

E-READ

The General Conference of the New Church **Articles and Letters**

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Easter Worship Suggestions

by Revd John Elliott

Attached with this bumper Easter edition of E-Read is a selection of worship suggestions for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Day, kindly provided by the Revd John Elliott.

Good Friday Poem

shared by David Friend

From the 'Intellectual Repository' for April 1826, a poem and attributed to C. D.

On Good Friday

"Tis finish'd," lo, our blest Redeemer cries;
The Man of Sorrows bows his head and dies:
For us the Saviour has resign'd his breath,
For us has triumph'd over sin and death.

To save mankind from misery and woe,
Jehovah GOD appear'd as man below;
In vain th' infernal hosts their strife maintain'd;
His mighty arm the glorious victory gain'd!

To him then let our songs of praise ascend,
To that Great God whose mercy knows no end;
For all are objects of his tender care,
And all alike his benefits may share.

When death's unerring dart shall set us free
From this abode of sin and misery,
Then, Blessed Lord, receive our souls above,
Where all is heavenly peace, and joy, and love.

Re: Suggestions for Palm Sunday

by *Richard Cunningham*

I am sure we all appreciate Revd John Elliott's "Suggestions for Palm Sunday" published in E-Read no 31. I found the material useful and interesting.

However, I was at something of a loss concerning the hymns he suggests. Which Hymn-Book is he taking the numbers from? I was able to match his numbers in "Songs for Worship" which can be found in many of our buildings as it was published by our organisation in 1986. Perhaps contributors who suggest hymns could also give a tune name and metrical indication, such as:

All glory, praise and honour. Tune: St Theodulph Metric: 7676 & chorus

O for a seraph's golden lyre. Tunes: Pembroke, Ravendale Metric: 886D

Christian, seek not yet repose. Tune: Vigilante Metric 7773

Jesus the Gardener

by *Alan Misson*

Suggested readings:

John 19:40-42; John 20:11-16; Genesis 2:8,9; Genesis 3:8,9;
Matthew 26:36; Mark 14:32,33; Luke 22:39,40; John 18:1

When you read that Mary Magdalene supposed that the resurrected Jesus was the gardener you might easily dismiss the idea as something quite incidental to the account of the events of the first Easter. Or you might pause and reflect on some of the other gardens mentioned in the Word and begin to see Mary's misunderstanding in a new light.

I don't often quote poetry but here is a piece by Dorothy Frances Gurney, the writer of the well known hymn: *O perfect love, all human thought transcending* – number 315 in *Songs for Worship*. Dorothy was the granddaughter of a Bishop of London, the niece of a Bishop of Colchester and the daughter of a Rector of St Andrew Undershaft in the City of London.

God's Garden

*THE Lord God planted a garden
In the first white days of the world,
And He set there an angel warden
In a garment of light enfurled.*

*So near to the peace of Heaven,
That the hawk might nest with the wren,
For there in the cool of the even
God walked with the first of men.*

*And I dream that these garden-closes
With their shade and their sun-flecked sod
And their lilies and bowers of roses,
Were laid by the hand of God.*

*The kiss of the sun for pardon,
The song of the birds for mirth,--
One is nearer God's heart in a garden
Than anywhere else on earth.*

*For He broke it for us in a garden
Under the olive-trees
Where the angel of strength was the warden
And the soul of the world found ease.*

Jesus often spoke about the processes of sowing, planting and weeding and about good and bad soil. Now whilst we tend to picture these in terms of farming they are just as applicable in terms of smaller scale gardening.

Jesus also talked about his hoped for relationship with us by describing himself as a vine - *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.* [John 15:5]

And he also reminds us of the need for pruning - *Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.* [John 15:2]

The book of Genesis invites us to imagine the Garden of Eden as a paradise created by God and as a place in which he walked.

Gardens continue to be mentioned in one context or another throughout the Old Testament, for example in these words of the prophet Isaiah: *For the Lord comforts Zion; he comforts all her waste places and makes her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song.* [Isaiah 51:3]

But in the New Testament there are just two specific gardens mentioned, the one where he was crucified and in which there was a new tomb, and the one we know as the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives where he prayed with his disciples and uttered these words: *Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.* [Luke 22:42]

The Teachings for the New Church offer us the insight that a garden pictures that part of our mind, our understanding, which is able to receive the seeds of truth from the Lord in his Word. From tiny seeds plants develop and grow and ultimately bring forth fruit. In the same way even the smallest of true ideas can develop and grow in our thinking to the point where we can apply it in life and it begins to bring forth something truly good - spiritual fruit.



