

January 5 I am the vine

Jesus's words "I am the vine", may well be familiar to us. They are worth reading again in **John 15: 1-8**. There are some musical settings, and at the annual General Conference meeting in 2012 the Revd Becky Jarratt introduced one she had written. Others may be found on the internet, if you wish to listen now.

Verses 4 & 5 seem to be the nub: the Lord is the vine and we are the branches. This makes it clear that the good [the fruit] we do comes from the Lord and not from ourselves: "*Apart from me you can do nothing.*" There is a warning too, in **verse 6**, that those who don't "*remain*" in him will be "*cast into the fire*": here we are warned that evil has its own punishment, which is separation from the Lord and being consumed by our own desires.

Also note that here the Word implies that we separate ourselves from the Lord, but He does not separate Himself from us. Again, "The branch cannot bring forth fruit from itself" [v4] shows us that there is no life and no result except in our receiving life from the Lord.

But it's worth looking in more detail at some of the words. In verse 2 the Word speaks about our regeneration. The Lord removes our evils one by one, and attaches good things instead, like a graft onto a vine. The Lord also improves the goods which we do, and perfects them: "*and every [branch] that brings forth fruit, He prunes it, that it may bring forth more fruit.*" It's the vinedresser (i.e., farmer) who does this work – that role represents the Lord, and so we are reminded that it's the Lord who does the work of our regeneration, not us.

As ever, the Word has two inner senses, one of which applies to us, and one about the Lord Himself. In the previous three paragraphs I have dwelt briefly on the message about us. But in 'pruning branches' the Lord is describing His overcoming temptation and removing evils that He inherited from His mother's human nature. That process is part of His glorification, and because of that the human race is able to be united with God (often referred to as 'the Father') through the divine human of Jesus (often referred to as 'the Son.')

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we thank You for Your Word and the messages it brings to us in simple pictures. May we read it diligently and prayerfully, in hope that we may understand You and Your works for us. We pray for our families and friends in need, and hope that they too find comfort in Your Word and through our kindly acts for them. And we praise You for our life, and our joy, and Your promise of heaven now and in the future. Amen.

January 12 Twelve spies are sent into Canaan

I don't know if you know it, but here is a child's song, suitable for Church or Sunday school use:

*Twelve men went to spy out Canaan, (Ten were bad, two were good)
What do you think they saw in Canaan? (Ten were bad, two were good)
Some saw giants, big and tall! Some saw grapes in clusters fall,
Some saw God was in it all. (Ten were bad, two were good)*

You can see it performed on the internet <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZzJqxe-Vlk> (or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLbDGn-vo38>) and read about this song in the internet encyclopaedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Twelve_Spies The story (in its original form, it is much longer) can be found in **Numbers 13:1-33**. Please read that story now, and if you have an internet access, listen to the performance.

Once I'd read the Bible story, I began to find in the song some meaning, and I'm sure that meaning is in the Bible passage too. Here's my feeling of what this is all about.

We are the Israelite tribes in the wilderness. Or what is the same thing, our spiritual life can be represented by the story of the Israelites. The Lord asks us to explore our better selves, by asking to "spy out" the land of Canaan. Every part of us is to consider a future in a promised land, Canaan, which is our promise of heaven. The number twelve is used in the Word when all parts of a whole are meant. The twelve princes or chiefs are taken from the whole nation of Israel, and variously represent some important aspect.

The spies visit and explore. They are there for forty days, and that number always indicates temptations. They see giants and fortified cities. They see and collect large bunches of fruit. The giants and cities represent our fears and weaknesses, our feeling that becoming heavenly is "all too much for me." The fruit shows that we understand that there are many good things there, if we could overcome our fears and enter.

The twelve spies return. Ten give a report that it's too difficult; in that the song words suggest they are 'bad.' Two give a report that the Israelites would be able to conquer, and in the song they are referred to as 'good.' Don't we often make just a feeble effort, about just two in ten parts of us in favour?

And then a comment is added in the song that is only implied by the biblical text that "some saw God was in it all." Even though these words are not directly in the biblical text, they do remind me that the Lord is in every action and is always trying to bring us to Himself and His life, which is the action of His Divine Providence.

