. In our personal efforts of repentance and spiritual growth may our individual work in the world serve the needs of all humankind.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, a whole New Year is waiting for each of us. Each new day untouched and unspoiled and so full of opportunity. Each day is a gift from you like life itself. You have given us life to make of it what we can. This New Year help us Lord to make a firm resolve to live our lives each day for your glory and purpose.

And so, O Lord, we ask that you accept the vows that we make in this New Year so that we may be worthy of the name Christian by living your way of love and compassion.

Widen our thoughts Lord to the needs of our fellows of every faith and every nation, and in so doing strengthen each one of us in the joy of Christian service.

May our short time in this world, Lord, draw us nearer to the eternal and timeless joy and service of your heavenly kingdom. Amen

HAPPY NEW YEAR EVERYONE!

Stephen

Home Worship

January 20th 2019 by Stephen Thomas

Duty and Responsibility

Look up in a dictionary the word debt and the answer it will give you is ‘an obligation that must be paid’. What is our obligation to one another? What is our obligation to society? What is our obligation to God?

Moses in the following reading gives Israel a law not given before: every seven years all debts between the Israelites were to be cancelled.

Please read Deuteronomy 15 verses 1-11 “The Year for Cancelling Debts.”

This law was designed to prevent the poor from getting poorer and the rich from getting richer. Israelites were “children of the Lord” and so they were all brothers and needed to treat each other in a loving way. Therefore, richer Israelites were expected to make loans to their poorer brothers and to those who had fallen on hard times. Already there were laws against charging a needy Israelite interest. One person was not to make a profit from another’s misfortune. Now they were to make the loans freely even though the ‘year of cancelling debts’ was near. I think our Lord Jesus understood the spirit of this law when he said, ***“Freely you have received, freely give.”***

Please read Matthew 22 verses 15-22 Paying Taxes to Caesar

In this reading our Lord is inside the courts of the Jerusalem temple teaching the crowds. The Pharisees and the Herodians approach and set out to trap him with a question, **“Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”** Our Lord does not evade the question, but of course provides the correct solution.

Prayer

O Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we confess to you our selfishness which looks only to ourselves and not to the needs of our fellows - our selfishness which takes for ourselves and our own self-greed and self-satisfaction, and in so doing robs others of your love and compassion. Forgive our blindness, our indifference, our dishonesty and a hardness of heart. Show us Lord Jesus that we are all members of one family and that the hurt of one person, even the humblest, is an injury to all and a sin against you.

Deliver us from the spirit of oppression and from selfish greed that seeks our own comfort at the cost of misery for all others. Create in us a passion for justice so that freedom and liberty may bear the fruit of righteousness and good will.

O Lord, we pray every day for your kingdom to come and your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. May we as individuals be sensitive to the needs of the world around us, by showing true witness in prayer, word and deed: leading the way towards a quickening of social conscience and a rejection of all that is low and unworthy.

Reading from the Writings of the New Church

The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine 92 -95 (Chadwick)

A community is more the neighbour than a single person, because it is composed of many people. Charity should be exercised towards it in the same way as towards an individual, that is, in accordance with the good to be found in it. It should therefore be exercised differently towards a community of upright people than towards a community of people who are not upright. A community is loved by caring for its good out of a love for good.

One's country is more the neighbour than a community, because it is a kind of parent. It is there a person is born; one's country feeds one and protects one from harm. Good should be done to one's country out of love in accordance with its needs. These are principally concerned with its food supplies and the secular and spiritual life of its inhabitants. Anyone who loves his country, and does it good out of goodwill, in the other life loves the Lord's kingdom, for there the Lord's kingdom is his country. Anyone who loves the Lord's kingdom loves the Lord, because the Lord is the all-in-all of his kingdom.

The church is more the neighbour than one's country, because anyone who cares for the church cares for the souls and everlasting life of the people of his country. So anyone who cares for the church out of love loves the neighbour in a higher degree, since heaven and happiness of life for ever is what he seeks and wants for others.

