

## Home Worship for July 2019 by Revd Christine Bank

**Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> July 2019      A Dead Girl and a Sick Woman      Matthew 9: 18-26**

July sees the Annual General Meeting of The General Conference of the New Church. This year the theme is Faith and a key verse which features on the front of the programme is from Matthew 9:22. "Take heart...your faith has healed you."

My Bible has the heading 'A Dead Girl and a Sick Woman' on each of the three Gospel accounts of this story, but there are differences between them; the focus today is on Matthew 9: 18-26, but this is also recorded in Mark 5: 21- 43 and Luke 8: 40-56.

It isn't unusual to find variations between accounts of an event in these Gospels and it is quite normal for me to find that the version I think I know doesn't actually exist. I'm familiar with elements of each and my memory combines them into one story, so when I do actually pick up the Bible to read it there is a sense of rediscovering just that one single story.

Looking for a sense of what is important in Matthew's account as distinct from the others for me is the simplicity and brevity of this passage. Not even the name of Jairus is recorded and the message to the woman who is healed is the briefest of the accounts. Without the additional description the healing is so simple. She touches his cloak and is known by Jesus and fully healed in that instant.

The outer garment is representing the most external aspects and the edge of that garment even more so - yet the woman's faith was such that touching just the edge of Jesus' cloak was sufficient and was all she tried to do. She knew and believed this was enough and so it proved. Together with the unnamed father who comes with the confidence he can ask Jesus to restore his recently deceased daughter to life we have a hugely powerful and very brief demonstration of the power of faith which allows the Lord's power to heal and transform.

Faith begins as a thing we hold externally, we see that others have it and that inspires confidence and some belief in us, or we find a truth in the Bible that we remember and hang onto. Only when we start to apply what we know in daily life does it truly change us and guide our ways.

### ***Apocalypse Explained 815.4 (part)***

*No other faith than that which is called historical, which at that time was a miraculous faith, was meant by this faith whereby the sick were healed; consequently by this faith many wrought miracles at that time. This faith was, that the Lord was Almighty, because He was able to do miracles of Himself; for this reason He also allowed Himself to be worshipped, which was not the case with the prophets of the Old Testament, who were not worshipped. But there must always be this historical faith before it becomes a saving faith; for a historical faith becomes a saving faith with a person by learning truths from the Word, and living according to them.*

**Prayerfully** give thanks for the faith you already hold and ask the Lord to deepen and increase this as it becomes an ever firmer and more robust base to depend on through life's challenges.

## **Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> July 2019    The Healing of a Boy with an Evil Spirit    Mark 9: 14-27**

Another healing miracle this Sunday, taken from Mark 9: 14-27 is the account of a boy with an evil spirit being healed by Jesus, as his disciples could not cast out the spirit. The father of the boy makes the very human appeal “**If you can ...**” which is a form of words Jesus pounces on and challenges. The father replies “**I believe, help my unbelief...**”

The ‘If you can do anything...’ part of this is a question within with the boy’s father and reflects his own doubt which persists even though he has brought his son to be healed. Jesus makes it clear that everything is possible with belief and the man immediately recognises that he needs the Lord’s help.

This is one of those passages which speaks so clearly to me, I recognise the idea I believe to some extent, but then everyday events of life and circumstances get in the way so easily. I need the Lord’s help to do even the most basic of things of faith – to hold onto what I already have as a starting point and then allowing it to grow and work through me and really be part of daily life.

Read back a few verses to the beginning of the chapter and see this is the first encounter with the crowds after the Transfiguration. The three disciples with Jesus saw wonderful things in that private moment and now the everyday world of doubt, need and human anguish is there in front of them again.

The extract from the Writings follows a long list of healing miracles when the Lord spoke to the person and said in various ways their faith had made them well. He healed a wide range of physical conditions, corresponding to spiritually diseased or disordered states. There is a principle of faith - being an acknowledgement of the Lord as a necessary first step - and then He is able to truly be in our life and work the miracles of changes we cannot produce for ourselves.