Internet homework: you can find this story and research its meaning using the New Christian Bible Study site (<https://newchristianbiblestudy.org/>)

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, today and every day I ask for Your help in overcoming all the parts of me which are lazy or wrong. Please help me to make choices so that those parts can be replaced one by one with new parts that are good and true. And also, Lord, help me to help others too, both in simple direct ways, and in their search for You. Thank You for all that You give us. Amen.

January 19 The Faith of the New Church

There is one God, in whom is the Divine Trinity, and He is the Lord God, the Saviour, Jesus Christ. Saving faith is to believe in Him. Evil actions are not to be done, because they are of the hells and from the hells. Good actions are to be done, because they are of God and from God. And these are to be done by a man as if from himself; but it ought to be believed that they are from the Lord, working in man and by him.

We are probably all familiar with 'the Faith' which I have copied from the red 'Worship' book issued by Conference in 1972. Most of us have said it many times in worship. But it struck me today what an excellent summary of our belief it is.

We do believe in Jesus Christ as our God, that He is (and was), and He made us so He can love us.

Some have said that we include the words about the Trinity to be more 'acceptable' to the majority of the other Christian churches, but in fact God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit spoken of in the New Testament. We think of the 'Father' in the sense of the immortal and somewhat inaccessible God, and known mostly as Jehovah in the Old Testament. We can think of Him as the cause or origin of everything.

We think of the 'Son' as Jesus, but in many Gospel stories this name draws attention to the human sinful nature He obtained from Mary His mother; it draws our attention to His overcoming all those evils during His life on earth, saving mankind from the damnation which otherwise would have overtaken them. We also think of Jesus as the God whom we can see is like us and we can easily relate to. In reality, however, we are like Him, drawing our humanity from His original supreme humanity. While on earth Jesus had a body, so this aspect is like an ordinary human having a body, but his soul was Divine.

The 'Holy Spirit' is mentioned in the Gospels too, and here we like to think of the activity of the Lord. We will learn more about the Lord's activity just below.

So our Lord does have three aspects, but we would not find it useful to split that into three different people. Rather we think about the soul, body and activity of the Lord, which is how we in the New Church prefer to think of the Lord as a 'trinity.'

We say 'Saving faith is to believe in Him.' This is not a simple fact "I agree that God exists," but rather a strong sense that each of us must make our best efforts to live by His law, and therefore to honour Him in keeping it. In that way we will do good to all our fellow men and women.

The last three statements are about not doing evil, about doing good, and these done by us as if by ourselves. These sum up the way the Lord saves us. We have freedom to choose to do good, and when we do so, the good 'sticks' and we become more like angels in the heavens. Our eternal life in one of the heavens will be because the Lord has saved us when we overcame temptation and chose good and its joy. However, behind the scenes, and very well hidden from us, the Lord is working to keep us alive: alive in our choice, and having all the good flow into us from Him via the angels in heaven, so as to keep our souls alive.

Prayer: Lord, we thank You for all that You have done for us, in making Your New Church known to us, and giving us freedom to accept it. We praise You for Your love and care. We wish to choose You, and help in Your care for others. Thank You again, Lord. Amen.

January 26 Charity and Good Works

Recently I was reminded of some Sunday worship sessions held at Purley Chase when Revd David Gaffney was the leader there. One of the topics he covered was 'Charity.' He made it clear that in New Church thought, Charity is a spiritual topic concerned with helping our fellow men and women reform and regenerate, so that they may become angels in the next life. He also explained that what is commonly referred to as 'charity' in common speech, giving money to good causes, is called 'Good Works' in the doctrine of our church. Swedenborg refers to them that way in his work 'True Christian Religion' (TCR).

I felt that it might be helpful to explore this topic further. In TCR 422 Swedenborg notes that spiritual charity happens when we deal with others fairly and faithfully. This applies to every part of our lives, both at work and at home. I have given some more thought to this, and make some suggestions here about how we can be 'fair' and 'faithful' in situations we may find ourselves. Each person must consider for him/herself what they think is correct on each occasion.

My first suggestion for spiritual charity is listening carefully and thoughtfully when someone has big problems in their life – perhaps a period out of work. The professional counsellors stress that it is important not to tell the other what to do, nor how to solve the problem, as that can result in ownership of the problem passing to the counsellor. They say good counselling allows the problem to be explored together.

Other ideas for spiritual charity include: to pray for someone; to talk about our own belief and our use of the Bible; to remind tactfully, when needed, such as when someone is blaspheming or committing theft. As an example of theft, tax avoidance is theft from society.

