

Tending the land and gardening with the Lord

July 1

Adam and Eve

Please read Genesis 2: 4-7

Adamah (Biblical Hebrew: אֲדָמָה) is a word that translates as ground or earth, and occurs in the above Biblical account of creation. The connective link between the word **adamah** and the word **adam** is used to reinforce the link between humankind and the ground, illustrating both the way in which man was created to cultivate the world, and how he originated from the "dust of the ground".

In Arcana Caelestia 29 Swedenborg emphasises this connection:

The Lord is He who sows, the "seed" is His Word, and the "earth" is man, as He himself has deigned to declare (refers to the Parable of the Sower in: **Matt. 13: 3-9, 18-23, 37-39**).

Please read the verses of the Parable of the Sower indicated above.

Creation of vegetation

Next read Genesis 1: 11-12

Returning to Arcana Caelestia 29, Swedenborg comments on these verses in Genesis as follows: When the "earth" or man, has been thus prepared to receive celestial seeds from the Lord, and to produce something of what is good and true, then the Lord first causes some tender thing to spring forth, which is called the "tender herb;" then something more useful, which again bears seed in itself, and is called the "herb yielding seed;" and at length something good which becomes fruitful, and is called the "tree bearing fruit, whose seed is in itself" each according to its own kind.

Closing prayer:

Dear Lord, we too plant seeds with our actions.

Let them be watered by your truths, blessed by your light.

May we feel the warmth of your love for us, that we may bring forth fruits. **Amen.**

July 8

The Gardener

In John's Gospel after the resurrection, Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and she mistakes Jesus for the gardener. **Optional suggested reading John 20: 10-16.** At a deeper level is she really mistaken? Can we see Jesus as the agency for our regeneration, as he turns over the earth of our nature like a faithful gardener?

Please read Matthew 13: 31-32 The Parable of the Mustard Seed

Reflecting on this, please read the following from Swedenborg's Spiritual Experiences [or Spiritual Diary]

SE 1436. About the seeds of faith taking root

Seeds of faith that have taken root in a person on earth, a soul, a spirit, and also in an angel, by means of enlightened knowledge [implanted] and then branching and sprouting in different directions, are of the following nature:

When a religious truth has been implanted, then gradually it grows out into many truths, as if taking over the whole space, and falsities are gradually consumed. For a truth of religion once conceived begets many, like rivulets of water from a spring, or roots of a tree in the earth; or like a tuberous root that has gone deep down, and at length takes up space by expanding, and consumes anything in its way.

First, evils are wiped away in the person, otherwise [religious truth] cannot be implanted. Evils are the "tares" that put forth roots widely, obstructing the roots of the good seed. After that comes conviction of the truth of religion, which gives birth to derivative convictions joined with other enlightened knowledge. Next comes the love of truth. Thus that seed reproduces and bears fruit beyond measure.

Closing prayer:

Patient and loving Lord,

You build times of waiting into the cycle of nature and into our lives.

Although we struggle to see the wisdom sometimes in the waiting,

help us face the bits of ourselves that need the firm yet gentle touch of your pruning.

Increase in us the good fruit so that to those around us we may be vibrant and attractive signs of your presence. **Amen.**

July 15 Growing and pruning

Reflect on the extract below from Isaiah 61 - The Year of the Lord's Favour

For as the soil makes the sprout come up

and a garden causes seeds to grow,

so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.

Please read John 15: 4-8

Go outside and take a long loving look at the natural world around you. Do this in silence, asking the Lord to be present, perhaps even imagining Him walking or sitting beside you as you look at creation.

Linger over anything that holds your attention, letting yourself be absorbed in the detail, colour and mystery before you. When you are ready record your thoughts in your journal if you keep one, or silently speak to the Lord in your heart about what you have noticed.

Please read the following extract from Swedenborg's Divine Providence which forms a nice reflection to your earlier reading from John 15.

DP 332: In the Word, we are in fact described as trees, and our wisdom, which arises from love, is described as a garden. This is exactly what the Garden of Eden means. Actually, we are bad trees right from our seed, but we are granted a scion or graft from shoots taken from the tree of life, through which the sap rising from our old roots is changed into a sap that brings forth good fruit.

