

## **Home Worship April 2020**

### **Jumping off points for Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> Palm Sunday**

In this week of Home Worship, the Revd Bruce Jarvis comments that the Psalm we have read is talking about Jesus' life, and by correspondence about our life. This idea can extend to the wider reading we will undertake during Holy Week.

**1)** Jesus' journey to Jerusalem isn't just a journey to a city, In the book of Jeremiah we find that Jerusalem is "the throne of Jehovah" and signifies the church, in its being that point where the love of God finds a meeting place with man. This then is the inmost holy place where in the temple courts sacrifices take place.

Truly welcoming Jesus to Jerusalem for us then, is opening the inmost part of ourselves to Him rather than just recognising Jesus as a character in stories and parables. This means being open to the truth and acknowledging something in us has to be sacrificed and to die in order for Him to fully enter in. Selfishness, or ways of being that affect our lives and our relationships with others has to be given up. Do we welcome Jesus into our hearts by letting other things go?

In prayer ask the Lord to be present as you gently consider your own life and what could be let go of and changed.

**2)** Jesus rides on a lowly donkey: might it seem odd that Jesus would walk many miles from Galilee to Bethany and then secure a donkey for the final two miles to Jerusalem?

Read Zechariah 9: 9-10 and consider the way Jesus approaches Jerusalem. Are we ready to become like the humble donkey ready to carry Jesus?

**3)** In Mark's Gospel there is specific mention that the colt Jesus selects for the procession was one that had not been ridden before. This reminds us of a stipulation given in I Samuel 6:7 concerning the animals that were to draw the Ark of the Covenant. Does this give us an extra insight into the nature of the Lord Jesus?

### **Jumping off points for Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> Maundy Thursday - Jesus speaks to his Disciples**

Revd Bruce has already provided gentle guidance for working with the chosen passages from John's Gospel. Please undertake this if you can before considering the discussion point below.

**1)** We are challenged to examine our own lives in the light of some of the characters who denied The Lord. Think about Judas who betrayed Jesus, Peter who denied Him three times, and Pilate who acted against his own conscience and condemned Jesus to death. Take time to consider how hard it is to stand against the crowd.

### **Jumping off points for Friday 10<sup>th</sup> Good Friday – The Seamless Garment**

**1)** After reading John 19 the Crucifixion of Jesus, take time to consider how love is willing and able to sacrifice.

**2)** Garments in our passage (John 19) describe the successive layers of truth or understanding until at last we reach the seamless garment – the most internal, living holy truth made of a single wholeness requiring not the joining of two ideas. This was the garment closest to the body of the Lord.

In a mundane sense we can associate Jesus' seamless garment with the high priest's robe, which was also seamless. Read the description of Aaron's garment in Exodus 28: 31-32. The Lord Jesus then is not only Israel's true king; he is also high priest.

### **Jumping off points for Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> April Easter Day – Doubting Thomas**

1) As Revd Bruce has suggested after reading John 20, sit for a few minutes and think around what sort of thing you have doubts about. You might even jot them down if you keep a journal.

2) Think back to your childhood and your first thoughts and understanding of Jesus our Lord. Notice how your ideas have grown and changed as you have matured and developed in understanding. This is what the Lord wants for us, to continue to grow and get closer to Him. Consider the idea that the Lord loves us as we are, but does not want us to remain as we are.

### **Jumping off points for Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> April – Feed my Church**

1) As Revd Bruce suggests after completing your reading ponder on how you see the purpose and function of the Church. What does it exist for? Whose Church is it? Amongst all the activities that Churches organise, which one do you regard as essential and vital? Focus particularly on the Risen Lord's question to Peter. Does Peter love his Lord and Master?

2) Simon had been renamed by Jesus and became 'Peter' which in the Greek is petros which means a rock and in this case the rock of faith. This truth of faith is that Jesus was from God, yet Peter had let Jesus down by denying him three times. Consider how frail humanity can serve the Lord despite making mistakes and then redeeming themselves.

3) After their meal Jesus walks along the shore with Peter and asks him what seems to be the same question three times. This is possibly the redemption of Peter as the three questions asked on the shore can be seen as a reflection of the three times he denied the Lord before the cock crowed.

The Lord asks Peter if he loves him more than these – which really means has he love within his faith?

The Lord then says "feed my lambs," meaning feed truths to people who are innocent.

Then after asking the same question again he says "feed my sheep" meaning feed truths to people who are kind.

From this we can discern that the Lord not only forgives us for the wrong things we do, but even asks us and trusts us to carry the message of love and forgiveness to others. Can you think of a time where you were able to forgive or were forgiven by another? How did this feel?

### **Jumping off points for Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April - Washing Feet**

1) Does this story about Jesus washing feet and the humility that Jesus reveals, remind you of any other passages of Scripture about Jesus? Read Philippians 2:3-8. How are these passages similar?

2) Is Jesus leaving a command that we should wash feet, or is he teaching his disciples (and all followers) about something bigger than washing feet? If this is about something bigger, what is the bigger lesson the Lord is teaching?

## HOME WORSHIP for APRIL 2020 by the Revd Bruce Jarvis

April 2020 begins with Palm Sunday on the 5<sup>th</sup>, and includes Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Day. This month's readings and reflections will focus on the record in John's Gospel. If you feel inclined, you would gain greatly from reading from Chapter 12 through to the end of the gospel.

### Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> - PALM SUNDAY – The Entry into Jerusalem – A False Dawn?

#### Readings - Psalm 118 and John 12:12-19

Remember that the Psalm is talking about Jesus' life, and by correspondence about our life.

One thing we sometimes do is try to imagine what it was like to be one of Jesus' disciples, or to be in one of the listening crowds, or maybe one of the characters in a story. I think it's not so easy to do this over the week at the end of Jesus' earthly life because we know the outcome. Nevertheless, becoming absorbed in the Biblical text can help us to capture some of the intense drama.