But this doesn't happen by accident nor by our own will power but by the ever present nurturing and caring life and love that flows from the Lord as our spiritual gardener.

When we go astray, when spiritual weeds develop and bad thoughts begin to choke the good ones, he offers us his help in weeding them out. And when good and true ideas have taken hold in our minds but yet become misshapen by foolish approaches to life, he offers us his help in pruning away the ideas that can never bring good results, making our whole spiritual life much stronger and more productive.

Truly the Lord is our Gardener.

Easter is the time for celebrating the Lord's triumph over the power of the hells and his resurrection and glorification - the uniting of his Humanity with his Divinity so that we could be in freedom to come to know him person to person.

This process of glorification was achieved through Jesus overcoming all temptation right up to and including his final temptations in Gethsemane and on the cross, thus in places where there were gardens.

Although you cannot find this directly in the Teachings for the New Church it seems to me that what takes place in temptation is in some ways pictured by the process of pruning. Because, when in the Lord's power we overcome in temptation, the false thoughts and bad feelings involved in the temptation are removed and replaced by renewed true thoughts and good feelings and we become spiritually strengthened.

For us this process comes from the Lord fighting on our behalf against the things leading us astray.

But for the Lord himself, in the Garden of Gethsemane and in the Garden of the Crucifixion the Lord fought from the power of the Divine itself at the very core of his own being.

Might we perhaps see this as the Lord pruning himself - acting as his own gardener so that in Gethsemane and at the crucifixion he carried out the final pruning away of the very last traces of the frail humanity that he had received from his mother Mary?

Perhaps then it is not surprising at all that when Mary Magdalene encountered Jesus in the Garden of the Resurrection she supposed he was the gardener.

To close here is an abridged extract from Arcana Caelestia 3318:5

The Lord imposed Divine order on everything within Himself by means of the very severe conflicts that went with temptations that nothing remained of the human He had derived from the mother, so that He was not made new as any other human being but was made altogether Divine.

For people, who are made new through regeneration, nevertheless retain within themselves the inclination towards evil; indeed they retain the evil itself but are withheld from it by the inflow of the life of the Lord's love. But the Lord cast out completely everything evil that was His by heredity from his mother and made Himself Divine. This is what in the Word is called Glorification.

Crosses and Crucifixes *by Geoffrey Bentley*

What's the difference? A cross is plain. A crucifix has the body of Christ upon it. In many Christian churches are a lot of crucifixes. From my experience of French Roman Catholic cathedrals, there are very many gruesome examples. If the Lord's

head is upright, he is still alive. If the head is leaning on one side, he has died. If the fundamental need of faith is to acknowledge our Lord's suffering then, I suppose these images are helpful.

Do not misunderstand me. I realise that our Lord suffered physically as did the two thieves crucified with him. BUT I also realise that the spiritual torment is beyond my understanding. He was crucified by people He loved, whom He wanted to save from themselves, and with all of the venom and hatred which the hells could muster.

For many Christians, the plain cross is an emblem of their faith. Many women wear a gold cross suspended from a gold chain round their necks.

Most New Churches of my experience do not have a cross on the Communion Table. Instead, we have the Open Word, often illuminated. This reminds us that our Lord is most present in His Word. 'The veil has been torn down' and the Word is revealed in all of its power and glory. The internal sense has been opened to us and we can see a new, great light.

What does the cross mean for us? I have searched the Writings of Swedenborg and New Church Commentaries. The two clearest interpretations are in Apocalypse Explained and in Rev Paul Vickers' exposition of the gospel of Mark.

In A.E. 655 we read, "the cross represents the destruction of good. Man's proprium (selfhood) against which he is to fight."

In 'Person to Person', the gospel of Mark on page 260, Paul Vickers writes;-

"We all have a cross on which to crucify our Lord. It is the selfish heart of our being, the feeling that we matter first, our fundamental assumption that life was provided to satisfy our desires. Against this, the unselfish love of God is nailed down, totally helpless and slowly dying. Not one of us will escape the agony of realising this crucifixion of life in our self interest.

Until we realise just what our selfish wanting does to God's gift of love, we shall not be able to reject our self-love, so that true love can be resurrected in us."

For me, this makes very clear that the cross represents something evil within us all. Wearing a cross can remind the wearer of this.

Personally, I find the symbols of alpha and omega more fitting for me in the New Church. Some of our ministers have these images on their vestments. I am glad.