Closing prayer:

Dear Lord, give us we pray, a fresh awareness of your life expressed through the natural world, so that with opened eyes, we may see this world for what it is: your precious gift to us. **Amen.**

July 22 Palms and cedars

Read the following extract from Psalm 92 - read it slowly several times and think how it might apply to your life. Write up any reflections in your journal or speak to the Lord in your heart about things you have discovered.

Psalm 92:12-15 (NIV)

- ¹² The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,
they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;
¹³ planted in the house of the Lord,
they will flourish in the courts of our God.
¹⁴ They will still bear fruit in old age,
they will stay fresh and green,
¹⁵ proclaiming, "The Lord is upright;
he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."

We can gain insights into this extract from Swedenborg's Arcana Caelestia 8369⁽³⁾:

Here 'a palm tree' stands for good and 'a cedar' for truth. Since 'a palm tree' means good it also means wisdom, for wisdom is the discernment of good. The palm trees which were carved along with the cherubs and flowers on the walls of the temple were signs meaning such wisdom.

William Worcester in his Plants of the Bible has the following to say about cedar trees:

In looking for the corresponding relationship to our mental growth when considering this noble tree, our attention must be drawn to what is represented by those successive platforms of branching growth, mounting higher and higher into the heavens, which are the most striking characteristic of the tree. In Swedenborg's journey to the heaven of the Golden Age, the heaven nearest the Lord and most filled with His influence, he came at length to a grove of tall cedars, with some eagles on their branches.

Seeing them the angel said, "We are now on the mountain, not far from its summit."

That the cedars reached to that inmost heaven, represents the ability of the regenerated mind to understand the inner spiritual truth taught by the outer form - as seen in the Word of God in the Bible and within the kingdom of nature.

Closing prayer:

Dear Lord we know we cannot abandon life because of its storms. The strongest trees are not found sheltered in the safety of the forest; rather they are out in the open spaces - shaped by the winds of all seasons. We pray you provide us deep roots for our wide-spreading branches. **Amen.**

During his ministry Jesus would go out and about in the country healing and speaking to people who would simply sit on the ground to listen to Him. In fact we read very little about the Lord within the setting of the temple. He also prayed outdoors - and for us, simply being outside in the countryside can act as a way of healing by connecting with Him through the face of nature. Praising the Lord for the beauty and majesty of creation is a powerful way for us to link to Him.

Take one of the following readings out into a green open space - a garden or park:

He is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth. 2 Samuel 23: 4

The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. Isaiah 35: 1-2

- Finding a quiet spot - sink into the beauty of all that surrounds you.
- Come to the present moment, by letting go of any tension in the body and day-to-day concerns - allow yourself to just 'be'.
- Begin by praying that the Lord will help you to understand his Word as you sit and reflect upon the passage you have chosen. After 10-15 minutes you can write up any insights in your journal or simply share the thoughts of your heart with the Lord.

Closing Prayer:

Dear Lord, you hold out a branch of love and protection and draw us to where the ground is good. Bless us in your garden of life. **Amen.**

Home Worship for August 2018 by the Revd Helen Brown
August 5 Wheat and Tares: Matthew 13: 24–30

Parables of the kingdom

Wheat and other grains are small, light plants which need to be grown together in large numbers to thrive and be of use. Grains are hard and dry and less attractive than succulent fruit, but are important on a daily basis as a basic food source. *from Soul Symbols*

When sowing seeds, you hope that they germinate and grow – but so too do a lot of other seedlings – weeds. Often you can't weed them out for fear of uprooting the plants you want to grow. Otherwise you will lose those as well. You have to wait until you are sure which seedlings are weeds and those that are not. [Tares (a ryegrass) which looks much like wheat in its early stages of growth. Roman law prohibited sowing ryegrass among the wheat of an enemy, suggesting that the scenario presented here is realistic.]

And all this is a mirror of our spiritual life.