Naturally speaking, Jesus was a marked man from the moment He brought Lazarus back to life. Caiaphas the High Priest prophesied that Jesus would die not only for the Jewish nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. How right he was! (John 11:51-52) How incensed Caiaphas must have been when, a few days later, Jesus made a triumphant entry into Jerusalem, acclaimed by the great crowd of pilgrims. As I said, we know the outcome – Jesus must die as to his natural, corporeal self in order that his mission to redeem and save the human race might be fulfilled. On the same basis, we finite men and women have to die for us to enter into eternal life in the spiritual world. Jesus' death was not an error, any more than ours is. It is the ultimate goal that determines what must take place, and it is the goal, the purpose of life, on which we need to focus. It is not either-or but both-and. Glory and triumph can only be achieved with a measure of pain and sacrifice. An easy, pain-free progress to a successful outcome is a mirage. This was true for Jesus Christ as he glorified his humanity, and it is true for us. Thankfully, our wise and loving Lord provides interludes along the way when we can be in positive states of delight and peace and exultation.

But where does that leave Palm Sunday? In some ways, it seems to be something of a misfit, with an odd feel about it. Is that because we know there is the air of a false dawn about his triumphant entry? Is it because we know that many of those who cheered Jesus into Jerusalem against the known opposition of the authorities would turn against Him only a few days later and side with their political and religious leaders? Is it because the change from cheers to jeers, from "hosannas" to "crucify him", from accolade to rejection – is it because all of this is bit too close to home for comfort? Is that why Palm Sunday raises uncertainty in our hearts? Like so much of the Gospel, the Palm Sunday episode often makes us feel rather uncomfortable. And yet if we bother to reflect carefully, we may find much to help and support us.

You see, spiritually speaking, false dawns of this sort are an inevitable part of our inner life. We **are** like those people who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem, in the sense that we are not yet fully developed and regenerated. Do you remember how even the disciples couldn't fully grasp what was going on at that stage? It was only *after* the Lord's resurrection, when he appeared to them and clarified what had happened, that the truth really dawned. Even those closest intimates of the Lord were to prove fickle when the going was tough, so what chance did the crowds stand?

What happened then represents patterns of human behaviour for all time. **Of course** we want the Lord to save us – preferably right now. **Of course** we believe in the truths that we find in his Word. **Of course** we want him to overthrow everything that oppresses us. **Of course** we will follow him because he is our King. And the very moment we enter into such a state of mind, that is the signal for the darkest forces to plot our downfall. It really is warfare. It's a nasty business, with no holds barred. The forces of darkness are not going to concede victor, and let us go without a fight. Dirty tactics are the order of the day, including the appearance that we're even willing to betray our Lord and join the opposition. Just like those disciples, we cannot understand completely what is happening; we become confused and dispirited and ashamed. The crucial point for us to grasp is that the Lord knows exactly what's going on inside us. He knows where our hearts and loyalties lie.

And what **is** happening? Well, the Lord is bearing our burdens for us. It is **he** who engages with the enemy. Indeed, it is **he** alone who can bring about victory for us. Yes, he needs our desires and good intentions, and he needs our efforts to listen and follow, however flawed and feeble they might be. Our earnest wish for him to reign over us is the keystone. He can't operate on our behalf to bring us into his kingdom unless that's what we really want him to do. But that **is** what is going on beneath the surface, behind the scenes. In the fullness of the Lord's own loving and wise time, all becomes clear. Meanwhile, in our confusion and uncertainty, we go out to meet him as he enters the Jerusalem of our mind; we cheer and greet him with genuine cries of "Hosanna!" For if we really wish him to save us from spiritual death, and bring us into the joy and peace of heavenly life, however imperfectly we understand what all that means, he must know that **that** is the desire of our heart.

So let Palm Sunday take its proper, inescapable place in the cycle of our inner progress and development. Let us welcome the Lord into our citadel so that he can teach us so much more, and on our behalf overwhelm and bring into order the powers of hell. Then and only then comes the joy and tearful relief of resurrection and new life.

**Prayer.** *Lord Jesus Christ, may this remembrance of your entry into Jerusalem help us over the coming days to celebrate your great work of redemption. As we do so, Lord, save us now in our present hour of need. Hosanna and Hosanna! Amen*

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#### **Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> - MAUNDY THURSDAY – Jesus speaks to His Disciples**

##### **Readings - John 13:18-28 and chapter 18**

John's gospel treats this episode quite differently from the other three. John doesn't recount the Last Supper. Instead, he relates how Jesus taught the disciples about what was about to happen to him. Chapter 13 begins with an act of love, when he washes the disciples' feet. Chapter 18 brings us to the dramatic arrest and his trial. His response to Pilate's question – *You are right in saying I am a king. In fact for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.* – could not have been more emphatic. Between those two chapters, Jesus speaks to his friends, emphasizing always the close and dynamic relationship between himself and his people. He brings it to a close with a whole chapter of prayer – a wonderful model for us now.

If you are able to put the time aside, allow yourself to sit quietly, absorb the narrative, and enjoy what Jesus has to say. Here is some of the most sublime and profound teaching in the Gospels.

**Prayer.** *Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Saviour, come to us now as you came to your disciples then. Grant us receptive minds that will hear what you want us to know. And when our earthly limitations blind us, hold us close to yourself so that, when the time is right, we can enter more fully into your heavenly light. Amen.*

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#### **Friday 10<sup>th</sup> - GOOD FRIDAY – The Seamless Garment**

##### **Reading - John 19**

Although John's Gospel doesn't generally dwell so much on the narrative details of Jesus' life as the other three, in the crucifixion John *does* include a number of fascinating and highly significant details. For example, what happened to Jesus' garments? The soldiers aren't the most culpable participants in this crucifixion drama. They were just obeying orders. But they had their fun at Jesus' expense, didn't they? There would have been four of them appointed to escort the condemned man to his death, with an officer preceding the procession carrying a placard giving details of the crime. Yes, the soldiers had their horseplay. They made this king wear an old purple robe. They stuck a crown of thorns on his head. And they slapped his face and taunted Him.

