

Home Worship jumping off points for the month of April 2021

Week 1

The Romans were occupiers, and in order to keep resistance to the occupation to a minimum they allowed the Jews to keep most of their power, which they yielded over their own people, just so long as they didn't oppose Roman occupation. The Romans didn't care much about religious issues but tolerated them to prevent a Jewish revolt against Rome. The Chief Priests and the Pharisees exploited this situation. For example, in their dealings with Pilate they already implied that Jesus could be a threat, which eventually lead to Pilate to wash his hands of the situation and turn Jesus over to them allowing them to conduct a mock trial. It was also they who convinced Pilate to seal the tomb and place a guard to prevent any attempt by Jesus' followers to remove the body and claim Jesus had rose on the third day as he said he would.

The curious event that happened when the disciples entered the empty tomb and beheld the abandoned grave clothes is intriguing. According to the best translations, the way the clothes were lying in the tomb, was as if they were laid out in the same position that the body was laid with the headscarf also where Jesus' head had been. In other words, it looked as though the body had simply evaporated through the clothes leaving them in that same position!

Week 2

As far back as the book of Genesis and the story of Adam and Eve we can see how important this idea of freewill is. Adam and eve were instructed not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. To eat something in the spiritual sense is to make something a part of who we are in spirit, just as the physical food we eat would become part of our natural body. Being able to eat from any tree of the garden, but not from that tree which was in the centre? Of the garden not taking the appearance that we live from ourselves to be the reality. We can live by the appearance that we live from ourselves in order to be able to make free choices. But, we are never to take this to be the reality. This is reflected in the statement of faith adopted by the New Church from the book True Cristian Religion, namely: *"Good actions are to be done by us as if from ourselves; but it ought to be believed that they are from the Lord working in us and through us"*. Conjugial Love 82. See also Divine Providence 78 & 96, Arcana Celestia 10777, Heaven & Hell 352[3]

Week 3

It is interesting that when we tell a simple story, like a parable for example, the story is able to be understood in some form by even a small child. As we grow and develop and expand our perspective the story begins to mean more and more to us. Then, when we are older still, we can begin to appreciate something of what the message within the parable is saying to us. This development continues until we are actually able to use what the parable teaches to help improve our living and that of others if we can pass our learning on. The case is similar with the whole Word of God. The people who wrote the Old Testament for example, only seen the Lord's proposes in a very literal way through what they could understand about this world. Spiritual weapon to fight against out evils for example could only be seen from a physical world perspective. Today, our understanding is ready to accept a deeper spiritual meaning within the Word of God. As we develop our understanding of the spiritual meaning within the Word we can begin seeking ways to use it in our living and also help others to come to understand and do the same. Both as individuals and as a world we can all gradually progress beyond the obscuring clouds of the literal sense of God's Word, allowing the Lord's love and wisdom to shine through in all its golden splendour to give life to our spirit, just as the physical sun shines through the clouds in the sky to give life to all the world. Apocalypse Explained 36 *"clouds signify Divine truths in ultimate"*. Doctrine of the Sacred Scriptures 14[2] *"clouds" signify the sense of the letter of the Word"*.

Week 4

In the modern world of advanced science and technology religion as we know it has been very much relegated to primitive and historical methods of seeking the truth about life and creation. However, in the

world of Quantum Physics many things have been discovered that appear to turn the current scientific understanding of life and creation on its head. Through the various experiments conducted in light of quantum physics, experiments made well known through the arrival of the internet, science has reached the uncomfortable conclusion that reality only becomes fixed when it is observed. Before it is observed it has the potential to be many other things. Experiments such as the “Double Slit experiment”, “Schroders cat experiment”, The two particles connected, yet far apart experiment (see internet references below). It turns out that many of these experiments back many of the explanations to be found in the heavenly doctrines for the New Church which were written and published by Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). For example, we read in Arcana Celestia (AC) 775[2] *“With regard to the origin of all things, every single thing comes from the Lord. And from the book Heaven and Hell “All things come into being from things prior to them and therefore from a First. They are maintained in being in the same way, since continuance in being is constant coming into being.”.*

Scientists have been aware of these things for decades but avoided them due to their implications. Again Swedenborg writes in AC 3483[2] *“The learned know that remaining in being consists in perpetual coming into being. Nevertheless, it is contrary to their affection for falsity, and consequently to their reputation for being learned, to say that natural forces are constantly kept in being, even as they came into being, from the Lord's Divine”.*