The story of the wheat and tares tells us that the kingdom of heaven within each of us is like a field ready to receive spiritual seeds and produce great abundance. However, there is also work to be done separating out the spiritual weeds also growing there.



Imagine for a moment a bare field prepared and ready for sowing – this is a picture of the ‘field’ of our outer mind. When there is the presence of openness then the Lord can develop and grow the spiritual seeds he has sown in the innermost part of us.

What has been planted in your life that is a true guide and sustains what is for the good of all?

However, alongside the spiritual seeds are weeds. Weeds as we have seen appear with the seed that is sown. They seem to sow themselves – just pop up taking advantage of the fertile prepared earth.

What needs to be weeded out in your thoughts and intentions?

When are we spiritually asleep?

To become aware of what is living in our minds and hearts is essential. It is the *servants of the Lord* that notice and recognise the *weeds* growing alongside the wheat.

What ‘serves’ and helps us to discern a true direction in living a spiritual life?

What is the ‘enemy’ of what is good for all and of what is heavenly, that allows false seeds to be sown in us?

When is what the Lord sows within us ‘ripe’ for the ‘harvest’?

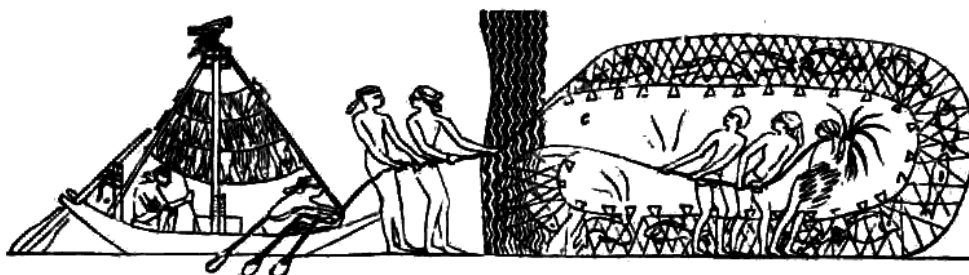
Look at how the Lord reacts. ‘It’s the enemy,’ he says. ‘Wait until harvest otherwise the wheat might be uprooted as well.’

Just as in the natural world the farmer waits for the wheat to be ripe – so it is spiritually. Wait until the time is right. Only the Lord knows this. He knows when we are ready to turn away from purely self-orientated things and allow his loving goodness and wise perception to dwell within us.

*It is according to Divine Order that things, which in the end are to be separated, should grow together; so that when they come to an end, separation may happen more easily, and spontaneously, or of *its* own accord.* paraphrased from Apocalypse Explained 911:7

August 12 The Kingdom of Heaven is like a net: Matthew 13: 47-52

A Dragnet - a heavy net that is pulled along the bottom of a river or area of water when searching for something



Bible History Online

How do you decide what is wholesome or what is ‘fishy’?

A Net - Our mouth and nostrils etc. help us to discern good food from bad. So too, does the lowest level of our mind help us discern what is spiritually good for us and what is bad. In spiritual terms,

the net symbolises our perception of what is true and good, that sifts and sorts out what we will choose to enter our mind and change our life.

How do you make choices about what is best for the good of all?

Fish - gathering knowledge from the world

Fish are like our natural curiosity, gaining knowledge wherever we go. Think about the way fish eat up everything in their path, and how excited pet fish are when they are fed.

We can be like fish when we do research, gather knowledge about how to do a project. It might be finding out how to fix the car or a new skill.

We can also 'fish for knowledge' in our spiritual lives. We can search for spiritual ideas and knowledge to help put things into perspective and to see our place in the world. It can help develop our spirituality within the world we live in.

adapted from Soul Symbols

What spiritual knowledge has helped you in your life?

Storehouse

In order that the spiritual mind may be opened up it must have a storehouse from which it may draw its supplies; since unless a person has such a storehouse he/she is empty This storehouse is in the natural mind and its memory. Here, everything we have learnt and know is stored up to be recalled when needed. Spiritual knowledge and experiences of loving goodness need to be stored in each person ready for the development of the person's inner spirit. *based on AE 790[3]*

End of the age

Can you identify times when a door closed in order for a new beginning to dawn?