What amazing irony! They were taunting Him, treating Him as a man with delusions of grandeur who'd come to a sticky end. What a joke! And yet the truth, as we have come to know and understand it, is that their prisoner was the true and only King of heaven and earth. Behind and beneath all their jesting was an eternal

truth. The man of flesh they were abusing was the Messiah, the Word made flesh. How little those poor, ignorant soldiers knew. They must have been included in their victim's words: *Father forgive them – they do not know what they are doing.*

The victim's clothes were the traditional perks of the military escort. The shoes, turban, girdle, undergarment and outer robe were all given to the soldiers to dice for. They would take turns to choose which items they wanted. But, as John tells us, when it came to Jesus' inner tunic or undergarment, common sense prevailed. Since these tunics were woven all in one piece from top to bottom, it would be madness and a waste to cut it up into four lots, so they diced again for it, and the winner took all.

There's another irony here, of course. One of the garments worn by the High Priest was a seamless tunic. So here was the rejected King of the Jews giving yet another sign. Not only was he the supreme King of all, he was also the great High Priest. Yes, it's clear that none of those participants had any clear idea of what they were doing to the Saviour of the world!

But, surely, there's got to be more to the inner garment than that. Well there is! The Heavenly Doctrines of the New Church explain to us the very nature of Divine Truth, and how it is always perfectly adapted to our needs and states. In its essence, Divine Truth is above and beyond all human knowing. It transcends our human, finite faculties. If we're to begin to approach the Truth itself, it has to be clothed with outer garments. Correspondentially, the light of the sun has to be filtered through layers of atmosphere, or our eyesight would be ruined. The perfection of Divine Truth comes to us in forms which we might say are woven from the fibre of angelic and human thoughts, so that we end up with the words of revelation in our Bible and in the Heavenly Doctrines. But this weaving is not a matter of our human will and intention. It is from God's will and wisdom alone that we receive versions of the Truth which we can cope with.

The result of all this is that there is an interior level of truth, and a natural, literal one – what we might call inner and outer levels. The inner, spiritual sense is primarily for the angels of heaven, whereas the natural, literal level is for men and women here on earth. Hold on a minute. Does that mean **we** cannot have any access to this inner level? Well, of course we can. We are, after all, **spiritual** beings. It's just that **our** access has to be via this outer, literal level. Which means, as the Apostle Paul said, we see through a glass darkly, whereas the angels of heaven see this inner level of meaning in the clear light of heaven.

The upshot of all this is that the outer level of revelation which we have in our Scriptures can be made to mean all things to all people. It can be distorted, it can be misquoted, it can be wrongly translated, it can be abused, it can be used by different groups to contradict each other, it can be perverted and made into dogma. This is what had been done to the Old Testament before Jesus came. It's what has been done to the Gospels since His time. So we have ended up with division and strife, with separation and enmity – the total opposite of everything the true Word of God encourages.

That's why the outer clothes and garments could be disposed of in a random fashion, but the undergarment, the seamless tunic, could not be torn up and divided. Why not? Well, it is **this** that represents the undivided inner, spiritual sense of the Word. It has to be preserved in its entirety. Man may pervert and distort the outer level but this inner dimension of revealed truth cannot be treated in this way. It's real, it's genuine. It has to be protected and guarded. That's exactly why we don't find it all that easy to penetrate, so that it may be protected, and so that we do not easily profane it.

Isn't it astonishing how every detail of the Lord's Word, every detail even of His crucifixion, contains within it beautiful, timeless, eternal truth. Our Lord, the One God of heaven and earth, came to be the Word made flesh. Evil powers tried to destroy Him. But they could not.

This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. Let's decide by lot who will get it. This happened that the scriptures might be fulfilled which said, "They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." So this is what the soldiers did.

**Prayer.** *Eternal Lord, you have given us written revelations that will feed our minds to all eternity. Take us into these mysteries of faith so that we can make more sense of our life, and come to grasp more fully how your loving wisdom is guiding and leading us through every moment. Protect us, Lord, from doing anything that would damage your Word. Amen.*

## Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> April - EASTER DAY – Doubting Thomas

### Reading – John 20

**Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**

When you have read through the chapter, sit for a few minutes and think around what sort of things you have doubts about. You might even jot them down. Some will be doubts about yourself. Others might be doubts about life, about the future. Maybe even about God. Can I really trust him to look after me? When we stop to think, we realise that most of our life is lived on the basis of trust. If we gave into our doubts, and required indisputable proof about everything and everybody, we'd be paralysed by indecision.

There is a sense in which "Doubting Thomas" has made it okay to be uncertain, not be sure. Just as he hadn't rejected Peter, or James and John, the Lord didn't reject Thomas because he needed to feel the wounds. But in another way, Doubting Thomas shows us the limitations of being stuck in a doubting state, always questioning, forever wondering. Remember what the Lord said to Thomas: *Because you have seen me you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.* If we're always wanting "evidence" of God's existence, and of His care for us, we'll always be somewhat frustrated and disappointed.

You see, we can only ever "see" the Lord as we prepare our minds to "see" Him. This is true of everything in life. We can only ever get a true idea of how things work if we make it our business to find out. If we can't do that, for whatever reason, we simply have to take things on trust. It's like that with the Lord. The more we make it our business to learn about Him, and the more we really do try to live by the way He has shown, the more clearly we shall come to know Him and "see" him.

The Lord always accommodates himself to where we are. Thomas wanted to see the Lord in his own way, and this is how the Lord made himself known to him. But notice that He didn't praise Thomas for his very earthly, rather immature idea. He said: *Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.* The point for us to grasp is that the Lord appears to every good person in the way we have learned to think about Him. But he is also keen for us not to confine our concepts, our thoughts, our feelings about him to immature, unformed ideas. As you and I come to know better from our own experience, and by exploring what he has revealed to us, we'll see Him more clearly, and know Him more nearly as he really is.

The Lord has given us a mind which allows us to doubt and question. It's an essential element of our God-given freedom. But He has also given us a mind that can grow and expand and develop. We have a mind which believes by means of our spiritual eyesight, even though we cannot see with these physical eyes.