The Lord's kingdom is the neighbour in a still higher degree, for the Lord's kingdom consists of all who are in a state of good, both those on earth and those in the heavens. Thus the Lord's kingdom is goodness in all its aspects together. When this is loved, so are the individuals who are in a state of good.

“Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?”

The question that the Pharisees asked, sets Jesus a very real dilemma. If he said that it was unlawful to pay the tax, they would promptly report him to the Roman government officials as a seditious person and his arrest would certainly follow. If he said that it was lawful to pay the tax, he would stand discredited in the eyes of many of the people. Whichever way Jesus might answer – so his questioners thought – he would lay himself open to trouble.

The approach of the Pharisees and the Herodians was very subtle. They began with flattery which was designed to achieve two things. Firstly, to disarm any suspicions that Jesus might have had, and secondly, to make it impossible for him to avoid giving an answer without completely losing his reputation.

Sadly, we use this flattery and hypocrisy in the same way. When we are with people our selfishness never really shows itself and so we hide it quite obviously! We want to feel accepted and we desire to accept the help and friendship of others. The question that the Pharisees and the Herodians put to Jesus was truly a masterpiece of cunning.

Jesus said, **“Show me the coin used for paying the tax”**. He then asks whose image was on it and, of course, it would have been that of Tiberius, the reigning emperor. All emperors were called Caesar. Around the coin there would have been the title “Tiberius Caesar”, the divine Augustus, son of Augustus,” and on the back of the coin would be the title “Pontifex maximus” – the high priest of the Roman nation. Because the coin had the emperor’s head and inscription on it, it was held at least in some sense to be his personal property. Our Lord’s reply to the question was that by using the coinage of Tiberius you recognise his political power in Palestine. By giving to him you give him what is his own. Give to Caesar yes BUT ALWAYS REMEMBER that at the same time there is a sphere in life which belongs to God AND NOT to Caesar.

Most of us have a double citizenship - citizen of the country in which we live or were born, and citizen of heaven. In our world we owe a debt of thanks to the public services such as fire, police and ambulance. Also lighting of our streets and houses and clean water and sanitation, medical and educational services, provision for the unemployed, and pensions for the elderly.

We have a duty to pay taxes for these so that they can be maintained and provided for, AND at the same time we give to God by fulfilling our duty to pay the tax! We do this because we love our fellows and wish to cooperate within the community.

Likewise we have duties at home, in our employment and church life and even in our leisure time where we **“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s”**. At the same time we must **“Give to God what is God’s”** by loving the good in all that we plan and do.

In society all moral values are in some way related to our day to day civil OBLIGATIONS. BUT they all depend on the acceptance that we must love God and at the same time love our fellows. If we have not given to God a true willingness to love his way and serve others, then all our moral standards will just become a more acceptable face for our selfishness to hide behind.

“Give to Caesar what is Caesars, and to God what is God’s.” Amen.

May God bless each one of you in your Christian duties, efforts and responsibilities in 2019.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, may we see the true purpose of our lives. In your strength may selfish greed and lust for dominion diminish. Grant us your power in which to perform our duties and serve one another.

Help and strengthen us to live in thought and deed, a life of true service to you.

Lord Jesus Christ, we give you thanks for your Word of truth and the essential guidance that it provides in our lives. Give us the strength to accept its authority and obey its loving commands. Grant us Lord that as we endeavour to do so, we shall come to understand it more fully, and be able to see clearly the beauty of its heavenly meaning. Amen.

Home Worship

January 27th 2019 by Stephen Thomas

Our Witness for 2019

We read in the book of Kings about Ahab who was king of Samaria. He had a second royal residence in the town of Jezreel. Next to this residence was a vineyard that he coveted. But when he asked to purchase it, the owner Naboth refused to sell it or trade it on the grounds that the vineyard was his family's inheritance and could not be transferred permanently outside the family. Now Israelite kings did not have the authority under the law to do what they pleased; they themselves were required to abide by the law. So, Ahab was disappointed and very angry and simply returned to his palace and refused to eat and so had a good old sulk!