To allow new spiritual life to be born in us we go through many cycles of learning spiritual ideas, trying to live them out, going through conflicts and difficult times that test our resolve to live following the Lord's guidance. In a sense, we need to come to the end of our own resources - to turn and ask the Lord to give us a life lived lovingly and truthfully. All the truth we know and use has no other meaning than to bring the love of God into the world to help others.

Prayer: Dear Lord, teach me to discern what nurtures the growth of your kingdom in myself and other people. Help me to let go of all that is contrary to your love and wisdom. Amen

August 19 The Wedding Feast is ready: Matthew 22: 1-14

Today we will be focusing on getting prepared for a wedding feast. In this parable, we hear how the invitation to come to the wedding is sent out three times before the guests respond.

The wedding feast is ready are we open and receptive?

When the Lord invites us to a wedding feast of his providing, he wants us to hear his invitation and accept him and all that he can give us. This is what he offers freely to us: to make his dwelling place within us.

As we read in Psalm 84: 'How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty!

It is hard to put into words what the Lord is offering to us in this invitation to a wedding feast – to his heavenly kingdom. Suffice it to say it takes us out of the superficial and mundane, it transforms what are the ordinary activities of life into pure joy and bliss.

This invitation is made freely to all people – the Lord yearns to come and eat with us and have us eat with him. He earnestly desires it.

The parable however tells us what our various responses might be to this invitation. Be aware that all these reactions are at one time or another part of our experience. The *servants* are the angelic messengers who are with us constantly.

- Those who refused to come – **Can you identify times when you don't want to listen to the promptings of conscience?**
- The Lord offers the nourishment that he only can offer – the oxen and fatted calf. These spiritual loves for others whose lives we touch – the kind and loving intention that we can choose to act upon. **But at times we have other priorities we don't want to change. This could be many things, status, power, our happiness above others.**
- The *servants* are killed off. **In fact, our own values are so important to us – we want to kill the angelic and heavenly influences that come and invite us to the wedding feast – these we want to rubbish and destroy, to ignore and silence.**

The consequences of all of the above are clearly shown in the story. In spiritual terms these choices bring spiritual death and the destruction of all that we have built up in terms of values, priorities and belief structures. There is no eternal life or nourishment in these.

However, the Lord never gives up on us; he tries again – he can only reach and connect with those things in us that are his.

What does the story tell us? That the Lord sends his servants -angelic messengers to the 'street corners' – we now get into the difficulties with translation. In various translations we have the alternatives of highways, crossroads and thoroughfares

The translation used by Swedenborg is as follows:

Verse 9: 'Go to the ends of the ways, and whomever you find, summon to the wedding.' (As in AC 10422) **What do the words 'the ends of the ways' evoke for you?**

Is it coming to the end of the road, the end of the ways we have been focused on in life?

The thoughts that came to me are:

- Getting to the end of our tether so we can no longer carry on in the same manner as before
- or a dawning awareness of the direction of our choices
- or a realisation of the consequences of our present intentions or loves.

August 26 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Matthew 25:1-13

This parable begins with the phrase 'the kingdom of heaven will be like' and describes this in terms of ten virgins taking their lamps and going out to meet the Bridegroom. This is not ten women but ten virgins, so to learn what the heavenly life is like we need to look at the spiritual significance of being a virgin. We remember Mary, a virgin, who had not been married or conceived. We use the term 'virgin' to describe something that has not been developed or impregnated. We use phrases such as 'virgin territory' or 'virgin earth'.

And spiritually speaking 'virgin' describes a part of us that has not had a relationship with the Lord. An aspect of us that has not received his life and so it lies outside of the heavenly life.

What does that mean? We all at times keep our faith and life within a boundary our selfish side feels comfortable with. We allow the Lord to be present only so far and keep control of what we allow him to influence. There are always parts of us that are virgin spiritually. But the heavenly life is all or nothing. The Lord loves us and desires to be with us in all aspects of our mind, heart and life. There are no half measures if we wish to be united with the Lord.