It is the whole message, the whole glory and delight, of Easter, that we can now know and see the Lord Jesus Christ as never before, Our God in His Divine Human. As he says to us: *Blessed indeed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.*

**Prayer.** *Lord, as we deal with the doubts, the complexities and unpredictabilities of our life here on earth, grant to us an inner conviction that you have all authority over our inner world, and are daily seeking to bring us into the way of everlasting truth, and to everlasting life in your heavenly kingdom. Send us forth on this day of resurrection, full of optimism and hope. Send us forth conquering and to conquer, ready and prepared to submit ourselves into your loving and wise care. Amen.*

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## Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> - Feed My Church

### Readings – John 21:15-17

**From the Teachings of the New Church:** *In this passage as elsewhere, Peter stands for faith. Now faith is not really faith unless it arises out of love for other people, and so out of love for the Lord. In the same way, charity and love are not really charity and love if they do not arise out of innocence. This is why the Lord first asks Peter whether he loves him; in other words, whether love is present within faith. He then says, "Feed my lambs", that is, feed those who are innocent. After putting the same question again, the Lord says, "Feed my sheep", that is, feed those who have charity. Heavenly Secrets 3994.5*

*Lambs stand for people who have innocence within them. The first flows from goodness. The second reference to sheep stands for people whose practice of good stems from truth. Heavenly Secrets 4169.3*

When you have read these words from John's gospel and the Heavenly Doctrines, sit quietly for a little while, and ponder on how you see the purpose and function of the Church. What does it exist for? Whose Church is it? Amongst all the activities that Churches organise, which ones do you regard as essential and vital? Focus particularly on the Risen Lord's question to Peter. Does Peter love his Lord and Master? This is what underpins our faith. This is what provides the motivation for the people of the Church to witness openly, urgently and passionately. It is genuine love for the Lord and his purposes that inspires us to act in his name.

If this is the case for us, then we shall want to play our part in teaching others, not just by words but by the way we live. We shall find ways of caring for people, sometimes in ways that cost us. Remember always that the disciples had been fed by the Lord, reminding us of our need to be fed regularly by him, so that we are fit and ready to do his work. We are to do what we can to nourish people who are searching, who are looking for something deeper. Sometimes we shall be responding to a deep innocence. At others, there will be a rational desire for more knowledge and a clearer understanding. May you be blessed as you respond to the Lord's call to be an active part of his Church.

**Prayer.** *Lord, you call us to reach out, to call, and to bring people into your sheepfold. May we feel able to respond to your call, however modestly, to share what means so much to us, to embrace those who are searching for meaning in life. Use us, Lord, in ways only you know. Amen.*

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## **Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April - Washing Feet**

### **Reading – Psalm 51:1-12 and John 13:1-17**

For our final time of worship this April, let's go back to where we started, and look at Jesus' act of washing his disciples' feet. It's worth reminding ourselves of just how great a contrast this approach is to the more usual human reaction to adversity and rejection.

It's so easy for us to become high and mighty, to stand on our dignity, to require people to acknowledge our status. We don't take kindly to rejection. We're not very happy when people say unjustified things to us. Whatever the situation, we're inclined to revert to a childish, immature approach. We turn away, become offended and hurt, and often want to get our own back. In effect we say, whether the words are spoken or not, *Well, if that's the way you're going to behave you can get stuffed.* It's like the little boy who can't take what's going on, grabs his ball and goes home. No doubt you can think of your own examples.

Jesus' act of washing the disciples' feet demonstrates in the most complete way what is involved in true love. Genuine love is all about service, it's all about giving, it's all about the attitudes behind the things we do. There is a humility about Christ's way of loving which changes the whole emphasis of relationships. It's not subservience, of course. Nor is it about servitude. It's not about allowing ourselves to become a doormat, and ill-used by others. True charity requires great discernment. We're focussing on the attitudes which are taking root in our hearts. It's about developing a capacity within us to see beyond the surface, to go further than just reacting to what people say or do. It's about realising that, to a large extent, other people's behaviour is their own concern and responsibility. We may want to change somebody else. We may be able to help another person change – if they really want to change. But, ultimately, it's only our own attitudes and values that we can do anything about – and then only by seeking the help of the One who has the power to do it for us.

Jesus' action that day showed those who were soon to be the future leaders of this new spiritual movement what sort of leadership they should offer. They had to realise that there would be no place for standing on dignity, of becoming high and mighty, of seeking power and control and domination. Subsequent Church history has shown how far short Christian leaders have fallen. As Jesus foretold, God has had to reveal himself once again in a new way so that we can begin to comprehend the deep reality about genuine, true love. It is a picture of giving and service. It is a picture of washing feet.

Why feet, by the way? Why not the head, the face, the hands, the whole body? When Peter asks these questions, Jesus gives one of his thought-provoking responses. [Read Jn.13.8-11] And when he'd finished washing their feet, he emphasised that he'd been setting them an example of true leadership. But again, why feet? Well, we've got a picture here of the action of Divine Truth cleaning up the faculty of our human understanding. We're back to water and its correspondence again. But, again, why feet? Feet picture for us the lowest level or degree of our mind, the part of the real 'us' which is nearest to the material world of

the senses. They represent the part of us – our thought and feelings - which is most affected by this sensual world, and which is most likely to be contaminated by it.

You know the sort of thing: all those material and sensual delights which are so attractive, and which can have such a deep grip on us. It's not necessarily bad actions or deeds that we're concerned about here. We're not talking about an evil lifestyle. Jesus said, *Anyone who has already had a bath needs only to have their feet washed.* Anyone committed to a truly religious way of life doesn't deliberately commit evil. We sin, or miss the mark, because we're not perfect, but we recognise and reject those words and actions. This is what baptism represents – the commitment to lead a good life according to God's commandments.

Jesus' washing of feet represents the **inner** washing, the cleansing of our hearts and minds of evil motives, and this is an ongoing process for us all. Hidden away from public view, we all know that there are elements in us – desires and ambitions – which need to be washed away. We are all affected differently by different desires and drives, but the condition is common and universal.