Please read 1 Kings 21 verses 1-19 Naboth's Vineyard

Many people here were involved in false witness. The king was sulking because he could not get what he wanted. But then, his scheming and evil wife Jezebel said, "I'll show you how you can get the vineyard." She then wrote an edict in the name of her husband. So right away the edict was a lie since it did not really come from the king. It was the work of Jezebel. She sent this edict to the nobles and elders. They knew exactly what they were doing because their instructions were to find some scoundrel who would lie for money. They got him to testify against Naboth convincing people that Naboth had blasphemed against God and the king. For this he was put to death. The witnesses were paid liars. Why were the nobles and elders willing to be part of the deception? What were the queen's motives? Surely, underneath it all was the love of power and even worse the abuse of power.

In our next reading from Mark's gospel we are focussing on the trial of our Lord before the Sanhedrin. They try to find two witnesses who would agree in their charge against Jesus. According to Jewish law, a man had to be accused by at least two witnesses before he could be judged guilty. But two witnesses who had agreed were nowhere to be found!

Please read Mark 14 verses 53-64 Before the Sanhedrin

We are not to think of this gathering of the Sanhedrin as an official trial. It was probably an examination of Jesus to find grounds on which to charge him before the Roman authority. The Jews had no authority at this time to try anyone for any grave offence, but had to present all cases to the Roman Procurator to try. Nevertheless, the injustice of the examination is obvious, for the spirit of Jewish justice should have been adhered to, but it was not. It was a complete sham. The hatred with which the authorities regarded our Lord made the trial nothing more than a means to achieve his destruction.

Doctrine of the New Jerusalem concerning Life 87

So far as anyone shuns all kinds of false witness as sins, so far, they love what is true. By bearing false witness, in the natural sense, is meant not only to act as a false witness, but also to practice lying and defamation. By bearing false witness, in the spiritual sense, is meant to say and persuade others that what is false is true, and that what is evil is good, and conversely. But in the supreme sense, by bearing false witness is meant to blaspheme the Lord and the Word. These are what constitute bearing false witness in the threefold sense.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you are our teacher and guide through life, and only you can know the path for each one of us that will lead into the universal sphere of your love.

Help us to recognise that there is much hidden motivation within us that is self-centred. We know that it is difficult and painful for us to see ourselves spiritually naked, having nothing of our own in heart which is truly good and wise. Lord Jesus, we pray that you will be very near to us with strength and comfort, when in the light of truth our spirit is put to the test.

We pray that we might not fail you by wanting to turn back to our old way of life and so throw away the spiritual gifts that you offer us. We are in your hands Lord, and we acknowledge that we need to be taught, tested and humbled, before we can be capable of serving you as true servants and witnesses of the One Glorious Divine Love, who creates and redeems us all.

Lord Jesus Christ, as we travel along our spiritual path, strengthen us to choose to place our trust in you, so that we may be led out of our selfishness into a state of joy and a heavenly sphere of love, care and compassion, with everybody that we meet through life. Amen.

“A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offence that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.” Deuteronomy 19v15

It must be a very challenging experience to be called upon to testify in a court of law. Imagine for example that you were a witness to a murder and you were a key person in the case for the prosecution against the murderer. And so, you find yourself called upon to go to court and give evidence. The time comes when you stand up and solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God. You realise that what you say will have a tremendous bearing on the whole case. You look over and see the person accused of murder. You wonder what might happen to you or your family if the murderer is set free or their family seek revenge. You think about the possibility of lying and then realise that if you did you would be

breaking another commandment – bearing false witness against your neighbour. But since you are doing it in a court of law and have sworn to God (hand on Bible) that you would tell the truth, you would also be breaking the commandment against taking the Lord's name in vain. You have sworn to tell the truth in the name of God. This must surely be a very challenging position especially when someone else's life and reputation depend on it!