In TCR 425 Swedenborg talks about 'good works.' He notes that we should give to the poor with prudence, and avoid gifts which may hinder rather than help. A modern example of this could be to decline a gift of money to those on the street, as they may buy illegal drugs with it. Rather it's suggested to buy them the meal they are asking for, taking them into the café. Again, Swedenborg says we should not give to those whose activities are evil, as we are only going to make their evil worse.

So what things constitute 'good works?' Clearly, giving money to a suitable organisation is a good work, such as Oxfam or Christian Aid. I mention only two, out of very many. Many persons choose to carry out a regular good activity, such as volunteering their time, perhaps to an Air Ambulance, or to a Boy Scout or Girl Guides group. And there are simple once-off acts of kindness, like taking a person who has no car to somewhere difficult to reach for them, maybe a hospital or shopping.

In his section on Charity in TCR Swedenborg goes on to notice that some good works in time come to be seen simply as duties, although it seems to me that he is not speaking of duties that are given to us by others (e.g., soldiers on duty) but rather things our love and wisdom point out to us.

So I hope that this explains more about spiritual and natural charity to you, and it's helpful.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, please help us this and every day to carry out for You works of Charity and Good deeds, to further Your Kingdom inside people and lead them onwards into Your heavens. We thank You that You have given us this knowledge and Your strength to do this, and we acknowledge they all come from You. And we ask Your blessings too on ourselves, our families and friends this day. Thank You, Lord. Amen.

BY **C. TH. ODHNER** NEW YORK **THE NEW CHURCH BOARD OF PUBLICATION** 3 WEST TWENTY-NINTH STREET 1900

As this book is so delightfully written it will be quoted from frequently and is the main source of information about Swedenborg's life, our theme this month, following his birthday, 29th January. Written in 1900 its style might appear rather quaint and is charming.

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 2**Emanuel's childhood and mission**

And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8 NIV

*And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom,
and the grace of God was upon him.*

Luke 2:40 NIV

'Here [in Stockholm], on the twenty-ninth of January, in the year 1688, a little boy was born, a child who in the merciful Providence of the Lord was raised up to serve his Divine Master and all mankind by the most wonderful and glorious work that ever has been given any man to do.

To this child was given the name Emanuel, which signifies God-with-us, for his father hoped that God would be ever with the boy and he with God. And truly this Emanuel showed himself worthy of his name. Throughout his life he walked humbly with God, and in the sacred volumes which he wrote God speaks again with man and teaches them the real meaning of the Word. This was the mission of his life: to act as the Lord's intelligent and willing scribe in writing down and publishing the Lord's own explanation of the Scriptures. The Doctrine which is taught in the books which he wrote is known as the "Heavenly Doctrine of the New Jerusalem," and the Church which believes in it as the Lord's own teachings is called "the New Church." The reason it is so called is because the Doctrine itself is something entirely *new* in the history of the Christian Church. And it will remain "new" forever, because no matter how much men may study this Doctrine in ages to come they will always discover new truths in it, new light from the Sun of Heaven shedding its glorious rays on the life of man in this world and in the world to come. Thus we will learn to do our Father's will as it is done in Heaven, and thus, by this Doctrine, the Lord will "make all things new." ...How great was the service for which this little boy Emanuel was born and raised up.

Emanuel's father, Jesper Swedberg, was a very learned, wise and God-fearing man, who was chaplain to the king of Sweden... When Emanuel was four years old, his parents moved to Upsala, where his father became a professor of theology... of the great university in that city. The little boy now began to show that he was different, in some ways, from other children. He seemed to be constantly thinking about God, heaven and spiritual things... Ministers and learned men often came to visit his father and little Emanuel always liked to talk with them about "love and faith"...