### ***Apocalypse Explained 815.5 (part)***

*There were three reasons why faith in the Lord healed these; first, because they acknowledged His Divine omnipotence, and that He was God; secondly, because faith is acknowledgement, (and this inner acknowledgement is what enables the Lord to be even more closely present with us rather than near us).*

*The third reason was, that all the diseases healed by the Lord represented and thus signified the spiritual diseases that correspond to these natural diseases; and spiritual diseases can be healed only by the Lord, and in fact by looking to His Divine omnipotence and by repentance of life.*

**Prayerfully** consider the things that the Lord shows you are in need of healing in your spiritual life. It may be something inside you or may extend to relationships and situations around those you know. Maybe asking, like the father in this miracle, for the Lord’s help to recognise our own needs and to have the confidence and faith to trust him is part of this for us.

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2019      Naaman Healed of Leprosy      2 Kings 5: 1-14**

In the first week the simplicity of the woman's faith in touching Jesus' cloak led to her being healed. This week let's look at 2 Kings 5: 1-14 and the account of Naaman being healed of leprosy.

The simplicity of the instructions to go and wash is almost Naaman's undoing – his outrage at being told to go to a river and wash there lead him to anger rather than compliance. Only when he is carefully calmed down by servants and reminded he would have willingly done more difficult things to effect a cure is he persuaded.

Being truly humble is a difficult step to take - and think of all that it entails for a powerful, proud and influential man to completely follow instructions from a prophet who doesn't even turn out to see him in person! So much of life is geared around our sense of self-importance and making sure we have some influence or sway in how things happen. Being willing to listen to others and take notice can be hard for us.

Sometimes others have to point out what should be obvious and our ego or sense of self has to take a conscious step back to enable progress to be made. Naaman's story is not just about a powerful man made humble but it also links to the sacrament of baptism; a sign of entry into the church and a powerful symbol which in itself does not save but is the outward sign of what is intended.

We tend to think of baptism for children with the responsibility for keeping the promises made resting with the parents. Bringing children towards an independent life includes not just the practical aspects of growing up but also supporting the development of spiritual and moral qualities and is not something we can force or impose. Parenting is a long term task and the child learns everything very gradually.

When an adult seeks baptism it is a very different commitment. An adult makes the personal choice to enter into following the pattern of Christian living in their own life and undertakes this as a conscious step in their own spiritual journey. Some aspects of this Old Testament story resonate with the almost childish sense of self being brought down a peg or two. The initially hidden but powerful prophet who won't accept gifts or allow any deflection away from the fact he serves the Lord keeps the focus on the God of Israel.

Belief this time comes after the event; the faith to send Naaman for healing is initially misdirected but when the Lord's instructions for a cure were begrudgingly followed the transformation was able to happen. Obedience to him, however grudging or unwilling at first, can be enough to allow the Lord to work in our life.

**AC4255.5** *Naaman's being healed of his leprosy by washing himself seven times in the Jordan according to the command of Elisha, represented baptism; for baptism signifies initiation into the church and into those things which are of the church; thus regeneration and the things of regeneration. Not that anyone is regenerated by baptism, but that this is the sign of it, which he should remember*

**Prayerfully** recognise a personal responsibility for following the Lord each day and that humility and obedience are the building blocks of our eventual heavenly life.

## **Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> July 2019    Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind   John 9: 1-41**

This chapter tells a complete story of the man being healed but not actually seeing Jesus until the Pharisees expel him from the temple. Then Jesus finds the man and asks if he believes – and the man then worships Jesus.

Jesus being worshipped is important, and it is also noticeable that the Old Testament prophets who were involved in healings were most definite they were not to be worshipped at all. The story of Naaman shows him returning to Elisha and recognising that it was the God of Elisha who healed him. Elisha wouldn't take even a gift as a token of thanks. The extract from the Writings for the 7<sup>th</sup> July said that the Lord did allow himself to be worshipped because *he was able to do miracles of Himself*

### ***Apocalypse Explained 815.5 (part)***

*This faith also was represented and signified by their miraculous faith; but the faith by which spiritual diseases are healed by the Lord can be given only through truths from the Word and a life according to them; the truths themselves and the life itself according to them make the quality of the faith.*

The Gospels give us a world of spiritual conflict where the spiritual boundaries were being pushed to the limits and the Lord came on earth to resist the hells and save the human race.

The 'simple' belief of following the teachings of religion, accepting them as sacred and holy and living life guided by that straightforward principle was enough for the Lord to find the people with hearts ready to welcome him into the world.

Mary and Joseph are obvious examples of those willing to obey and the disciples and others like Martha, Mary and Lazarus followed and came to believe in him. The external evidence of miracles and the personal response that what Jesus taught is true resonates deeply within.