Had we lived in Old Testament times, we would have found an added factor in ancient law that says, "If the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, then do to him as he intended to do to his brother." If you bore false witness in a murder trial knowing that the person was innocent, and your testimony led to a guilty verdict, and it was found later that you perjured yourself, you would be put to death! They would do to you as you intended should be done to the other person.

Our earlier two readings, concerning the stories of Naboth's vineyard and the trial of our Lord, are just a couple of examples where motives of greed, hate and power were strong factors in leading people to bear false witness.

It is easy to lie, but if we keep lying it becomes difficult to know the truth. In business, people might tell you anything in order to get the job. They tell you that you are a valued member of the team - but you can easily be replaced! You are just another cog in the wheel. Sales people might say anything to make a sale. In the media we hear about corruption, revenge and accusations. We seem to live in a society in which we are constantly wondering whether people are telling us the truth or not!

Lying comes from our self-centred nature – a desire for personal revenge, self-protection and a variety of other motives. I have heard it said that most lies do not hurt anyone – they call it a 'victimless crime.' But surely the real victim is the love of the truth! The danger is that we can come to a point where we do not know what is true anymore. How can we be saved without the truth? How can there be justice without the truth? Truth is the great redeemer. So often we can find ourselves in conflict between our own self-interests and our love for the truth.

We all have within us great spiritual potential – love and compassion. But we do need to beware of that deceptive, hidden part of us that constantly tries to twist and turn what we do - like trying to escape from trouble, trying to take advantage of others and using lies to achieve its ends. We need to rise above it and strengthen the good within us, which is our love for the truth for the sake of truth itself. It is through the truth that we are healed and grow spiritually along the road towards our salvation.

In Mosaic Law no one is to be judged on the basis of one witness. There had to be two or three witnesses. Think back to the Lord's trial. At first, no charge could be made to stick because the testimony of two witnesses must agree absolutely. The one accusation of which we are told was a clever distortion of fact. Jesus had never threatened to destroy the temple himself, but had said that when it was destroyed, he would raise up a temple in three days - by which he meant his resurrected body.

The law that required the evidence of two witnesses with identical evidence is not just a useful precaution for judges. It expresses a fundamental characteristic of our genuine religious life. There are TWO aspects to such a life: the commands of truth that our faith understands and the desire to obey and use them. This is the heart of a truly good life. So often we use the truth to condemn

our fellows. We are not giving a true witness unless we are using the truth that we understand to bring love and service into this world. With this truth and our loving desire we have a **THIRD WITNESS – ACTION!**

We must arrive at a point in our living where we love the truth and are **WILLING** to follow where it may lead us. It is only through truth in the Word of God that we can grow spiritually and come into our Lord's heavenly kingdom. Amen.

"O Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tent? Who shall dwell on thy holy hill? He who walks blamelessly, and does what is right, and speaks truth from his heart." Psalm 15 v1-2

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Home Worship for February by the Rev. Robin Wooldridge

February 3 House built on rock

'Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon the house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock' (Matt. vii 24, 25)

In these two verses we have a wonderful picture of faith in the Lord. But what do these two verses really mean? We may answer that it simply shows we must put our faith in the Lord. But let's consider its deeper meaning.

The most important aspect of this extract from the Word concerns the man who *'heareth and doeth'* the teachings of the Lord. In other words there must be both knowledge and practice. It is our responsibility to respond to the Lord - and to live the life of faith which manifests itself in love or charity. These two aspects - *'heareth and doeth'* - are two sides of the same coin and both deserve our attention. The Lord says, *'If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them'* (John xiii 17).