How difficult it was for those disciples to shake off the desires which they harboured, and we are no different. The desire to control, to have what is another's, to be admired, to be well-thought of, to satisfy cravings – all these come from our contact with the natural, material world. In some ways, our appetites are insatiable, they're never satisfied. The only way for us to be relieved of this inner pressure and turmoil, to be truly content and at peace, to be truly healthy and a whole person, is for these appetites to be washed away by our Lord. This is what He wants to do for us; He wants to relieve us of the burden of these inner, destructive, unhealthy drives.

It's not a one-off action – our feet constantly get dirty. There are great depths within us that keep on emerging as we grow spiritually. But the Lord is constantly present, available, yearning for us to allow him to wash our feet. What a wonderful, marvellous offer we have from the One who is our Lord and Saviour. It's surely worth swallowing our pride, and allowing him to wash our feet.

Jesus said to His disciples, *Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*

**Prayer.** *Lord Jesus Christ, we acknowledge that our spiritual feet need cleaning. Relieve us from unnecessary guilt, recognising that we share a common predicament with our fellow travellers. Open our eyes to see you as our loving Heavenly Father, standing ever-ready to relieve us of our burdens. As we become aware of the unhealthy desires which so plague us, grant us the readiness for your loving wisdom to enter our hearts and minds, and to change us. So may we become washed clean, and made fit for your kingdom. Amen.*

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## Home Worship for May 2020 by Revd Alison Southcombe

**May Theme: Elijah passes the mantle of prophecy to Elisha**

**Week 1**

**Please read 1 Kings 19: 9-21**

After reading the passage, reflect on Elijah hearing the voice of the Lord as a gentle whisper.

There is a sense of something personal, something interior that is not found in the wind, earthquake or fire of the natural world, but is actually something very close to us if we are able to hear it. Take some time to reflect on how this has manifested in your own life.

Returning to our Bible passage: Elisha was ploughing when Elijah came to find him – outwardly this looks like a mundane task but we can sense it has a deeper spiritual significance.

Arcana Caelestia 5895. *...the meaning of 'ploughing' as the preparation made by good for the reception of truths...*



Take some time to consider Swedenborg's correspondence of ploughing – it might be interesting to accompany his explanation by reading Matthew 13: 1-23 the Parable of the Sower.

Thinking about Elisha ploughing in a mundane sense, reflect on something you do that outwardly looks like an everyday task but actually makes you useful to God?

**Closing prayer:**

**Be Still**

You, O Lord, are greater than the most powerful forces in this world,  
enable us to be still in this moment and know that You are God.

Lord it is You who answers out of the whirlwind of everyday life,  
breathe in us Your Holy Spirit to strengthen, comfort, and guide us. **Amen**

**Week 2**

**Please read 2 Kings 2: 23-25 – Elisha is jeered for being bald**

This is a strange little story! Without understanding that there is an internal or spiritual sense to it, it appears to be a very cruel fate for the 42 boys.

If we break this down to understand that the boys represent those who blaspheme against the Word as Holy and the bears correspond to those folks with a vehement love of literalness we can see how the bears gave the boys a mauling.

Thinking about the boys being mauled by the bears, most of us have been through this 'bear' stage in our Christian life can you recall how you moved through an insistence on the literal story to something deeper more internal akin to Elisha? What was it that helped you?

Coming back to the central issue in the story Elisha being bald Swedenborg talks of hair and hairiness denoting the most external or outermost of life or the Word. Elisha therefore has no outer we could say no 'literal sense' with which to be 'understood.' No wonder he was jeered at by the boys, as they could not understand what he was about.

Elijah on the other hand had a mantle or cloak and the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible describes this cloak as made of sheepskins which is very hairy. There is then, an outer, more accessible understanding wrapped around the internal message brought by Elijah the prophet, and this is what he passes on to Elisha symbolically in the mantle.

**Read a description of John the Baptist in Matthew 3: 1-6**

Sit quietly and think about Elijah and his sheepskin mantle and John the Baptist with his camel hair clothes. These can represent teaching the outermost aspect of us but something else can follow on from this.

**Now consider paragraph 36 from Swedenborg's New Jerusalem Heavenly Doctrine below:**

Man is so created as to be in the spiritual world and in the natural world at the same time. The spiritual world is where the angels are, and the natural world where men are. As man is so created, there has been given to him an internal and an external; an internal by which he is in the spiritual world, and an external by which he is in the natural world. His internal is what is called the internal man, and his external is what is called the external man.

Thinking about the truths that can be received by the external and then internal man reflect on the persons of Elijah and John the Baptist and then Elisha and our Lord Jesus.

**Closing prayer:**

Dear Lord, help us to strive to be obedient to your external Word.

As we do this our internal self is blessed and flourishes in Your light.

May we feel Your warmth and love for us, that we may truly be your children. **Amen.**

**Week 3**

**Please read 2 Kings 4: 1-7 The poor widow has to sell her son into slavery but has a little olive oil**

Elisha asks the woman what she has in the house. In the internal sense this is about 'remains,' that goodness that the Lord implants into each of us as a tiny infant. What she has is a little olive oil. **Please look up Zechariah 4: 11-14** to read a beautiful description of the use of this golden oil in the world. Sit and gently consider what understanding comes to you.

Thinking about the words of Elisha: "Go around and ask all of our neighbours for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few..." Take some time to reflect and consider the following: in your everyday life are you better at helping than being able to ask for help when you need it?

The woman "shut the door behind her and her sons..." This links to the idea that there is a time to pray with others and a time to pray alone. How easy it is for you to find time alone with the Lord?

**Closing prayer:**

Dear Lord,

You help our understanding become rooted in goodness.

By praising You, O God always and being cheerful,

Our neighbours greet us with warmth in their hearts.

With your help we will love life and see many good days. **Amen.**

**Week 4**

**Please read 2 Kings 5: 1-14 - Naaman healed of leprosy**

Swedenborg's writings help us to dig deeper into this story as in Apocalypse Explained 475<sup>18</sup>

"leprosy" signifies falsifications, and "Syria" (Aram in the NIV version) the knowledge of truth and good. "The waters of Jordan" signified the introduction to truths.