The challenge of offering worship is one that encompasses the whole of life as it requires our own priorities to be realigned in accordance with the Lord's ways. Faith and belief must lead us on as in AC 9139 below.

**AC 9139** *Acknowledging and worshipping the Lord means living according to His commandments, that is, living the life of faith and charity.*

Prayerfully turn to the Lord acknowledging him as your Lord and Saviour. Name who he is for you, confess what he does for you, humbly acknowledge your need of him and thank him for opening your eyes to his truth and goodness.

## Home Worship for August 2019 by Revd Jack Dunion

Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> August

Please read: John 14:1-10

### Caring Angels

John 14:2 *“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?”*

One of the key ideas presented in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg is the idea of “use”. According to Swedenborg use is made up of a trilogy of end, cause & effect, the actual deed being the effect. In other words, we have an end, which is part of our will, we form an idea in our understanding of how we will go about it, which is the cause, and so both end & cause are present in the effect or outcome. The idea of usefulness involves the quality of the end. To be useful we are required to apply this trilogy of end cause & effect as honestly, justly, and industriously as we can and in everything we do. In short, usefulness is an expressed form of love through truth. Swedenborg describes heaven as “a kingdom of uses” because everyone there performs a good use according to their individual skills, talents & abilities. These heavenly uses are performed by individual angels within societies. Each individual use complements the other uses. Additionally, all societies which perform uses complement the efforts of other societies. This kingdom of uses is said to function like a single human body, which Swedenborg refers to as ‘the grand and divine man’ or ‘universal and divine human’ [HH 59]. ‘Divine’ because it is the Lord’s Divine Love flowing into the heavens which gives the angels the desire to be creative, and his Divine Truth flowing into the heavens which provides guidance for the angels so that their actions (uses) will be complementary, creating harmony across the entire heavens.

As these angels serve the Lord, and the Lord’s work consists of saving people for heaven, then the work of the angels benefits those of us who are still here on this earth. Angels in this way, by co-operating with the Lord, help bring others from earth into heaven. In looking for the closest analogy of the work the angels do, I find that the caring profession says it well. Take for example a social care team working with service users with learning disabilities. The team meets to discuss the needs of each individual service user, then devises care plans which are designed to improve the service user’s quality of life. Each plan is tailored to the individual and implemented by those who feel drawn to a particular aspect of the work. If the service user likes swimming for example, they are matched with a care assistant who also likes swimming. The reward lies in seeing this plan achieve the desired objective - helping improve the quality of someone’s life. The joyful feelings generated are then shared by the whole team and the benefits are universal.

This is how we might envisage heaven. The angels, working together within each society, seek to help improve the quality of spiritual life for those in this world. The desire to serve the Lord and help people is their end in mind. The Lord’s overall end is to create a heaven of angels from the human race. Their cause is therefore truths which support this end, which they gain in their understanding from the Lord, and so the end, through the cause into the affect becomes a use. The rewards are universal because each addition to heaven increases the general sphere of happiness there and this without end. Hence the perfect, ever increasing, ever expanding, human system, called ‘the Grand Man, eternally increases the happiness of the Lord’s created children.

*“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?”*

**Prayer: Dear Lord, teach us to listen and obey, that your truth will be in us and your good will be done through us, until that day when we join with the angels of heaven and joyfully work in and for your heavenly kingdom. Amen**

**Sunday 11th August**

**Please read: Psalm 23**

**Reading the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm**

Psalm 23:1 *“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.”*

Out of the 150 Psalms the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is probably the most popular. It was also the subject of a famous hymn, “The Lord’s my shepherd”, which draws its inspiration from the psalm. It is often read to help people who are going through difficult periods in their lives and it seems to touch people very deeply in its expressions of empathy and hope. The Psalm can roughly be grouped into three sections. It begins with the words *“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.”* We might think of how sheep rely on the shepherd to lead them to the best grazing places and keep them safe. Sheep know their shepherd and follow him only; they know he will provide for all their needs. The Lord compares himself to a good shepherd in John 10:11 when describing his love for and commitment to his people and the way in which he laid down his life for us his sheep.