Indeed, it is the wise man who builds his house upon a rock. But this is no natural house but rather the heaven or happiness he seeks to realise. This must first become a condition of both heart and mind and to make the 'kingdom of God within'. This is a spiritual abode - his heart and mind - which is to become the Lord's dwelling place. The Lord is ready to enter, *'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me'* (Rev. iii 20). We read about the Lord *dwelling* in the heart by faith (Eph. iii 17). Once the Lord has entered and we are thus one with the Saviour, we can never be led astray. We look to the Lord as 'Emmanuel, God is with us' - as being 'one with the Father'. It is our trust in the Lord where our feet are firmly established on the rock. This is the Rock of Ages, the rock on which the church is built. Do we not read that the people of Israel *'drank of that spiritual rock that followed them; and that rock was Christ'* (1 Cor. x 4).

Once built upon that rock we are safe, safe from the rains and winds that blow. But what is meant by winds and rains? These are the challenges we will experience as we begin the journey of regeneration. The promise of the Lord is clear: *'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee'* (Isa. xliii. 2) No matter what winds

and rains may blow and beat upon the house, this house will never crumble, for it is he who *'heareth and doeth'* the teaching of the Lord and so builds on him as the Rock of Ages.

Temptations are necessary for us to be reformed and regenerated and the Lord is with us for, *'In that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted'* (Heb. iv. 15; ii. 18). It is a foolish man indeed who knows the teachings of the Lord but does not live according to them. The house of the foolish man is built upon sand and one day his house will fall. But those who *'heareth and doeth'* the teachings will build their house upon rock. This house will never fall and crumble because it is built on rock.

Prayer

Teach me thy way Lord; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name. I will praise thee, O Lord my GOD, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore. Amen

February 10 Parable of the fig tree

***'And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.'* (Matt. xxi. 19)**

This is a very challenging extract from the Word. Here the Lord curses a fig tree for not producing fruit outside of the season. What are we to make of this? And, what is the spiritual teaching contained within?

We must remember that the Lord was the *'Word made flesh'* and therefore everything he did and said has significance. The Lord taught in parables - what appears to be the case on a literal level hides deeper spiritual truths. Firstly, let us consider that trees are often used throughout the Word as being representations of man. For example, *'A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.'* (Matt. vii. 18, 19). In prophecy good men are referred to as *'trees of righteousness'* (Isa. lxi. 3) while in Revelation the Son of Man refers to himself as *'The tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God'* (ii. 7). In the Psalms we read of the man who delights in the Lord's teachings as *'he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper'* (i 3).

The Lord gave this parable: *'A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down'* (Luke xiii. 6-9). This parable speaks about us and how the Lord - who will not let us suffer the consequences of our evil life - tries every possible means to support and help us to reform and thereby be saved.

When the Lord curses the fig-tree, we can see that this refers to the men of the Jewish church. They had lost sight of the doctrines of love and charity. They had committed two evils: they had forsaken the Lord himself - who is *the fountain of living waters* - and had made for themselves cisterns - *broken cisterns that can hold no water* (Jer. ii. 13). We can apply this to ourselves: if we have a knowledge of the truth, we are a fig-tree planted in the garden of the Lord. But are we a

'tree of righteousness' bearing ripe fruit or are we simply a tree crumbling to the ground? The Lord will come to you as surely as he came to the fig-tree. Let's not miss the opportunity to embrace the Lord and to be in the Lord and bring forth fruit in abundance!

Prayer

Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. Show me thy ways, O Lord, and teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth and teach me; for thou art the Lord of our salvation; on thee do I wait all the day.

Amen

February 17 *God created man in his own image*

'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him.' (Gen. i 27)

What constitutes a man? His physical form, his mental and physical powers? Are these the only attributes needed by which we can determine a person is indeed a man? It feels that there is a missing dimension. Indeed what distinguishes a man from an animal? Unlike animals, man can by his rational powers rise above nature: he can learn about the Lord and read the Word. In fact man has everything he needs to gain eternal life in heaven. A man in the real sense of the word is rational and learned in both worldly as well as heavenly things. His heart is made for both love and charity and his understanding is moulded by wisdom and truth which teaches these spiritual loves. So it becomes clear that it is not external but rather internal factors by which any one is made truly human. The Word teaches us that what is important is not the outward appearance but rather what lies in the heart - this and this alone makes that person a human being. We read in Jeremiah:

'Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgement, that seeketh the truth' (Jer. v. i.)