When we look at this parable we are presented with the contrast of what is 'wise' and what is 'foolish'. The wise had lamps and oil. The foolish had only lamps. If we wish to receive a heavenly life from the Lord, we are wise when we are prepared, and this involves having two essentials in our life. A lamp and oil.

A Lamp

In the time of Jesus there was no electric light: the only light was provided by what they had – oil to burn, that could be lit, and a container for that oil made out of clay. Nothing elaborate – everyday things made from clay and fruit of the olive tree.

A lamp that acts as a container, a container for the oil which can be ignited. In spiritual terms this lamp is what our outer mind learns about the Word of God. As we read the Word we gain containers of knowledge in our memory. These memories, experiences, are containers that if we are open can be a source of enlightenment – they can be ignited by the Lord to give us a different way of looking at life. Then light can shine in our mind and bring a new understanding.

*Your word is a **lamp** to my feet and a light for my path.* Psalm 119: 105
*You, Lord, are my **lamp**: the Lord turns my darkness into light.* 2 Samuel 22: 29

What shines in spiritual darkness and gives you light – guidance and direction in your life?

For the lamp to be lit there needs to be oil. Olive oil is a precious commodity – it was used as part of the sacrifices in the Tent of meeting and the Temple. It was an integral part of worship. Oil is the symbol of love, associated with joy, with the touch of healing and with the anointing of priest or king. The word 'Messiah' means literally 'anointed with oil'. The Messiah is love giving light to the world. **See:** Exodus 27:20, Psalm 18:28, Luke 12:35, Luke 10:34, Mark 6:13, Psalm 45:7, Psalm 23:5

In the inner sense of this parable the oil is love to the Lord. This is an essential part of being wise and therefore prepared for heaven - to act inwardly from the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, to use them to love wisely. We use oil to 'oil the hinges' to ease the opening of doors – and it is love that can open inner doors in us and others. It opens heaven to us and others. We cannot buy this from others – as we need to allow this loving goodness to transform and regenerate our mind and heart. The foolish virgins know the truth (and have a lamp) but live and act from selfishness. Hence in the parable it says that the door is shut. Make no mistake the Lord never shuts the door of heaven on us – but we choose to shut it from our need for our own delights and happiness.

Now take a few moments to reflect and bring before the Lord what needs his presence, the flowing in of his love and wisdom at this time.

SEPTEMBER 2 THE HARVEST SERVICE READINGS: GENESIS 8: 22; EXODUS 23: 14-19

Harvest time as we know it and celebrate it in churches today stems from a service of Harvest Thanksgiving instituted by Rev Robert Hawker, the Anglican vicar of the parish at Morwenstowe in Cornwall. Hawker, who was a Cornish patriot and poet, thought that as well as the villagers celebrating the pagan aspects of harvest, they should also give thanks to God in a special church service where they could offer gifts of their own home grown produce to the lord for the benefit of the poor.

But Hawker was only reviving a tradition that had its roots in the Old Testament as far back as the earliest chapters of Genesis when Cain and Abel brought their offerings to the Lord. A little further on in Genesis we read of God's promise to Noah, "Whilst the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat and summer and winter shall not cease." As a token of this promise God set a rainbow against a cloud in the sky.

In the book of Exodus the Lord also gave Moses other laws that the Israelites were commanded to obey. We are told that a ceremony should be held to celebrate the gathering of the first fruits, namely, the first crops produced at the beginning of the year. The first sheaf of the 'Barley harvest' was presented to God on the final day of the Passover festival. In our calendar this would be about the middle of April. Then in autumn was held the feast or festival of 'ingathering' the most popular and joyful of all Jewish festivals. This was held when all the fruit crops had been gathered.

In bygone days people realised that if the harvest was poor there was a strong possibility that they would be very hungry indeed during the coming year. I imagine that it might have been very hard for them to give the first fruits of their labour as an offering to God. I can imagine too the feelings of relief and thankfulness and joy when the harvest was good!