The second part of the psalm describes how we can *“walk through the valley of the shadow of death”* and reassures that we needn’t fear anything, even during the worst times in our lives or while we endure the deepest temptations; the Lord is always there with us. High places represent heavenly states and so valleys, being the opposite of high places, represent very low states, and the shadow of death describes further the depth of these temptation states. We can, even in the midst of a disaster, still be calm and at peace within, when we know the Lord is looking after our spiritual life.

The third part of the psalm describes how the Lord prepares a table in the midst of our enemies. Our enemies are of course the evil spirits who try to harm us by manipulating our emotions and trying continually to turn our thoughts to evil. To prepare a table means that the Lord can still feed our spirits with heavenly goodness, even when those around us or within us are trying to harm us. The Lord himself demonstrated this when he allowed his own people to take his very life away, that he might be able to save even those who harmed him.

Such love is only possible for us if we have the Lord’s life in us. We could therefore apply this psalm in our lives today. First we can grow a deep trust and reliance on the Lord to look after our spirit. By following him alone we refuse to do wrong and only try to do the good which our good shepherd teaches us. Secondly, in times of deep spiritual temptations, we should call on the Lord. If we have truly followed him and we know this in the deepest part of our being, all the accusations etc. which the hells try to use against us, cannot and will not be inwardly believed by us and cannot harm us.

And thirdly, if we are following the Lord, relying on him to meet our every need and we have achieved that inner peace which the world can neither give nor take away, then he will prepare a table for us and feed us with heavenly food, even in the presence of our enemies. If people have wronged us we needn’t react out of hate or vengeance, but we can instead see them too as victims who are either ignorant of truth or haven’t yet had the strength of faith to rise above their own selfish and worldly emotions and thoughts.

The Lord is the true shepherd, no real or lasting harm can come to those who rely on him completely; who read his Word, seek his truth and apply it in their lives. Such a person is being led by the good shepherd, day by day, led that is towards their heavenly home prepared with loving care. Ultimately, such a person comes among others the same as themselves and lives an eternal life of useful service unhindered by bad spirits and led by the Lord alone.

*“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.”*

**Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, our true Shepherd, we love you and trust you and wish to be led by you. Please remove anything from our lives that would separate us from your loving care, so that we will always and forever be led by you to the greenest of pastures and the life giving waters of truth which flow from your Holy Word. Amen**

**Sunday 18th August**

**Please read: Matthew 5:1-12**

### **The Poor**

Matt. 5:3 *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

Whenever there is a downturn in the economy many people experience a sharp rise in the number of charities and sales people phoning their homes, looking to boost their income. Sales people are usually trained and therefore very good at what they do and we can often find ourselves wrestling with certain emotions. These emotions often appeal to our obligations as Christians and we may feel sympathetic or even guilty, that we have more material wealth than those who are poor and needy, and we can't refuse to give them what they seek. So how do we as Christians respond in these situations and what do the Writings of our church have to say on this?

First it may be useful to look at where these “emotions” originate. We read in the book Arcana Caelestia (AC) 5008[2]: *“It is a truth natural not spiritual, within the church, that good ought to be done to the poor.”* And in AC 5023 we read that *“unspiritual natural good is easily convinced that falsity is truth and that truth is falsity.”*

We can see here that we should at least consider the potential for natural good in us to be producing these doorstep emotions. Here we see a distinction made between natural truth and spiritual truth and it tells us that, the idea we should do good to the poor is, on its own, a natural truth. Natural truths however, merely act as recipient vessels for spiritual things to flow into so without the spiritual idea of doing good to the poor this truth cannot have any life in it from the Lord. What then is the spiritual idea of doing good to the poor? Passage AC 5008 [2] continues:

*“For they (spiritual people) say in their hearts that not all are poor who call themselves poor, and that among the poor there are those who live most wickedly, and fear neither God nor men.”*

It is clear here that for this truth to be spiritual it needs to have a discerning element to it, based on the character of the poor person, or the nature of the group we give our support to. The confusion arises from us feeling the need to make decisions based on natural emotions alone. These often take the form of sympathy or guilt and only appear to be good. So we shouldn't be left feeling guilty because we refuse to give in to these emotions and not give our money to anyone who stirs up these feelings when clearly it's not charity and only looks like charity when seen from the light of this world.