Naaman's leprosy is therefore revealing the truth of his internal state. Although a man of renown in Syria, his heart and mind were bent upon using his fame for his own ends and this was starting to show in his appearance.

The washing in the Jordan is symbolic of baptism into the Lord's truth and the setting aside of self-serving and false ideas. There is the separation or 'washing' of truth from falsity.

The Jordan is the boundary of the Lord's kingdom and we are cleansed in the Jordan before being able to proceed further on our journey to wholeness.

Naaman had captured a little Israelite maid, who is in fact the prompt to right action and suggests he goes to Elisha and being healed. The little maid is representative of spiritual truth that actually dwells within each of us. Are you able to recognise this little maid within yourself? Do you allow her freedom to speak to you?

In our story Naaman became very angry when Elisha would not see him and therefore did not listen to Elisha's instructions. In the light of this story, examine your own willingness to listen afresh to ideas and teachings from the Word even if you already familiar with the story. Are you open and able to be challenged when new realisations come to you?

### **Closing Prayer**

Dear Lord, as your Word tells us, You will draw close to us when we draw closer to You. I draw closer to You now, so that I can hear from You, know You more and obey You. Give me wisdom to discern Your voice and act on it. **Amen.**

### **Week 5**

#### **Please read 2 Kings 8: 7-15 the murder of king Ben Hadad**

This is a blood and guts story and no mistake! Here Elisha is revealed as the true prophet he is. Elisha's answer in verse 10 sounds like a falsity, but in fact it was the truth: *"Elisha answered, 'Go and say to him, 'You will certainly recover'; but the Lord has revealed to me that he will in fact die.'"*

What would it be like to know the future and know that you will not be able to change it?

What does this particular passage teach us about the Lord God?

The temptations of the heart (Swedenborg would talk about the will) prompt us to follow their bidding and indeed people talk about "following their heart." Take a little time to reflect how this can be bad advice.

### **Reflect on the following verses:**

#### **Proverbs 27:19**

<sup>19</sup>As water reflects the face, so one's life reflects the heart.

#### **Psalms 51**

<sup>10</sup>Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

<sup>11</sup>Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

<sup>12</sup>Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

### **Swedenborg writes about the love central to our heart as follows:**

Our love is our life itself. What our love is like determines how we live and therefore everything about what we are as human beings. It is, however, specifically our ruling or dominant love that makes us who we are. From **New Jerusalem Heavenly Doctrine 54**

### **Closing Prayer**

Dear Lord, I want my heart to be completely free to love You. Give me a heart free of self-absorption, that I might know and love You in every person I meet. Give me a heart brimming with joy and peace, that remains firmly rooted in You. Give me a clean heart able to love You. **Amen.**

## **Home worship June 2020**

### **Jumping off points week 1 Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> June**

We are asked to reflect on the idea of being spiritually 'asleep' and 'awake' with various Biblical references to prompt our thinking.

The idea that our physical understanding of being awake and alert or the opposite states of sleepy and dozy can be a spiritual pointer is probably not new to us, but what sort of things in your own life have been what you could consider 'a wake- up call'?

The Lord seems to allow what could be called the ordinary events of life a deep power to move us and potentially to change us.

Finding love fill us with joy while losing it breaks our heart. The close experience of birth and death can be overwhelming and lead to deeper consideration of our priorities and values.

The experience of growing up and leaving childhood draws us into new areas. Our employment, financial circumstances or developments around physical health and new opportunities give us reasons or prompts to think more deeply and set new goals or priorities.

What have you been aware of as a 'wake-up call' in your life and is there something you can point to as having been of particular significance?

How did it change you and what have you learnt through this?

Is it perhaps time to rethink and review the things that have been 'sleepily' going along in routine patterns keeping us busy and occupied, but at the same time letting habits we may be better off without become established?

### **Jumping off points week 2 Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> June**

Baptism promises are very often made by parents as they celebrate and give thanks for their young children in a formal church ceremony. For many families the continuous work of bringing up a family becomes a practical daily challenge without much awareness of the spiritual being formed and nurtured within the pattern and priorities of everyday life.

Nicodemus came to the Lord at a time of darkness – perhaps our own first approaches to the Lord are also secretive, under cover, checking it all out in our own way and in our own time.

The personal discovery of the Lord and developing our own confidence in His leadership for our life takes time.

Consider the things you have achieved – perhaps academic qualifications, learning to drive, skills in running a home and the relationships and friendships which enrich life. None of these come without effort and commitment and our learning doesn't stop with passing an exam any more than a friendship can deepen or thrive without some contact and connection.

What aspects in your life are perhaps in need of making new and being refreshed? It can be relatively easy to identify external aspects of life we would change but much harder to see the habits and traits which keep us away from the kingdom of God.

For example: the love of sharing gossip can feel like aspects of close friendship and be very enjoyable. But do some relationships need to have a bit of a 'spiritual clean' and reset the boundaries of the sort of conversations that are appropriate? Can you think of how to gently steer away an idea or explain that you are no longer comfortable speaking so personally about other people in the future? Having done it once can you then maintain the new approach until it becomes a firm boundary in your life and others recognise it is something you don't encourage or welcome?

### **Jumping off points week 3 Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June**

Today is known as New Church Day, the Sunday nearest to 19<sup>th</sup> June because of the significance of #791 in Swedenborg's The True Christian Religion (TCR). The date he gives as 1770 means we are this year at the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

*After the completion of this book (TCR), the Lord called together His twelve disciples, who had followed Him in the world; and a day later He sent them all forth throughout the spiritual world to preach the Gospel, that the Lord God Jesus Christ is king, and His kingdom shall be for ever and ever, as foretold by Daniel (Daniel 7:13-14) and in Revelation (Revelation 11:15):*

*Blessed are they who come to the wedding supper of the Lamb, Revelation 19:9.*

*This happened on the nineteenth of June in the year 1770. This was meant by the Lord's saying:*

*He will send his angels, and they will gather together His chosen people from the bounds of the heavens on one side as far as the bounds of the heavens on the other, Matthew 24:31.*

The revelations the Lord gave and continues to give to men and women in this world take many forms. Those who truly seek His presence in their lives find ways of being enriched in ways that bless their life and that of those around them. Swedenborg always described himself as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Writings provide explanations and insights which clear some of the 'spiritual clouds' and allow truths to shine through Biblical texts.