The streets of Jerusalem were full of 'men' but what was sought was a person who practised the divine precepts, one that was truly a man. Now back to our opening scripture, 'So God created man in his image, in the image of God created he him'. Does this mean we are all gods? No, as this refers to man who was created after the mind of God. The Lord is love and wisdom, good and truth and man was made to resemble him and to reflect his character on earth. Once we are restored, once we love the Lord above all things, once we love the neighbour as our self, then we are a new man. Man receives life from God; he has both will and understanding - one to receive divine love or good and the other to receive divine wisdom or truth. Of course such qualities are believed to be inherent within man - to originate in himself - but it is the Lord that gives them and such attributes only appear to be in man as his own. Thus to acknowledge this life as being given to us by the Lord is a very important duty on the part of man. This duty means we will acquire oneness with the Lord and are truly on the path to regeneration.

We are to make the declaration that we receive life from the Lord and we are but receptacles of life. We are to focus on our internal life; to love the Lord above all things and to love our neighbour as our self. We are to turn away from love of the self and love of the things and ways of the world. Then we will start to understand that beautiful teaching:

'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him'.

Prayer

Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy loving kindness; for they have been ever of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake. Amen

February 24 Gathering fruit to eternal life

'Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together' (John iv. 35-36).

The Lord said to his disciples: *'The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life'* (John vi. 63). This means that they had a spiritual application and that these divine ideas were clothed in natural images. In this extract from the Word he speaks of the harvest, of labouring in the harvest but he is referring to the spiritual sense. Here the Lord is explaining the parable of the sower, *'The field is the world'* (Matt. xiii. 38) and, *'the harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest'* (Luke x. 2).

Do you remember how John the Baptist described the Lord? He said of Jesus that *his 'fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire'* (Matt. iii. 12). The spiritual meaning of our short extract becomes clear. When he says, *'Say not ye, there are yet four months, and then cometh harvest?'* we can see that the Lord is speaking of that great harvest of the church - when the land will overflow with blessings. The Lord had come and now was the time for the blessings promised in prophecy: *'Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.'* The Lord was not here to establish a natural but a spiritual kingdom. Everyone who follows the Lord has the seed of holy truth sown in his heart. He prays and labours and is rewarded - he receives his rewards here on the earth and afterwards in heaven. He reaps the *'peaceable fruits of righteousness'* and so *'gathereth fruit unto life eternal'*.

We must be careful that we do not look at heaven with natural eyes. In the world we work and are paid accordingly and we must avoid looking at spiritual rewards in the same way; otherwise we will think we gain merit for the good things we do. We will think that we are to be rewarded for, rather than through, our obedience to divine precepts. Such thinking is natural - not spiritual. We are to work with the Lord. We are *'workers together with him'* (2 Cor. vi. 1) and so our works will be *'wrought in God'* (John iii. 21). Our reward is the joy itself - the true happiness which the Lord infuses into our soul and into every soul who delights in the law of the Lord. We may be blessed for this short time on earth and afterwards eternally in heaven. We share in his joy and our joy will be full. One with the Lord we will dwell in him and he in us - *'that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together'*.

Prayer

O Lord, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and magnify thy holy name. Amen

Home Worship for March 2019 – Revd Becky Jarratt

3rd March

“Well done, good and faithful servant!”

Read Matthew 25:14-30

What are you good at? Some of our “talents” are fairly obvious. Some of us are good at gardening; others are skilled musicians. We may be able to bake the perfect Victoria sponge, or to park a car in a very small space. It is often easier for others to say what we are good at than for us to recognise it ourselves.