Today in many respects our lives and the food we eat are divorced from where food is grown. Many children do not realise that everyday foods such as cornflakes, rice crispies, chips and chocolate come from what were originally living plants. Until recently people had to work hard physically to get food. Planting, digging and weeding were hard work and often efforts were frustrated by drought or flood, animals or insects that ate them or human enemies who destroyed them. To people of those times growing crops must have convinced the ancient Israelites of the power of God to punish or to bless.

Today, of course, we know that God does not use the forces of his creation to punish. Even today, although we mostly do not notice it, the growing and harvesting of crops still underpins the whole of human activity. Without agriculture we could not live. The agricultural processes are also a picture of our own spiritual growth. During our earthly lives we are growing and developing spiritually as well as naturally. Our individual spiritual crop is the things that we have done for others in the course of our own lives, not for our own benefit but for the sake of others. It is the effort that we have made to become more like the Lord our Creator. Hopefully by the things that we have learnt and the love that we have shown our lives will be like the crop that produces a hundred fold.

May the Lord truly bless our natural harvests and the spiritual harvest of lives well lived.

PRAYER: O Lord, you are the sower of the Word bless us with the good ground of an honest and fruitful heart, that neither weeds nor thorns, the cares of this world nor the deceitfulness of riches may choke the Word and make it unfruitful in our lives. Amen

The celebration of harvest, is I think, one of the loveliest services of the year. This service of celebration and thanksgiving reminds us of the wonders of creation through all our senses. We can see the rainbow colours of fruit and vegetables, feel the texture of peel and skin, smell the distinctive earthiness, taste the sweetness of the fruit, and whilst we can't hear fruit and vegetables, we can enjoy singing the special, evocative, harvest hymns.

The purpose of all living things, whether plants or animals is to multiply and bear offspring. When the purpose is completed, fertility usually declines and the living thing dies. From the smallest bacterium to the largest mammal, from the tiniest flower to the giant redwood, all go through the same cycle of life that nothing living can escape. We ourselves are the only exception, for as the Writings of our church tell us 'The Lord's Providence has as its creation a heaven of angels from the human race.'

Alone amongst creation, human beings have the ability to bear two sorts of fruits or offspring - natural offspring, the fruit of our bodies in our children and grandchildren, and also spiritual fruit or the actions and deeds that we do in the course of our lives. Sometimes we use the phrase 'Fruits of our labours' to describe the things that we have accomplished.

In the Word of the Lord a human being is frequently compared to a plant. In Psalm 1 a good person is compared to a tree planted by a river that bears fruit at the appropriate time. Where does a tree come from? –obviously from the seed of a more mature tree. At this time of year the seasonal cycle of a year in the life of a tree is entering its autumnal phase. Foliage and flowers have grown in spring and early summer; pollination has taken place and the ovaries of the flowers have swollen to become fruit. What does a tree need to make it a successful fruit bearer? It needs to become established with strong roots within the soil; the trunk needs to have produced branches to bear leaves which feed and oxygenate the plant; and it needs to produce buds that grow into flowers.

To enable this process to take place successfully the tree needs plenty of water, fertile soil, light and space. It might also need pruning and trimming and preventative measures to guard it from moths and aphids and other pests.

The growth of a tree is a picture of the growth of our own spiritual lives. The seeds in us are the ideas and suggestions that are planted in the soil or ground of our minds. In the "parable of the sower" related by the Lord we hear what happens to some of these seeds. Ideas might die or get swallowed up but some ideas always take root and flourish in receptive parts of our minds.

Spiritually speaking we may have an intention to do something good and useful; we might need to study an idea and to think about it before we can put it into practice. With many of the ideas and principles of life we need to develop a certain maturity before we finally develop our lives in accordance with heavenly principles. When our knowledge and principles have become strong then eventually we grow to delight in them and to feel happy with them and this is the flowering stage. The culmination of knowledge and love in our lives produces beautiful fruit in the form of uses that we do for others. Of course if our principles and thoughts are hellish the resulting crop is thistles, thorns and weeds. The tree of our life is evident from the things that we do with our lives and the way in which we live them.