Divine revelation is the only way we can know the Lord and He provides this for us. He wants us to know Him while we live on earth and to become angels in the heavens in the fullness of time. Sacred scripture enables us to know Him and learn of Him in ways that fit our simplest understanding but also contain depths to enrich us more fully as we develop and grow.

The reading in today's Home Worship speaks of the sower and the way human minds accept and apply the things which come from the Lord. Perhaps today is a good time to consider the way our understanding needs to be guided by and instructed by the Lord, all the provision He has made for us to know him through the written word of the Bible and the Writings. Then we can apply ourselves to this process so our life is spiritually more fruitful and abundant.

### **Jumping off points week 4 Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> June**

The image of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm of sheep beside still waters under the care of a Good Shepherd resonates with us. Who would not want to be in such a safe and pleasant situation to live out their days without any external concerns?

The psalm does take us into more difficult places though. Struggling through the 'valley of the shadow of death' is part of this psalm; we can't just settle for the cushy bits and ignore the clear message of the Shepherd still being there with support and strength when it is needed most. Perhaps this is why these few verses are well-known and well-loved as they cover a journey from safety through danger and onto a better state at the end. Simple but powerful message, yet with immense depth and meaning to draw on and apply to physical and spiritual situations we encounter.

Perhaps you may wish to take the time to reflect on the whole of Psalm 23 and recognise the times the difficulties you have experienced have led onto new states with a different understanding and appreciation of the Lord's presence and guidance. Has 'a disaster' looked more like a blessing with the benefit of hindsight? Did something good come out of changes beyond your control? Not everything is pleasant or nice, but recognising things we cannot change and coping anyway can teach us a resilience and strength that can serve us or others in the future.

Our world is being changed through Covid 19 coronavirus. The outcomes are still being explored, change is still happening and life will not be 'normal' again. It is simplistic to say things are 'good' and 'bad' when the experience is so complicated and wide ranging. Finding ways through this particular 'valley of the shadow of death' is a very real and present concern for the world; may our lives know His peace.

## Home Worship for June 2020 by Revd Robin Wooldridge

### Week 1

‘Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead and Christ will give thee, light’ Ephes v. 14

We have a great work before us. We are created to become angels after death and while we live here in the natural world we must live with this end result in mind. We must develop an angelic character – a character which is developed by regeneration. In short, by faith and repentance, we must be born again. It’s a case of putting off the old and putting on the new. We must not neglect this great duty.

With this great duty before us we must not ‘sleep as others’ but rather watch and pray. Even when we lose ourselves in the concerns of worldly life we must not sleep when we should be ‘up and doing’. In Proverbs we read, ‘Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty’ (xx. 13) Furthermore, ‘Yet a little sleep. A little slumber. A little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man’ (vi. 10, 11). ‘He that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame’ (x. 5)

It’s one thing to sleep when duty calls but far more hurtful to be asleep spiritually when it would serve us better to be attentive and watchful. To sleep spiritually is to risk losing eternal life. We read in Ephesians v.14 ‘Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light’. To awake or to be awake is to watch or to be watchful. The Lord says, ‘Watch and Pray’ and ‘Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh’ ‘What I say unto you I say unto all. Watch’. But what do we mean by sleeping? What do we mean by being watchful – in a spiritual way? When we are here in the world, living our life everyday, paying bills, doing the shopping, we are little aware of our spirit. The Lord warns us to be in a state of readiness when he comes at the end of our life ‘lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping’. (Mark xiii. 36). The Psalmist calls this carnal life of man ‘the sleep of death’ (xiii. 3). Consider 1 Thess. V. 6 ‘Let us not sleep as do others; but let watch and be sober’. It’s clear that sleeping means living in what might be described as a careless state of mind. On the other hand, to be wakeful or watchful means to shun evils as sins and turn to the Lord in prayer.

We do not die at our bodily death but live on in the spirit world. The body is cast aside and we enter into the eternal world where we go to heaven – or hell. It’s more accurate to say that death is the death of the soul and the soul is dead when it is separated from God and a soul is separated from God when it lives in the evils of sin. Hence Adam died by eating the forbidden fruit; he died as to the spirit by the sin of disobedience. Now we understand death more clearly, what to say about life in its true sense? We are not truly alive and cannot find true joy or happiness in a life of sin. ‘He that believeth not the Son shall not see life’ (John iii. 36). The Lord also says that those who hear His words and believe are ‘passed from death unto life because we love the brethren’ (1 John iii. 14)

The Lord is our life and light. Without the Lord we are dead. The task is to awake from the ‘sleep of death’ and turn to the Lord. We must ask ourselves, what is our present state?’ Are we spiritually speaking ‘a sleeper’, snoring in our slumber oblivious to the spiritual reality? The Lord and his angels are with us. Awaken and arise from the dead and the Lord will give you light.

Prayer:

May the light of God illumine the heart of my soul. Amen

## Week 2

‘Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God’  
(John iii. 3)

These words were spoken by the Lord to Nicodemus – a Jewish ruler. The Lord stressed the necessity of a new birth. Afterwards, he continued: ‘Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God’.

Nicodemus was well known for his piety, wealth and liberality. He may well have understood that the man in front of him was the Lord but not only was it dangerous to acknowledge the Lord but he would risk losing everything – including his own life. Therefore he would go to the Lord at night – away from the prying eyes of the masses.