In the Parable of the Talents, the master asked three servants to look after his money while he was away. They were all given different amounts, “each according to his ability” (v 15). When he returned home, he was not disappointed that the servant he had given two talents to had only made two more, whereas the servant who had received five now had ten. We are all gifted in different ways, and the Lord is happy as long as we use our talents in his work. We do not need to be “better” at our endeavours than other people – we just need to be prepared to work with him for the benefit of others.

What other talents may we have inside, hiding away? Ask yourself the following questions:

1. What do I do that comes easily and naturally to me?
2. What makes my heart sing?
3. What have you been thanked for?

It may be something as simple as making time to talk to a neighbour. Or getting some shopping for someone who is housebound. Remembering that we have been given one mouth and two ears - listening carefully to someone who is burdened can be a true gift. Over the next week, keep those questions in mind, and reflect to see if an unanticipated gift comes to the fore.

Prayer *Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for the gifts you bless us with. Grant us the wisdom to appreciate them, and to use them for the benefit of others. Amen.*

10th March

“This is my command: Love each other.”

Read John 15:1-17

We are coming to the season of new life. If they are not visible already, we shall soon be seeing growth in the trees and bushes, and shortly flowers will be poking their heads up through the ground. This time last year, there was plenty of snow, slowing the pace of spring. I wonder what is in store for us this March?

Jesus shows us a vivid picture in his story of the vine and the branches. If we follow the Lord, we will bear much fruit. If we separate ourselves from the vine, we will wither and die. I am intrigued by verse 2: “He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he trims clean so that it will be even more fruitful.”

Have you been able to answer the questions from last week? Is there something within that has surprised you? I would like to suggest that our gifts and talents produce the fruit that Jesus speaks of in this passage. I feel he is telling us that we need to

make use of our gifts, or they will not bear fruit. Even the skills we make good use of can be honed ('cleaned') to be even more productive.

We can read in Apocalypse Explained:

[Everything in heaven, the world, and in the human body] both great and small, was created from use, in use, and for use. A part, in which this ultimate - being for use - ceases, is separated as harmful and is, as it were, condemned and cast out. (AE1194:2)

If we think back to the Parable of the Talents, the master was furious with the servant who hid the money that had been entrusted to him. The servant could have made his master some money by gaining interest from a bank, but instead his fear of his master led to him doing nothing.

Are we sometimes afraid to use our gifts? Are we concerned about what others will think of us? Jesus commands us to love one another. He wants us to show our love through the fruit that we bear: through our gifts.

Prayer *Lord, teach us how to love others as you have loved us. Show us how to grow and develop through a life of use. Amen.*

17th March

“Love your neighbour as yourself.”

Read Matthew 22:34-40

Over the past couple of weeks we have been thinking about putting our gifts to good use. After all, if we don't use our gifts, we might as well not have them. After a while we may forget to use them entirely. There is a balance to be struck, though. Sometimes we can be so caught up in helping others that we forget to look after those closest to us.

It can be rewarding, helping others and empowering them to help themselves. Imagine the volunteer in a centre for the homeless. They come in, day after day, and help to prepare food for those who really need it. They offer their time to listen to people, and feel like they are doing something worthy. However, by spending this much time out of the home, things begin to slip. The volunteer needs to be out early enough to prepare breakfast, leaving their other half to look after the family two or three times a week. Yes, the volunteer is doing something truly beneficial for the homeless, but is neglecting the needs of their family by doing so.

We are also required to look after ourselves, too. The Lord asks us to “Love your neighbour as yourself.” (v. 39). If we spend all of our time on others, without allowing time for rest and recuperation ourselves, we are no good to anyone. If we permanently put the needs of others before our own, we will burn out.