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

**Prayer: Loving and faithful Lord, grant me the serenity to know the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen**

**Sunday 25th August**

**Please read: Genesis 6:9-22**

### **The Ark and the Flood**

Gen. 6:17 *"I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish."*

We are all too well aware that the decline of the Christian church has brought the need for change to our very doorstep. We have perhaps sensed the inevitability of this for decades now. It would seem that our own church has reached a critical moment in our history, and many have had to take the brave step of moving out of the building or cease meeting as a church altogether. In thinking about the process of decline more generally, I am reminded of that ancient story, affectionately known as "Noah's Ark". In the search for the origins of human species this ancient story has long been discounted, on the basis it's no longer relevant. That which has been unknown till this day though is that the story of Noah's Ark can tell us what is happening within the church today, and what will happen in the future. It can therefore be a guide to us today in our present situation. Let's look at the main highlights of the story: we are told wickedness had increased greatly on the earth and, but for a few within the Ark, a great flood is destroying everything.

Within the Ark is everything needed to make a fresh start upon the earth, and everything outside is to be destroyed by a flood. It will be useful to look at what has being preserved within the Ark and what this represents. First let's look at that outside the ark which is to be destroyed. As we read in Genesis 6:17 *"I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth..... Everything on earth will perish"*. What is meant by these floodwaters and that which is to be destroyed on the earth? We know that water, when mentioned in the Word, means truth. That is why it is said to quench the thirst of the soul. The psalmist says, *"My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."* [42.2] And in Matthew's Gospel: *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."* [5.6]

Water means truth. But as with all things in the Word, it can also mean its opposite, which is falsity. In the case of the great flood, it means a flood of falsities. By the earth is meant the church, throughout which there has been a great flood of falsities. But just because the church is full of false doctrines, doesn't mean that true doctrine has stopped existing; false doctrines are truths which have been twisted into what is false. Falsities are like contaminated water. If the contamination is removed, the water is still there. And if falsity is removed the truth is still there. In Exodus 15:22-27 the thirsty Israelites find water at the pool of Marah, but it's contaminated. Moses is commanded to throw a log into the water, after which it turns sweet and becomes safe to drink again. When that which is false is removed, the water is still there, so too do truths remain when falsities are removed. It is similar in the story of Noah's Ark.

Noah and his family going into the Ark with all the animals, represent truths and goods being separated out and kept safe while the flood of falsities destroys the external things of the Church, which have been contaminated. No matter what is happening to the church today, the essential goods and truths of the church are being kept safe. The Christian church has been swept away by a flood of false teaching, teaching which was drawn from the Word; we might call such false teachings, contaminated truths. But the essential goods & truths of the church are still there. The presence of falsities bears witness to this as they couldn't exist without them. The goods and truths themselves are like water, they are still there, preserved over millennia, safely sealed in & riding on top of the flood of falsities. Everything needed for a fresh start, a New Church, is safe within the Ark. And just like those in the Ark, some day they will re-emerge, to make a new start and form a New Church upon the earth - but not until all the things of the church which are false have been totally swept away.



We shouldn't be surprised at what's happening to the church; neither should we fear it. The Lord, through his Word and through the Writings of our church, has told us this would happen. It's almost obvious what is happening today. Think about it, churches are all empty because of false teaching. But the truths people seek are still there, within the Word; safely sealed in while the flood and the destruction of the church goes on outside the Ark, as it were. The truth is still there and the good can still emerge from these truths, but not until the flood of falsity is gone.

So what does this mean for our church today? Well surely it gives us an indication of what we need to preserve within our church! What are the essentials? What do we need to bring into the Ark? Is it the buildings? Is it the pulpit, the stained glass windows? Is it the printed books and the old Bibles? Perhaps it is these too; but that which we definitely need to preserve, is keeping what is written in the old Bibles and the printed books inscribed on our hearts. What we need to keep safe from the flood devastating the church today is a genuine love for the Lord and a love for one another. In Rev 21:5 "*He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"*" So let each of us build our Ark and preserve in it that which is truly important in the church. Let us keep it written on our minds and inscribed in our hearts, and rise above the storms of life riding high on the waves of change.

**Prayer: All seeing Lord Almighty, help us to put our trust in you and know that your mighty providence is over all things at all times and that your love for us is deeper than the deepest ocean. Let us then experience that peace which passes all understanding, which this world can neither give, nor take away. Amen.**

## Home Worship for September 2019 by Revd Gillian Gordon

**September 1<sup>st</sup> 2019**

**Take my yoke upon you**

**Matthew 11:28-30**

A popular saying nowadays is “Life is a journey” and originally Christianity was called THE WAY and being a Christian is a spiritual journey.