References: “Double Slit” experiment <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9tKncAdlHQ> Schroders cat experiment <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OkVpMAbNOAo> the two particles connected, yet far apart experiment <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/07/22/science/far-apart-2-particles-respond-faster-than-light.html>

Home Worship Services for April: prepared by Revd Jack Dunion

Easter Sunday 4th April 2021

The chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 'Sir,' they said, 'we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, "After three days I will rise again.....Take a guard," Pilate answered. 'Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.' So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone. Matt. 27:62,63,65,66see also Apocalypse Explained 400[14]

The leaders of the Jews had asked Pilate to seal the tomb and put a guard on it. It wasn't that they feared the resurrection because they didn't believe in the resurrection. No, it was because they feared the Lord's followers would say He had risen. They feared this may then inspire people to keep Jesus' teaching alive among His followers. The tomb was sealed because it wasn't just the Lord they wanted to get rid of it was also the truths that He came to reveal. What was it that made the Jewish leaders so determined to prevent Jesus and His teaching from getting out? Surely it was that both Jesus and the truth He revealed posed a threat to their own power and authority, which was being sustained through false teachings from the letter of the Word. No doubt, they were thinking only of this world and what they could get out of it for themselves. Why wouldn't they? if they didn't believe in the Lord or the resurrection! Little did they know that them placing the stone over the entrance (or exit) to the tomb was only permitted in order to represent what they did to the literal sense of the Lord's Word.

In the Word, a stone or a rock, with its enduring and stable structure, represents truth. A stone shaped by human hands though, would represent man made truth, which is falsity. By using the truths of the letter of the Word to empower themselves, instead of using the same to lead people to the Lord, they were sealing the truths of the Word in, prevent them from shining forth from the letter of the Word. This is how they were preventing the Lord and heaven from being truly known. After the resurrected, the stone was rolled away and now the Lord Himself is the Word now resurrected on every level. The seal had been placed around the tomb entrance because it represented what the leaders of the church had attempted to do with the scriptures.

So, what could this mean for our world today? We know that through the heavenly doctrines for a New Church on earth, the internal spiritual sense of the Word has been made available. Whenever we approach the Lord in sincerity and read the Word in light of the heavenly doctrines which He has revealed, it is as though the stone which once sealed in the truth gets rolled away and the truth about the Lord and His resurrection to eternal life is able to be known and spread by word and deed by all those who choose to live by the revealed truths.

Prayer: *Ever blessed and most adorable Lord, Your people celebrate your great victory over the hells and Your great revelation of life everlasting. Praise and thanksgiving to You Lord for Your great love, which passes all our understanding. Praise and thanksgiving that You O mighty God, the Lord of all life, have become the redeemer and Saviour to eternity. Amen*

Sunday 11th April 2021

John 14:6 ***"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life.*** Although my home worship contribution is scheduled to cover the month of April at the time of writing it is actually 25th January, which to us Scots is known as "Burn's Day". Burns day is the day on which we honour our national poet Robert Burns. One of Burns' most famous poems was "To a mouse". This poem was written after a farm labourer who was helping Burns plough a field stumbled upon a mouse's nest. As he was about to hack out the nest and kill the mouse Burn's suddenly intervened saving the mouse's life. In the poem Burns compares his own

situation to that of the mouse. The mouse has been busy building a cosy nest for the winter but how easily disaster could come upon it, caused no doubt by circumstances beyond its control: It's where the well-known saying comes from "*The best-laid plans o' Mice and Men*". But Burns went further, realising that he himself was worse off than the mouse because at least the mouse was ignorant and knew nothing of any impending disaster. And this because it didn't have the capacity to see ahead and worry about it, as we humans do. And so Burns writes: "*Still thou are blest, compared wi' me! The present only toucheth thee: But Och! I backward cast my e'e, On prospects drear! An' forward, tho' I cannot see, I guess an' fear!*"

That which Burns was inadvertently highlighting here was that we humans have an ability to reason which the mouse didn't have. Swedenborg's writings tell us how freedom and reason is what actually makes us human as it allows us to procure the Lord's life and so live the life of our own choosing forever; "*all the good which a person does from freedom according to reason is appropriated to him as his own*". See also Divine Providence 78 & 96, Arcana Celestia 10777, Heaven & Hell 352[3]