Nicodemus would have understood the notion of being born again. It was a tradition among the Jews that baptism was done in day time in front of witnesses. Even the gentiles of the time understood the idea of being born again as they were accustomed to water baptism of those who gave themselves up to the worship of their idols. It is interesting to note that those who had undergone such baptism were believed to have become the child of the deity so Nicodemus was aware of the implications of being ‘born again’. So what is different in the new birth required by the Lord? Is it just the outward baptism by water? No, baptism really means the purification of the soul. Water symbolizes truth from holy Scripture, which truth is called ‘water of life’. Water is not enough. In Jeremiah ii. 22 we read ‘Though thou wash thee with nitre and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me, saith the Lord God.’ The new birth of which the Lord speaks is nothing short than the creation of a new creature. But we are taught that such transformation doesn’t just happen in an instant. The Word teaches us that it is ‘first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear’ (Mark iv, 28). The sudden awakening is conversion rather than regeneration.

What is important is that our ‘new birth’ is that it is something for which we must take responsibility and work towards. This new creation has the two loves at its foundation: Love of the Lord and love of the neighbour. The old nature comprises all the false persuasions which result in love of the self and love of the ways of the world. The path to regeneration begins in the earliest years. It begins with good affections towards parents and understand what is right and just. This forms the first step towards repentance which is the foundation of regeneration. At first this is felt as Godly sorrow for sin but leads to self-examination. This in turn, leads to recognizing evils and then confession to the Lord – shunning evils in affection, thought, word and deed.

To be ‘born of water and of the spirit’ simply means to be regenerated by truth from the Word.

Prayer:

May the flame of Christ kindle me to love. Amen

### Week 3

‘Behold, a sower went forth to sow’ (Matt. XIII. 3)

The way the Lord teaches through parables is very interesting. We see Divine Wisdom contained within natural images. There is a reality that’s not seen in abstract or common terms. Let’s explore a well known parable – the Parable of the Sower – to understand how the parable reveals Divine Wisdom.

‘Behold’, said the Lord, ‘a sower went forth to sow.’ In the 37<sup>th</sup> verse of the chapter the sower of the seed is the Son of Man. The Lord uses the name. the Son of Man in reference to himself as the ‘Word made flesh.’ The parable tells us that some seed fell by the way-side, some on stony places, among thorns and some on good ground. The Lord explains that these four places where the seeds fell refer to the mind set of four different types of people. The way-side hearers are the first group. The term ‘way-side’ is not an accurate translation from the Greek. A more meaningful translation would be ‘along the way’ meaning the common way. This correction helps us to understand the spiritual meaning more clearly. The ways of men are spiritually the principles they hold. When we talk of the way or ways of the world we really mean the ideas or persuasions adopted by worldly man. When we say ‘ways of wisdom’ we mean the principles of religion. The ‘way of righteousness’ is the doctrine teaching men to live righteously. If we live according to the Divine Teachings we are indeed walking in the ways of the Lord. So the common ways of men really means the selfish and worldly love of man. The Lord explains that if you hear the word of the kingdom but do not understand it then you will fall into evil ways. The idea that a person does not understand really means that the person does not wish to make it a principle of life. As birds pick up these seeds is the same way the seeds are taken by evil ways.

The second class of minds – where the seeds fall on stony ground – shows that there is no permanent growth. Here the seed may sprout but being on stony ground cannot take deep root. The Lord explains that initially some will receive the Word with joy only to abandon the Divine Principles later as the old ways re-emerge – the Divine Principle fails to take root.

The third mindset class is where the seed falls among thorns. These thorns are the cares of the word, lust for the pleasures of life. We receive the Teachings and apply them to life and yet we become engrossed in worldly cares – the anxieties and the fears.

The fourth seeds fall on good ground which bring forth fruit. The Divine is understood and applied in life – loving the Lord and love of the neighbour.

So we can look at ourselves and ensure that we are of good heart so we can reap the blessings of the Divine.

Prayer:

Blessed are you O Lord for your light that shines through creation. Amen



## Week 4

‘The Lord is My Shepherd; I shall not want’ (Ps. Xxiii 1)

The Lord has many names in the scriptures. He is called: Father, King, Saviour, Prophet - along with several other names. But one of the most interesting names of the Lord is that of shepherd – the shepherd of Israel or shepherd of the church. In this Psalm, the psalmist invites us to consider the Lord as a shepherd. In Isaiah xl. ii we read: ‘He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.’ In John x. ii 27, 28) we read: ‘My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.’ For those of His Church are ‘the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand’ (Ps xcv. 7).

The Psalmist writes that the Lord is his shepherd yet in the original it is Jehovah and not the Lord and hence it is ‘Jehovah is my Shepherd’. Jehovah is the Shepherd of Israel; however, in the New Testament we discover that the Shepherd of the Church is Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jehovah and Jesus are equally said to be the Shepherd of the Church. Yet we know there is only one Lord, one God. Furthermore, there is but one flock. Jehovah of the Old Testament is the name before His manifestation in the flesh. While unmanifested no human eye could see him for what is Divine and infinite is beyond finite vision or conception. He assumed humanity to be seen and known of men. He became ‘Emmanuel, which being interpreted is God is with us’ (Matt i. 23). In 1 Timothy iii. 16 it is written: ‘God was manifest in the flesh.’ In John xiv. 9. 11 we read ‘I am in the Father, and the Father in Me’ and ‘I and My Father are one’ (John x. 30).

But who are the people of His pasture? These are men who spiritually love one another and love the Lord as their shepherd. Is it any wonder that such followers are represented by lambs and sheep? ‘The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want’ and ‘He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.’ The green pastures refer to the heart being gifted with spiritual love or goodness while still waters to the mind or understanding being gifted with truth. When the sheep went to their fold they followed the shepherd who would be calling or perhaps playing a pipe. Isn’t this a pleasing image of the Saviour’s people following the Saviour’s voice – the ‘voice of His Word’? In John x. 27-28 we read ‘My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give them eternal life.’ Sheep were trained to follow only the voice of the shepherd. The Lord says: ‘A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they not the voice of strangers’ (John x. 5) We are to keep true to the Teachings and our regeneration.

‘They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living foundations of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes’ (Rev. vii 16, 17).

Prayer:

Blessed are you O Lord for you awaken me to life. Amen