If you were on a journey or perhaps on a cruise and you landed in a strange country you had never visited before and you knew nothing at all about, I am sure you would love to have a local guide to steer you around and help you. If events got unnerving in this strange place you might want to get closer to the guide who understood what was going on and knew how to cope and protect you. Jesus offers to act as our guide and protect us in both spiritual and natural life and to help us through good times and difficult times with the following words from Matthew 11 verses 28 to 30: **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”**

So, are you lost or weary? Are you carrying a heavy burden? Do you need rest? Jesus here is inviting those who answer “Yes” to take on his yoke and become his yoke-mate. Yokes were common in Jesus’ day. Yokes were made for oxen so that the animals could work together as a team and not be hurt by the burden they carried. Each yoke was hand made to suit each individual animal so it could deal with its work more easily. Jesus as a carpenter probably would have made many yokes.

Often an experienced and big ox was yoked to a smaller inexperienced ox so that the older one could drive the way and the smaller one learn from it. Jesus is offering to act in a similar way with us, sharing our loads and burdens and guiding us on the best way to go forward in life.

Imagine yourself, then, yoked to Jesus. Your burdens are not removed because that is your lot and your individual learning process, but Jesus offers to be your yoke-mate and he wants to pull through life with you. He has fit you with a yoke that is perfectly made for you and him to work together, if you are willing to share that yoke. It is rather like the old sayings, ‘A problem shared is a problem halved’, and ‘A friend in need is a friend indeed’.

Despite our burdens and workload Swedenborg reassures us that with the Lord’s guidance and help it is not so hard to live the life that leads to heaven as might be supposed. What reassuring words!

*prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for inviting us to take your yoke upon us. Help us so that the heaviness of the world’s yoke doesn’t break us down. In your loving kindness, you bring us to the point of humbleness where we can encounter your rest. Bind us together, Lord, and lift us up. In Your Name. AMEN.*

**September 8<sup>th</sup> 2019**

**Seedtime and harvest**

**Psalms 65:9-13**

**While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease. Genesis 8:22**

September is the traditional month for holding Harvest Festival services. It is that time of mellow fruitfulness and Harvest Festival seems a specially colourful, joyful and thankful service. Here are some prayers for celebrating the harvest that the Lord so generously and lovingly supplies:

Dear Lord, we thank you for breathing your own life into our being... that you give us the gift of life. You placed us on this earth with its flowers and fruits, minerals and waters and living creatures. At harvest time the earth reaches the peak of its fruitfulness. It depends on us to praise you by harvesting its goods in ways which ensure there will be harvests in the future. You made us custodians of the earth which you created: may we be worthy of your trust in us. Amen

We thank you for rain and sun and insects to pollinate crops; for farmers who work with nature and preserve the beauty and diversity of God's creation...

and for wild creatures which enjoy the harvest of berries, nuts, grains and seeds And for the soil, rich and precious, home to countless living creatures which maintain fertility and give us food and life...

for grace to recognize we are part of God's creation with responsibilities to care for God's earth and our fellow creatures, including farm animals. Amen

*You crown the year with your goodness, and your paths overflow with plenty. May the pastures of the wilderness flow with goodness, and the hills be girded with joy.*

*May the meadows be clothed with flocks of sheep and the valleys stand so thick with corn that they shall laugh and sing.* From Psalm 65

**September 15<sup>th</sup> 2019      Angels – God's Secret Agents      2 Kings 6:8-23**

Do you enjoy Spy Stories? I do. John Le Carré has written many novels, based on his own experience as a British spy, which have proved so popular they became best sellers. One particularly popular book was made into both a film and a television series – 'Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy'. Due to the nature of their work spies need to be covert, and have no doubt saved many lives and dangerous situations through their undercover activities. They are invisible to the general public so we are unaware of their activities on our behalf.

Our Church's teachings reveal that with each one of us there are two angelic influences and two bad influences trying to guide us toward either good or evil words and actions. It can seem sometimes as though the bad influences are winning, or at least are very strong. Yet the Bible and the Writings tell us that the least angel has more power than a whole lot



of evil and that there are angels everywhere to help us.