It is the Lord's purpose that one day we will all become angels but the development of our heavenly nature is an ongoing work. Sometimes if we examine our life tree we might see that it

requires watering, a little more food or maybe a drastic pruning of the unsatisfactory parts. At this harvest time let us think about the harvest crop which is our own life. May it be colourful, useful and bring joy to others. AMEN

PRAYER: O Lord you give us all good things. Give us thankful hearts. Amen

SEPTEMBER 16

THE BREAD OF LIFE

JOHN 6:29 -35 and 47-51; AC 3478

It doesn't stand out in the supermarket as the leading offer for the week. You don't see it stacked up in the 'two for the price of one displays.' It's not heavily promoted on television. It's not presented in elaborate packaging. It's a humble everyday product that most of us pick up and put into a basket or trolley without even thinking about.

It is your average sliced or unsliced loaf, brown or white - nothing fancy - but stick it in a toaster and it provides a quick hot meal - with marmalade or honey or even scrambled eggs for breakfast or baked beans or sardines or cheese for a quick snack. Eat it as it is with just butter, or sandwich two slices together with every type of filling you fancy. Go to an Indian restaurant and use the naan bread to mop up your curry, go Italian and have it hot with garlic butter, or Mexican and stuff it with chilli beans and mince. Wherever you go in the world, bread of some kind is a basic or staple food – a cheap, nutritious filling food. There is still the odd street corner bakery with delicious smells of home baked bread! The wonderful taste of freshly made bread – something that we miss when we eat factory made bread.

Bread is one of the earliest foods known to man. It is sometimes called the staff of life because in times past it was often the main or only food, and the lives of whole communities depended on a successful grain harvest. In Biblical times two kinds of cereal plants were used to make bread, either barley which made quite a coarse sort of bread and was usually eaten by poorer people, or wheat which made much finer bread and was eaten by better off people. Making the bread, even after the crop was sown, grown and harvested was a long process requiring great effort. After the corn was harvested it had to be threshed and winnowed to separate the grains from their outer covering and sifted to remove stalks, before being crushed or ground between large stones to make flour - usually the woman's job.

All people in Biblical times were familiar with making bread and instead of taking it for granted as we do today knew just how important it was. To get a worthwhile crop of corn you have to grow the cereals en-masse. The stalks, growing closely together, protect and shield the individual plants as they grow. The resulting grain is small and hard – quite unlike the fruits that grow on bushes and trees which tend to be sweet and juicy. Yet these small, hard, unexciting grains become food that fills and makes us feel warm and satisfied – rather than the more spectacular and easily-picked fruits. Our daily lives are not made up of spectacular things. It is the everyday acts, the routine things of life that give us satisfaction. It is the sum of many small things that make us the people we are. The small acts of kindness or things that we feel we ought to do and don't relish doing, but which nevertheless we carry out faithfully and well - such tasks as caring for others. We show our love for others in the way in which we live our lives.

In our reading from John's gospel the Lord compares himself to bread. Just as he literally fed crowds of people so he feeds us spiritually in the sacrament and throughout his Word. The food which he gives to us through the teachings in his Word sustains us, satisfies us and nourishes us. Truly the Lord himself is the living bread that comes down to us from heaven and gives life to the world.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, you are the true Bread of Life. We ask you to feed our souls with your heavenly bread and nourish us with your love. Amen

SEPTEMBER 23 SEEDS GENESIS 8:20-22; and 9: 1-3; LUKE 8:4-15; AC 932

Almost as soon as we have celebrated harvest autumn is upon us and the green and gold of summer is replaced by the brown, orange and russet as leaves change colour and fall to the ground along with any remaining fruits. The conkers that children collect are the potential chestnut trees; the spinning jennies that seem to land everywhere are the potential sycamore trees; the hips and haws on bushes are potential roses and hawthorns, and the blackberries, as well as providing fruit for the jam that I often make, are the potential bramble bushes.