Our reason gives us the capacity to look at the world around us and also take in the vastness of the universe and conclude, as we might, that there is indeed an intelligent designer to whom we should look when contemplating our existence. Having reasoned such, as every human culture in history has done, we can then freely choose whether or not to act according to this belief by following the creator's instructions on how to live our lives here on earth. These instructions are what we know as the Word of God. The Lord's instructions or commands, along with our ability to reason, are what give the human race the potential to become angels in heaven through our own choices and thereby living for and from the Lord who is the way, the truth and the one true life!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, our Heavenly Father who has created all people that they may live forever in happiness in Your Eternal Kingdom, thanks giving and praise be to You for this assurance of Your great purpose, and of Your Providence that forever works to fulfil the same. Because of my frailty O Lord, grant me Your light and Your truth, the will and discernment to be led by You and to walk humbly with You in gratitude for the wondrous promise of Your blessings in Your Eternal Kingdom. Amen.*

Sunday, 18th April 2021

"Then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."
Matthew 24:30

As I sit at my desk this morning I notice that the sun is obscured by layers of cloud. I expect as the year progresses and the sun rises in the sky it will begin burning through the clouds and they will dissipate far more easily, allowing the sun to shine in all its golden splendour. This reminds me what can happen when we are reading the Lord's Word. Mention is made in the Word that the Lord will come through "the clouds of heaven" where it signifies the internal spiritual sense of the Word shining through its outer literal sense. As we read in **Arcana Caelestia (AC) 49[3]** "*The 'clouds of heaven' are the literal sense of the Word.*"

Here we see that the actual words as we read and understand them literally contain within them a deeper meaning. As we are so used to taking whatever we read literally, the letter of the Word can obscure any deeper meaning within. For those who are willing to live as the Lord teaches, this internal spiritual sense is permitted to shine through the letter which obscures it. This obscurity being dissipated is similar to what happens with the summer sunshine. If we think of the sun with its heat and light as representing the Lord who is love (heat) and wisdom (light), the sky representing heaven where the Lord is, and knowledge's of the Lord and heaven being contained within the Word, behind or within its literal meaning, then we can see how life from the Lord can shine through the clouds of the literal sense and give life to our spirit.

The structure of the literal sense of the Word is fitted to the minds of people in this world – not just for people of today but to be adapted to the way people perceived things in the past also; truth for every age. Today the Lord calls on us to look beyond just the literal sense of His Word to be moved by the meaning within, which tells us all about the Lord and His glorious and wonderful plan for the human race; as we read again in **AC49**:

“power and great glory” are the internal sense of the Word, which in all things both in general and in particular has reference solely to the Lord and His kingdom; and it is from this that the internal sense derives its power and glory.

The Lord must lead us in freedom according to reason, and when we see the internal sense of the Word shining through the letter, it makes sense and we can reason about it and then freely choose to live a life consistent with it. The Lord is love and wisdom just as the sun in our world is heat and light, and all those in His kingdom live from Him by following His love and wisdom just as we all have life in this world from our sun. And because the internal sense is all about the Lord and heaven then the things we read about from that internal sense are His life in us. It is by reasoning that this is true and freely choosing to live by it that we acquire our new life from the Lord. We call this process regeneration, which is to be born again, but now from Him instead of self-living.

“Then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

Matthew 24:30.

Prayer: *Dear Lord Jesus Christ, giver of all life and saviour of all Your children. we acknowledge this day that without You we can do nothing. Lift from us any doubt we may have in Your ability to save us from ourselves, so that we may have the strength to do Your will and to put the love of Your people and Your purposes for them first in all we think and speak and do. Lord, in Your mercy hear our prayers. Amen.*

Sunday, 25th April 2021

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” Matthew 11:29

In the course of our education we are offered two alternative explanations regarding the creation of our world. On the one hand we have the creationist idea that the world was created in seven days, a literal interpretation of the so called “Creation Story” as recorded in the book of Genesis. On the other hand, we have the “Big Bang Theory” followed by the Darwinian idea that we evolved over millions of years from simple life forms through primates to humans.

Does Swedenborg offer an alternative view? I think he does!

It is commonly understood that the universe was created out of nothing and it is expanding out into nothingness. But Swedenborg clearly tells us that the Lord not only created the universe but He is continually holding everything in being even as it is coming into being. If the Lord were to let up for even a second, everything would instantly cease to exist! Why do we not hear this taught in our schools and colleges and academic institutions? Well, Swedenborg perhaps offers an explanation here:

Arcana Caelestia (AC) 3483: *The learned know that remaining in being consists in perpetual coming into being. Nevertheless, it is contrary to their affection for falsity, and consequently to their reputation for being learned, to say that natural forces are constantly kept in being, even as they came into being, from the Lord’s Divine.*

Further, we are taught through the doctrine of evolution that matter gives rise to the human mind. But it appears that Swedenborg is saying that it is the other way round; i.e. it is the mind which gives rise to matter. According to what Swedenborg says, the Lord's life flows out through us and is projected back to us as a theatre representation of our inner world.