Look at the story in 2 Kings 6:17 in the Old Testament when Elisha's attendant thought the game was up:

**Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who**

are with them." Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the LORD opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. [6:15-17]

Psalm 91 tells us,  
*If you say, "The LORD is my refuge,"  
and you make the Most High your dwelling,  
no harm will overtake you,  
no disaster will come near your tent.  
For he will command his angels concerning you  
to guard you in all your ways;  
they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.* Psalm 91:9-12

So when you feel the chips are down and you are threatened and alone in your fight against evil in others or yourself, how about taking this advice from 2 Chronicles 32.7?

**"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than him."**

**September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2019**

**Marriage at Cana**

**John 2:1-11**

The changing of the water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana was recorded in John as "the beginning of miracles." According to John this was the start of Jesus' ministry.

Just like today, when we get together as family and friends to mark birthdays, weddings and anniversaries, this was a family occasion with Mary, Jesus' mother, there with her eldest son and his disciples. And, as in all such celebrations of landmarks in peoples' lives, food and wine play an important part in the festivities. However the bridal party had run out of wine.

Mary said, "There is no wine." (It's interesting that at that time wine was always watered down, two parts wine to three parts water.) Water and wine both represent truth, but water on the natural plane and wine on the spiritual plane. The Lord made use of the six vessels on hand – they were filled with water – this represents truth on the natural plane, but he commanded the servants to "Draw out now and bear unto the governor of the feast", which means we should use the truth we have learnt to promote the union of good and truth. This is water changed into wine...using knowledge of the truth in meeting your daily problems and helping others in need. In other words, applying spiritual truths to everyday life as the need arises and not dealing with problems in a worldly or vengeful way.

Mary represents the church and it is through the church we should bring the Lord's truth into view – and that is what Mary does in the story. Instinctively Mary turned to Jesus when something went wrong. She knew her son so well. It is thought that Joseph, Mary's husband, died early on and it is possible Jesus, being unmarried, was still at home at the age of 30 – most unusual in Jewish men at that time – because he had to be the breadwinner for the rest of the family, probably working as a carpenter, like Joseph. Let's think of that special occasion about 2000 years ago when Jesus enjoyed himself with his family and friends at a family celebration – and turned natural truth into spiritual truth, water into wine.

*A closing prayer:* Dear Lord, for all the times when I was aware of your help today, all the times when your unseen presence seemed so near, thank you... But for all the ways

you worked behind the scenes, unknown to me, moments when heaven-sent angels moved on my behalf in ways I'll never know, thank you for those also Lord. Amen

**September 29<sup>th</sup> 2019**

**Holy Supper**

**Matthew 26:17-29; Luke 22:7-20**

The Holy Supper is a living thing because it carries with it a living correspondence. When we take the elements of bread and wine, without even realising it, we simultaneously take in the celestial and spiritual things represented by them or to put it another way, corresponding to them.

The word “correspondence” means an acting together. When a person sincerely eats the bread and drinks the wine, the spiritual counterparts of these elements—the love of what is good and of what is true—are absorbed unconsciously by their spirit. While nourishing the body, the person is at the same time nourishing their spirit.

When a communicant thinks of bread and wine, angelic spirits perceive the spiritual things, which these represent. The angels are stimulated to reflect on the Lord’s love toward angels and people. So it doesn’t matter if there are just two or three sharing communion together, because they are connecting with many angels at the same time who are moved to draw spiritually close to the people at the communion table. By doing so the angels bring with them the sphere of their heavenly affections. This sphere affects the spirit or mind of a person, imprinting upon it all the loves and delights which this sphere contains. How does this happen? It happens according to the ability of the individual to receive the sphere—that is, according to their own kindness and their faith.

When people, through the Holy Supper, receive heaven into their minds, they also receive the Divine Humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. For this reason the teachings of the New Church are that the whole of the Lord’s redemption is in the Holy Supper.

It may surprise you to hear that most of the celestial and spiritual benefits received in the Communion will be clearly and fully recognized only after death. Then the person will begin to experience, with growing understanding and joy, all the good affections and thoughts they had formerly received. Then they will begin to understand and delight in all the divine truths.

When we understand the holiness of the Lord’s Supper and try to worthily approach his table, we can join with the psalmist who wrote,

**“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord.’ Our feet shall stand within your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is built as a city that is joined together.” Psalm 122:1-3**