We often use the analogy of seeds in our everyday lives. We might talk about 'sowing an idea' when we make a suggestion. When we talk about having 'the germ of an idea' the word germ is shorthand for germinate not for the viral influenza.

Repeatedly in the Word of the Lord the cyclic nature of seedtime followed by harvest is stressed. The promise to Noah in the book of Genesis 'Whilst the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter shall not cease.' This promise is the basis of life in this world. It reminds us that there is always a new beginning but that beginning comes from what has gone before.

Every person in this world, whether they realise it or not, is constantly the recipient of the seeds of love and truth from the Lord. Every act of goodness done in the world, whether the individual acknowledges it or not, is a result of the initial sowing done by the Lord.

Each one of us receives seed from the Lord in many different ways. If we consider the seeds that are sown through the world of nature, the numbers that never even come to fruition are mind-blowing. In the same way so many spiritual seeds never come to fruition but the supply is infinitely on-going.

In the parable of the sower we can see some of the reasons why the seeds in our minds do not grow, perhaps our minds might have stony places with little soil for nurturing ideas to take root. Other seeds are like sudden enthusiasms and ideas which start off brilliantly but the enthusiasm wears off and the idea and interest withers and dies. Some seed falls by the wayside of our lives and becomes prey to the first birds of falsity and is eaten. Yet amazingly some seed always grows in our hearts and minds for we have all been blessed with some good soil and if we cherish the seeds of goodness and truth in our lives we too will have harvests. What will our harvests be –the joy of inner peace that we have from trying to love the Lord and from trying to live a life of loving and serving others? It is ultimately the spiritual things within us that will grow to eternity.

SEPTEMBER 30 QUESTIONS GENESIS 1: 24-31

This talk is suitable for a family gathering with young children

Do you ask a lot of questions? Not questions like 'What's for tea mum?' or 'Can I have my pocket money early?' but questions that your mum and dad might find difficult to answer.

In the summer I went on a family holiday in the Yorkshire Dales. My five year old granddaughter asked me, 'Grandma why does milk come out white from cows when the grass they eat is green?' Well I'd no idea about that answer so I just said, 'Pass.'

Then a bee came along-just a bit too near my grandson for his liking. He brushed it away crossly and asked, 'Why did God make bees when they're no use to anyone and a nuisance to everyone.'

Now that was a question I thought I could answer. 'God made bees because they are very useful. People would have a lot of trouble finding food if we didn't have bees. As they fly into flowers looking for nectar to take back to their hive they accidentally pick up pollen from one plant and transfer it to another.'

I couldn't remember how the next bit worked because it's a long time since I was at school. But I did know that flowers can't produce seeds without bees pollinating them. So no bees, no fruit, no seeds, no new plants, no fruit, no vegetables! 'I guess God designed and made bees as part of this wonderful world where we all depend on one another and where everything has a use,' I concluded.

Answering questions can be stressful for grown-ups but then I had a good idea, 'Let's go to an ice cream farm!' 'You're kidding, grandma!'

But I wasn't! There is an ice-cream farm. They keep lovely Jersey cows and turn their milk into the most delicious ice cream! There's a fantastic ice cream bar with loads of different flavours, and a counter with high stools where you can enjoy ice cream with pancakes and waffles.

'What would you like madam?' Now that's a question I have no problem answering!

So from bees to grass, to cows, to milk, to ice cream – it's all a part of the wonderful pattern of creation where we are all interdependent.

Here's what the Word of the Lord says in **Genesis 1: 30-31** *To every beast of the earth and every bird of the air and to everything that creeps on the earth, where there is the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food. And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made and it was very good.*

A POEM PRAYER:

The harvests have ripened in the sun. There's plenty of food for everyone.

There's some for ourselves and more to share with all of God's people everywhere.

WORD MAKING: HOW MANY WORDS CAN YOU MAKE OUT OF HARVEST? I CAN MAKE 20 OF 3 OR MORE LETTERS. CAN YOU MAKE A 6 LETTER WORD THAT HAPPENS TO SOME PEOPLE IF THEIR HARVEST IS POOR?