AC 3483[2]: *“the whole visible universe is nothing else than a theatre that is representative of the Lord’s kingdom.”*

If this is the case then instead of us thinking according to the appearance that things exist out there, we need more to be thinking about them originating and existing from within ourselves. This is very interesting and I think potentially very empowering to the individual. It basically means that we have perhaps far more power over our lives than has been known.

We read in **AC 3702:** *“the human being has been so created that Divine things that are the Lord's may **come down through him** even to the lowest things of the natural order, and from the lowest things of the natural order may go up to Him.”*

Embracing the Lord's words in the light of these new revelations through the writings of Swedenborg, could potentially have profound implications regarding the way we deal with things such as war and human conflicts. If we can't change the world through intervention, out there; can we perhaps change things by making changes from within. The Lord asks us to reject our own self will and do His will instead. He advises: *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.”* If that which is within us is what manifests in our world, what would we rather have within us? Would it be selfish loves and worldly desires? Or the life of love and wisdom from He who is, was and is to come?

If everyone in the world followed the Lord’s teaching the world would surely be perfect, having come forth from He who is love itself and shaped by He who is wisdom itself. Perhaps it’s a bridge too far for now to expect that the whole world would choose to live from the Lord instead of from themselves. But, surely, the more who do then the better the world will be. Each one of us in that regard can make one small difference and become better people along the way. But all of us together, well, surely, together we can truly change the world.

Lord of all, so often we struggle in life trying to complete tasks which sometimes seem to come over the horizon faster than we can cope. Help us to stop now and then and allow You into our lives, to be still and know that You are God, from everlasting to everlasting. Help us to be willing to let go of our own agenda and be more confident in Your ability to save. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayers. Amen.

May Home Worship – Revd David Gaffney

Week 1 – Sunday 2nd May 2021

Are we Spiritual or Religious?

Give to the LORD the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come before Him. Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! (1 Chronicles 16:29)

Over the years, many people have said to me that they are spiritual but not religious. Because the Lord is the origin of everything good and true, all that is spiritual comes from the Lord. The Lord's essential qualities of Goodness and Truth are the only source of anything Spiritual. What I think the people are rejecting is not religion but *false* piety and the things of the Church that mankind seems to have degenerated.

People get great solace from the awe and wonder of the majesty of nature; which has been created by the Lord. *“Know that the LORD Himself is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.” (Ps 100:3)*. But we cannot be joined with the Lord simply by immersing ourselves in such things as the beautiful views of nature, or by yoga, or meditation etc., of the types generally practised in the Western World. These things can bring us calmness, but in themselves they cannot really improve our character or regenerate us. They are useful peripheral things but they cannot teach us how the Lord wants us to behave in myriads of different situations. *All people throughout the world who live according to their religion are saved (AC 8941)*. And *religion must be formed from the truths of the Word (AC 9256)*.

When we take hold of the Lord's Truths and live them out in life from genuine motives, then we change and the Lord's goodness flows into our hearts and He is joined to us and we are joined to Him. We become channels of His goodness and truth, His love and His wisdom. This process of taking hold of the Lord's Truths and *living* them is called *religion*. So religion causes what is spiritual to flow down into us from the Lord. His Word is our handbook to leading a good, fulfilling and regenerative life. Through religion we become spiritual; it is the Lord's Truth (with His Love in within it) which is spiritual

Since the time of Noah, the Lord has made Himself known to us through written revelation called 'The Word'. We need to live by it's instruction. *Religion alone can renew and regenerate mankind because it occupies the highest parts of our minds. (TCR 601)*.

Religion must be formed by the truths of the Word (AC 8941). And: *The Lord has provided that in every religion in the world, there are precepts similar to those in the Ten Commandments (DP 254)*. So people of every religion have the means to regenerate.

To conclude: we are in a **spiritual** state when the Lord's truths from His Word are being perceived in the mind, and when we put these truths into action in our lives we are being **religious**. To live the genuine life of religion from pure motives makes us spiritual.

A Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, help us to value the power of your Word as our guide to spiritual growth which is regeneration. We ask for the abiding presence of your Holy Spirit as we meditate upon your Word so we may be guided into living good lives. Amen.