When he was eight years old a great sorrow fell upon him, for his loving mother died, leaving him behind with all his little brothers and sisters... Thus, no doubt, Emanuel was led to think all the more about the spiritual world, and in time the Lord gave him a great knowledge on this subject... Nor was he left long without a mother's care... for his father married again, and his new mother was a kind, gentle lady, who became a true mother to her many little step-children. She was also quite wealthy, and when she died, many years afterwards, she left a great deal of her money to Emanuel, who thus could afford to travel much in foreign lands, and to print the many and costly books which the Lord commanded him to write for the use of the New Church.' From pp 10-17

Swedenborg's childhood, his precociousness and interest in heavenly and spiritual matters, reminds me of Jesus's childhood. Both were being prepared for tremendous missions in their adult lives: bringers of truth at a time of crisis in the life of the church at the time. This showed in the way Swedenborg spoke with learned men visiting his father and in Jesus's discussions with teachers in the temple at the age of twelve. Much is revealed about who the baby Jesus is in the early part of the chapter, but let us focus on and read

Luke 2:39-52 - The boy Jesus in the temple. *After three days they [his parents] found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers... Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them... And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.* Luke 2:46-47, 51-52

Blessing I pray that the LORD will bless and protect you, and that he will show you mercy and kindness. May the LORD be good to you and give you peace. Numbers 6:24-26 (CEV)

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 9 Swedenborg as a scientist and philosopher

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Psalm 19:1
*The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;
for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.* Psalm 24.1-2

When his father was appointed Bishop of Skara in 1703, Emanuel stayed in Upsala in order to finish his education and lived 'with his elder sister, who had married Dr. Eric Benzelius, one of the most learned men in Europe... He studied especially the great philosophers of ancient Greece and Rome, and from them, and from the Word of God, he learned to *think clearly*... When, in 1709, he finished his course at the university, he was considered by his professors a well-prepared and talented young man, from whom great things were expected.'

Emanuel spent the next few years travelling to London, Holland, Paris and Germany where he studied 'astronomy, chemistry, physics, mathematics, and other sciences. He always took his lodgings in the houses of various mechanics, and learned from them the latest improvements in machinery and in the art of making scientific instruments. He was wide awake to everything that might be of use to his own countrymen.'

Back in Sweden he became a favourite with the new king, Charles XII, who appointed him as an Assessor at the College of Mines, 'supervising the work of mining in Sweden,' and showing 'the miners the best methods of getting the ore out of the mountains, and how to smelt it so as to make pure iron or copper.' The king 'commanded him to assist the great engineer, Christopher Polheim, in building a great canal from Stockholm to Gottenburg, right across Sweden...

During this period he lived at the house of his friend Polheim, who had a very pretty young daughter, Emerentia, with whom Emanuel Swedberg was deeply in love. The young couple became engaged.' However, Emerentia, being only sixteen, fell in love with 'a young officer whose head was not so full of mathematics and scientific inventions' and Emanuel released her from their engagement. 'This was the last time he looked for a wife in this world.

He now sought consolation in still greater work and study, for the advancement of science and the good of his country.' He wrote books and 'accounts of his inventions and scientific discoveries, the construction of air-pumps ...and flying-machines, methods of mining and smelting ore.'

After relishing many years of war Charles XII was killed in 1718. His sister, Ulrica Eleonora, became queen and 'rewarded the long and faithful services of Bishop Swedberg and his son by raising the family to the rank of nobility. According to the Swedish custom the family now changed its name from Swedberg to Swedenborg. Thus Emanuel Swedberg became Emanuel Swedenborg. He now 'had the right to a seat and vote in the "House of Nobles" of the Swedish Diet or Congress, corresponding to the House of Lords in the English Parliament... With him the love of country was next to the love of God.' He was 'always in favour of peace, reform, and education.'

In 1721 he again travelled publishing books on chemistry and science and examining mines. He then spent eleven years in Stockholm 'preparing a great work treating of the beginnings of all natural things... the

Principia... in which he gives an altogether new explanation of the manner in which this earth and all other planets were created from the sun...' He also wrote 'on Iron and Copper, and a beautiful book on *The Infinite*, in which he presents his clear and noble ideas about the infinite nature of God and the connection between the soul and the body... Truth was the treasure which he sought for with an ardent love. His one aim was to show that nature had not created itself, but that above nature there is a God of infinite wisdom and love, and that within the body of man there is a soul which is to live forever...' From pp 17-39

His studies of the natural world were a solid preparation for understanding and making known the link between the natural and spiritual worlds later in his life

Read Psalm 19 prayerfully. Spend a little while meditating on any part that moves you.