We can read in Heaven and Hell:

...Good and useful activities include providing the necessities of life for oneself and one's own, wanting ample resources for the sake of one's country and one's neighbour, whom a rich person can benefit in far more ways than a poor person can. [These activities are useful also] because they lead the mind away from an idle life, which is destructive, since in that kind of life our thoughts turn to evil because of our inborn evil nature. (HH 361)

Prayer *Heavenly Father, help me to find balance in my life. Help me to use your gifts wisely. Remind me that looking after myself and my family is as important as*

taking care of people I don't know. Teach me how to prioritise, and guide me in my dealings with others. Amen

24th March

“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor”

Read Psalm 112

When thinking about our gifts, we sometimes reflect on our weaknesses. When asked, many of us would find it easier to think of something we don't do well, rather than coming up with our talents. We can spend our whole earthly lives trying to conquer a negative quality that we have within, only to see it rear its head again when we least expect it.

I would like us all to think of one negative quality that we are aware of within ourselves. It could be one we are working on at the moment, or one that we have kept tucked away to be dealt with at a later date. Spend a few moments reflecting on this quality. When have we been aware of it in our lives? How have we managed to see it for what it is? When has it been so strong we have struggled to keep it under control?

For some people, the awareness of a negative quality can be all-consuming. I would like us to consider what we can do to use these qualities productively. For example, we may chastise ourselves for feeling we cannot speak up when it is required of us. However, being quiet or shy can give us the opportunity to observe what is going on around us, rather than jumping in straight away with what might not be the best response.

Many people find it hard to know when to say no. Last week, we thought about how it is important to look after ourselves and our families. If selfishness is a quality we are aware of at times, we could put this to good use by being prepared to tell people when too much is being asked of us.

Below is a list of suggestions of how we can turn some negative qualities around. Thinking about the quality you reflected on earlier, how can you use it productively?

Quality	How we can use it productively
• Competitiveness	Refusing to fail when challenged
• Shyness or quietness	Ability to be reflective and observant
• Highly-tuned sense of justice	Being prepared to fight for justice for others
• Stubbornness	Not giving up when things get hard
• Fear to try new things	Not taking unnecessary risks

We read in AC 10331:6:

It is a general rule that as is a person's character, so is every work he performs. For this reason 'the works' according to which there will be reward or retribution must be taken to mean a person's character so far as his love and faith are concerned. For works are the product of the love and faith residing in a person. Nothing other than his love and his faith constitute the person, or what amounts to the same thing, his good and his truth...

Prayer *Heavenly Father, we offer our negative qualities up to you for your use. Teach us how to embrace areas that we would prefer to be hidden, and to use them in love for you and for our neighbours. Amen.* **The Lord's Prayer.**

31st March **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**

Read Matthew 6:19-34

It can sometimes be a challenge for us to be happy for others when we feel they have more than we do. Some people use the expression, “They have been dealt a better hand”. I don’t believe the Lord “deals” us hands. True enough – we are all born into different circumstances, and it may feel that others have much more than we do. We can look at it in another way. If we are able to receive and read this document, we are luckier than many in the world who do not have access to education or to the Lord’s Word.

There are areas in all of our lives where we can observe that others seem to have “more”. It may be that we have not found a partner for life. We may not have been able to have children. Others may have their families living around the corner, and they spend time at weekends with them, whereas ours live a train or plane journey away. We may not have had the promotion at work we feel we deserved. Another’s exam results may be better than ours, even though we worked harder.

Being able to be happy for others is important. We may feel their gifts are somehow “better” than ours, or that we haven’t been able to achieve as much as others with our talents. As long as we have put what we can into what we are doing, the Lord is happy with us. In the passage in Matthew 6, we are told not to worry. We can only do our best. It is what is in our hearts that is important.

In True Christian Religion, we read: To those who faithfully perform uses, the Lord gives the love of use and its reward, which is internal blessedness, and this is eternal happiness (TCR 736:3). The Lord knows our gifts and talents. All he asks is that we use these in our daily lives in love for him and for those around us. Even if we feel that others have been blessed with greater talents than us, it does not stop us using ours to the best of our ability.

Prayer *Lord Jesus Christ, allow us to be humble in our deeds and dealings with others. Help us to acknowledge our feelings when we feel others have been blessed with more than us. Let us recognise that our own gifts have value and use. Amen.*

Blessing. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The Lord lift his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.