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 16 Swedenborg's search for the soul

*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?
You have made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honour. Psalm 8:3-5*

'Swedenborg now turned his attention to the study of the human body, the habitation of the soul and the image and likeness of God Himself...' He examined 'the greatest works on anatomy... Without some knowledge of anatomy, a man cannot really know *himself*, for if he looks at his body from the outside only, he will never understand what is going on within... The things within, the real life in the body and all its parts, can be seen only with the eye of the rational understanding.

This was the instrument which Swedenborg used in his studies of the human body... He looked with his reason... for... the purpose, reason, and use of all things in the body. On this account, and because he always remembered that the body is the sacred temple of the *soul*, the mysteries of the human frame were opened to him in a light such as has never been given to another man. And thus, by learning the genuine truth concerning the kingdoms of nature, his mind was prepared to receive, afterwards, the revelation of the Divine Truth concerning the spiritual Kingdom of God...

And now, after he had mastered every natural science and had come to those inner recesses of human nature where the spirit dwells, he tried to lift the veil from the invisible in order to discover the very soul itself...Swedenborg made a study of the mind of man, the will and the understanding, the affection and the thoughts. Higher and higher soared his inquiring spirit, until he felt that he stood upon the threshold of a higher world, into which no man can penetrate by his own understanding... Glimpses of truth were given to him... But with all his learning and his labours he had not been able to discover the *real* truth concerning the soul and its immortal life. He knew he could go no further by himself, and bowed in humility before his God, who alone could reveal what is invisible... - heaven itself, which now was opened to him by the Lord.' From pp 40-45

Settle yourself comfortably and read **Psalm 8**. Read it again reflecting on who we are as God's created human beings; and again on our relationship with the rest of creation; and finally as you read dwell on your relationship with the Divine.

SUNDAY FEBRUARY 23 The opening of his spiritual sight

I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Isaiah 6:1
For some years

Swedenborg had noticed a wonderful change coming into his life. While writing... there had appeared, at times, flames and strange lights before his eyes, and he had understood that these were signs from heaven

to show that he had written what is true. Remarkable dreams also came to him at night... He thought they must have some hidden meaning... He tried to explain to himself what they could signify. Thus he walked for some time... in a twilight between natural and spiritual light; it was the dawn of a new age, not only for himself but for all mankind.

Finally, in the year 1743, the light of heaven first broke through the clouds in his natural mind, for then the Lord Jesus Christ appeared in person to Swedenborg and called him to serve in that holy use for which he had been prepared from his childhood... He appeared twice again... before he was fully introduced into the spiritual world... The second time he “lay upon His bosom and looked at Him face to face...” in Holland in the year 1744.

The third manifestation took place at London, in 1745, while Swedenborg sat at table in an inn, eating with unusual appetite. Suddenly everything became dim before his eyes, but after a while he saw a mass of horrid reptiles on the floor. These disappeared after a few minutes, and then he noticed a man in a corner of the room, who said to him, “Eat not so much.” Swedenborg was quite frightened at all this... but when the darkness cleared away he found himself alone as before. He then went home, but during the following night the same man appeared again to Swedenborg, revealing Himself as the Creator and Redeemer of the world and promising to explain to him the hidden or internal sense of the Sacred Scriptures...’

From pp 46-48

‘In order that Swedenborg might learn to understand the Word as it is understood in heaven, the Lord now opened to him the whole spiritual world, so that he was able to walk about there, and to speak with the spirits and angels just as really and actually as we walk about here on earth and speak with one another... Every one of us is, in fact, even now in the spiritual world as to the spirit, although we do not know it, because our spiritual eyes are not opened until after death. But whenever the Lord in His mercy has given a new revelation to His people, He has always opened the spiritual eyes of some one of His servants on earth. He did so in ancient times to Moses and the prophets and the evangelists, and He did so now to Emanuel Swedenborg, but in a more perfect manner than ever before. ...in order that through him all other men might receive a true knowledge of that world in which, after death, each one is to live for ever.

From pp 53-54

Read Isaiah 6:1-8 How the Lord appears to the prophet Isaiah and the latter’s response

Prayer Lord, when you want me to do something for you, may I be as responsive as Swedenborg and Isaiah and obedient to your call. Take away my fear and strengthen my trust in you. Amen

Sunday March 1st *"The one who believes in me will live"* John 11:25.

In this modern fast moving society where few see the value of the church, how often do people stop and really think about what they are doing or why? We go to school, get an education, get a good job, buy a house, go out shopping and buy what we want, raise a family and teach our children to do the same. But ordinarily we do all these things because it is the way they have always been done. We don't often stop to ask the questions: "What is life all about?" "To what end do we do this or that?" "Why are we here?" Yet, can you imagine meeting someone in the park and asking them "What are you doing here?" and they answer "I don't really know"?

Many people are so busy that they rarely have time to ask the deeper questions such as: Where does consciousness come from? What is my life for? Do we go somewhere else after this? We are often so taken up with duties and responsibilities that we don't often think about these things. Often, it can take a life crisis or the sudden death of someone close to make us stop and think. Jesus tells us that we are here for a purpose and that we live after death. *"The one who believes in me will live, even though they die"* John 11:25. And in 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?"* But some might ask, "Why then, if we live after death, do those who have died not come back and prove this to us?"

Well, we might tell them that if the Lord allowed this we would have no choice other than to believe it. This would compel us inwardly and take away our freedom to choose to believe. Yet it is only when we freely choose something for ourselves that it actually becomes part of who we are: anything else would not truly be our own. In every activity we always have options which present us with opportunities to make a balanced and free choice. If God forced us to believe in Him our choices could not be made in freedom. For example; if someone has a gun pointed at them forcing them to steal something, they would be compelled to do so. But as soon as the threat of the gun is removed that person will stop stealing and return to what they did previously, in freedom. On the other hand, if someone did want to steal something but refrained solely because of the threat of punishment, then if that threat was taken away, they would then steal, in freedom. It is the inner choices we make which are free and so these define who we truly are.

We might point out to them that when we leave this world, it is only the inner person that remains: *"...the body is adapted to uses in the natural world; this is cast off when a person dies: but the Internal which is called the spirit, is adapted to uses in the spiritual world; this does not die.* Heavenly Doctrines 224. Therefore, if people ask what their life might be like in the world to come, they only need to think about what they would do if they were in complete freedom to do it. **Recommended reading: John 14.** Arcana Caelestia (AC) 10777. Apocalypse Explained (AE) 248[2]. AE 689[2]. Divine Providence (DP) 71,78.

Loving God, be present with us now, that we may learn from you this day and take what we learn to heart. Deepen our friendships and strengthen our faith so that we will be equipped to serve you better. Teach me to use the gifts you give me for the good of all and to always be on the lookout for opportunities to offer service. Amen

Sunday March 8th **Crossing the Jordan** **Joshua 1**

In Joshua Ch.1:2 we read: *"Now then, you and all these people get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them."*

The children of Israel had wandered about in the desert for forty years. But why not just go straight to Canaan? Well, it's because the literal story is only a means through which a spiritual story can be told. The deeper message of these wanderings tells us about the temptations someone goes through once they commit themselves to following the Lord. So from a natural and worldly state they begin to move towards a more spiritual and heavenly state. From a life lived from self and the world, to a life lived for the Lord and the neighbour. Before we embark on this spiritual journey, we are slaves to our own natural desires; they pull us down, they oppress us and they cause problems in our lives which we don't want. The Lord asks us to follow Him and trust Him so He can free us and lead us away from living in a selfish and worldly state.

The destination is Canaan, which represents the heavenly state we are promised at the end of the journey - a journey away from self-living - it's the Promised Land. But to get there, we first need to remove the things of self and the world. The journey in the desert represents the refining process that we must go through before we can become more loving and more heavenly people. We need to go through this process before we can cross to a more heavenly life. This requires a cleansing of the soul and is signified by the crossing of the Jordan River. The Jordan River forms from the melting snow, the rain and the dew which descends upon the mountains above. This pictures how the truths of heaven descend upon the higher regions of our minds down into the natural mind, cleansing our lives of evils and falsities. This of course is why people were baptised in the Jordan River by John the Baptist, in preparation for the Lord's coming;

John the Baptist said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matt 3:1-2. Repentance helps us to get ready to cross over into a more heavenly life by identifying and removing evils and falsities. Only then are we ready to receive the Lord's goodness and truth which will flow in and bring life-giving truths for our salvation.

'Crossing of the Jordan' means introduction into cognitions of good and truth. AC 6536

"Now then, you and all these people get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them." Joshua 1:2.

Sovereign Lord, we thank you for all those who have had the courage to speak out in your name. To declare their faith and testify through word and deed to the new life you have given them. Give to all who speak for you the words to say and the opportunity to say them and inspire us through their example, so that we, in turn, may share what you have done for us to the best of our ability. Amen

Sunday March 15th

"Destroy this temple and I will raise it in three days.... the temple He spoke about was His body."

John 2:19, 21

To realise what the Lord is saying here we need to trace the roots of the temple. The whole idea of a temple started out as an altar which represented the Lord's Divine Human (see below AE 391). The ancient people saw rock or stone as a symbol of truth due to its strength and durability. An altar was made from natural stones gathered together from the surrounding area, not shaped by human hands. Exod. 20:25: *"If you make an altar of stones, you shall not build them hewn; because if you move a chisel upon it, you will profane it."* The stones of the altar represented the Lord's Divine Truth, which proceeds from His Divine Love. Stones shaped by man would then represent falsity.

When the Children of Israel receive the Ten Commandments, altars and sacrificing are still the principle form of worship. But the Lord tells them to build the tabernacle (Ex. 25:8) at mount Sinai representing the Lord now coming down to dwell among His people. The commandments (known as a covenant) were placed in the ark, that's why they called it the "Ark of the Covenant". The ark and the structure round about it was built the way the Lord instructed. This whole structure now became the principle focus of worship, and the sacrificial altar was inside the courtyard.

When the Israelites set up camp this tabernacle or tent was placed at the centre and it was laid out exactly as the Lord had instructed. This whole structure was a representation of heaven, with the Lord at its centre i.e. the law "God with us" (i.e. the divine truth). We read in AC 9485: *"The reason why the inmost heaven was meant by 'the ark' was that all the tabernacle or tent represented the whole angelic heaven."* It was some 350 years later that the idea of building a permanent temple was introduced by King David with these words to the prophet Nathan in 2 Sam.7:2: *"Here I am living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."* David felt this was wrong so he proposed building a temple (eventually built by his son Solomon, see **1 Kings 6:1**). The temple itself was built to almost the same specifications as the tabernacle enclosure. What was represented by an altar (i.e. the Lord's Divine Human) was now also represented by the temple. In AE 391.3 *"In the Jewish Church there were two things that, in the highest sense, signified the Lord's Divine Human, namely, the altar and the temple."*

In **1 Kings 6:7**: *"The temple of Jerusalem was built of whole stone, and neither hammer nor axe nor any instruments of iron were heard when it was built."*

But it was the reconstructed temple of King Herod (built in 9 BC) which stood when Jesus said these words, *“Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.”* Herod had used stones shaped by human hand and so, rather than representing the Lord’s Divine Human, it represented the inherited human He assumed in the world and which the Lord put off when He glorified His human - putting on only that which was from the Divine Love within. This is why He said in **John 2:19, 21** *“Destroy this temple and I will raise it in three days... the temple He spoke about was His body.”* Amen

Read John 2:12-25 - Jesus in the temple; 1 Kings 6:1, 7-14 - Solomon builds the temple

Dear Lord Jesus, grant to all your people the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, and the light of your love in their hearts. Help them to recognise something of you in all people and to respond to the guidance you provide through others so that we may see you and praise you in all places and all situations. Amen

Sunday March 22nd

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” John 8:12

Light is of course responsible for our sense of sight. Throughout history people have used lack of light as a symbol of evil. Darkness can bring a feeling of insecurity and uncertainty regarding our surroundings. Darkness perhaps also highlights in us our deep fear of the unknown.

I’m sure as a child we all remember times when we were convinced someone was standing in our room when the lights were out, only to find that, when the lights go on, it was something silly like a coat hanging on the door or a Hoover with clothes draped over it. When light is introduced, all becomes clear and what we looked upon with fear becomes almost laughable. It is no wonder that there is this linking of darkness with evil. We know there are two kinds of light. There is light that enables us to see with our physical eyes, and light that enables us to see with our understanding. This is why we often say “I see what you mean” or “Let me shed some light on the subject.”

The light which helps us see with our physical eyes is of course natural light from the sun. But the light which helps us see with reasoned understanding is spiritual. We have natural light and spiritual light and they correspond. And it is because natural light corresponds with spiritual light, that we can easily know the nature of spiritual light. As light and darkness correspond to spiritual light and darkness then all the related effects correspond too. So, for example, if natural darkness causes fear, then spiritual darkness will cause spiritual fear too. And since the effect of a light coming on clarifies things, there must also be a spiritual light that clarifies things spiritually. That light is the Lord because He Himself is truth which makes clear and manifests the Divine Love. The Divine Love is called in the Word “the Father” and this is why the Lord said in many places He was sent from the Father. See Matt. 10:40; Luke 10:16; John 4:34; 5:24, 30, 37 etc.

The world we are born into is like that room without the lights on. We have many fears in this world. Many things are yet unknown to us. The Lord said, *“I am the light of the world.”* Whenever we do what we do from the Lord it brings spiritual light from the Lord into our natural life, dissipating fear and darkness. It is worth remembering that darkness is by default; we need the Lord’s light before spiritual darkness is dissipated. *“All the light of truth is from the Lord, and every bit of darkness from humankind.”* AC 1321 (New Century Edition, Cooper)

That which switches on our spiritual lights is love, which we acquire by doing as the Lord teaches, because the Lord Himself is pure love and pure truth. When we live from the Lord by doing what He commands, He is then in us and we see in the light of His truth and darkness and fear have no place in our lives. Amen

Recommended reading: John 8:12-19 AC 1321, 3223

Everlasting Lord, we celebrate your coming into the world and that your light continues to shine in our darkness. We praise you for the way your love shone in so many lives during your ministry; through the healing you brought to the sick, comfort to the distressed, promise to the poor and forgiveness to the lost. Receive our worship now and shine in our lives today. Amen

Sunday March 29th

Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." Mark 10:50-51

It was along the road on the outskirts of Jericho where Jesus encountered Bartimaeus. Imagine the blind Bartimaeus, sitting by the roadside begging. There was a common belief among the Jews that blindness was a punishment for personal sin. We might imagine then the treatment he would often endure. Jesus, His disciples and followers are heading for the great Passover festival. What might Bartimaeus be thinking when he hears the commotion? "Am I in danger?" "How will I escape if I need to?" But then he hears someone say, "Jesus of Nazareth is here." He hadn't been *seeking* Jesus; of course *he* would have heard much from the daily gossip of the travelers. But what he shouted shows knowledge of Scripture, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" The Scriptures called the Messiah the Son of David. But more important than knowing, he *believed*! Hearing a single cry from within the din of voices, the Lord suddenly stops. No doubt the people following Jesus had seen him do this before, and no doubt they knew it meant something big was about to happen. And when they told Bartimaeus to rise and meet Jesus, he threw his coat aside. This is significant! To a poor beggar, this coat would have been a treasured possession; he would need this coat in the desert climate of Judea - hot by day, but very cold by night. Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" It's an interesting question - because he was blind and the Lord would have known full well what he wanted! But He asked anyway. Bartimaeus' answer was: "Rabbi, let me receive my sight."

Two things we might consider here: firstly, Bartimaeus seems to have been prepared for this moment; He had previously considered the facts and made His mind up, he *knew* that this was the Messiah. When the Son of David appeared, unexpectedly, for only an instant, Bartimaeus was ready; this was a man prepared. This is the way we are told that good deeds come forth out of Faith. Faith is preparation, and *knowing what is true*. But until it acts, it's just as if Bartimaeus had stayed sitting beside the road. But, he didn't; he showed he wanted the Lord's help, he was *persistent*. What Bartimaeus did represents the *work* of our *regeneration*. We must persist in our daily work of removing evils and replacing them with good. We must be *relentless in doing* this work. Secondly, when Bartimaeus sprang up to meet the Messiah, he threw his coat aside. This signified that he wanted all his needs to be met in the Lord Jesus. He was ready to cast aside what he himself thought, and trust the Lord's teaching. In AE 239[22] "*By the blind are signified those who have not the knowledges of truth, and consequently do not understand truth.*"

When we are able to cast aside our own selfish and worldly desires and persist in doing so, trusting in the Lord's teaching instead, our faith becomes a living faith and we can then follow the Lord with our spiritual eyes wide open.

The Lord may often ask us, "What do you want me to do for you?" We should then be ready to answer, not just in words, but also with our actions. Amen

Readings: Mark 10: 46-52; AE 239 [21, 22]

To God who blesses us beyond our imagining, who loves us beyond our dreaming, who forgives us beyond our deserving, and who uses us beyond our hoping, be praise and thanksgiving, honour and adoration, now, always and forever. Amen