AC = Arcana Caelestia, DP = Divine Providence, TCR = True Christian Religion

Week 2 – Sunday 9th May 2021

Humility

And Jesus said to His disciples, “ ... truly I say unto you, except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Mtt 18:3)

The disciples were arguing as to which one of them would be the greatest in heaven, and the Lord's response was that unless they become as little children they wouldn't be able to enter heaven at all. The disciples would have been puzzled by this; and probably taken aback; much the same as when Nicodemus in the Book of John answered Jesus: *"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (Jn 3:4)*. But Jesus had said, unless you become **as** little children, you cannot enter heaven. I wonder if you or I consider ourselves **as** little children? Children are very trusting, lacking in worldliness, wanting to learn, looking for a good teacher, looking for security, needing someone to trust. The Writings tell us that:

“Children in the Word represent those people who love the truths of the Word and desire them.” (Swedenborg, Arcana Caelestia, §489).

The Writings also tell us that some things in the Word are primarily for the excitement and delight of children; they are thrilling. Such stories as: the Creation story, Noah's ark, Moses in the bullrushes, David and Goliath and so on. These stories give children, whilst they are still young, a desire to learn more of the Word. The joy which flows into them when they hear such stories comes from the celestial angels who accompany them.

As we get older we may study more deeply in order to find answers to the bigger questions of life. But the Word of God is complex; it is from the Lord and *is* the Lord, as the Lord is fully in it; every 'jot and tittle' is there intentionally; set there by the Lord God Himself; it is an infinite document. Some of us might say to ourselves, "I don't understand this part or that part therefore the Word cannot be trusted." But it would be much better to say, "I don't yet understand it, I will pray to the Lord for enlightenment, and await His answer, because His Word is perfect."

To become heavenly, we need to remain humble before the Lord and His Word; to nurture our humility and not be haughty. We need to be positive in the belief that the Lord will open up new vistas of thought leading to exciting places; as children do when they read their stories. Children are teachable; we adults also need to be teachable. People are teachable - as little children are - when when they are in humility before the Lord's Word.

We begin life in the innocence of ignorance, we need to end life in the innocence of wisdom. To do this we need a conversion of the soul and reliance on His Word. We need to promise the Lord that we accept Him; that He will be our God and our Teacher and we will be His students. There will for most of us, be temptations along the road - possibly severe temptations - but the rewards will be out of this world.

A Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, may we be constantly vigilant and guard against haughtiness, maintaining a sense of humility before you and your Holy Word. Help us to be diligent in reading your Word and asking for the guidance of your Holy Spirit to interpret it's meanings, and to live the life required of us. Amen.

Week 3 – Sunday 16th May 2021

Promises, promises, promises!

“My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips.” (Ps 89:34)

A covenant means a promise, so what the Lord is saying here is that he doesn't take His promises lightly; he always keeps them, He says, *“nor will I alter the utterance of My lips.”*

Morality itself rests upon the act of promising. There can be no orderly society and no orderly Church without promises. We make our promises in freedom, and we need to be able to be relied upon. Without this reliance, no future plans can be made, and chaos results. We should think carefully before making a promise, and if necessary seek advice from various quarters before we make or receive one. A promise is a two way contract involving ourselves and someone else, and much investment of time and effort usually follows on from it. The promise itself is a basis of order and freedom, although to some people, it may seem to restrict freedom. There can't be any real morality apart from promises, because they bind us to put the common good before our selfish interests.

At the very beginning, when God created mankind, He knew we had to be allowed to follow our own path in order for us to be kept in freedom, and that this in turn would end up in “The Fall.” Without this allowed freedom, we could not be human. The following is God's first promise to us in the Bible: *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her **Offspring**; **He** shall crush your head, and you shall bruise **His** heel.”* (Genesis 3:15) (Note that the capitals (in bold) are omitted from some ‘modern’ versions of the Bible.) Although God made this statement as the process of ‘The Fall’ was about to begin, it is a promise about the coming of Himself on Earth as Jesus thousands of years in the future.

‘He’ in this passage, is the Lord God incarnate, Jesus Christ who was promised here to come and show us the way back to the Kingdom of Heaven; through adopting His loving and wise ways as described in the Bible. The Lord's heel which will be bruised is His inherited earthly ‘external or lowest part’ through which all His temptations came. He suffered the same types of temptations as we do: *“Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness..”* (Mk 7:22). The serpent's head that was crushed is the *false reasoning* in support of these evils which flowed into the Lord from the hells to try to cause Him to falter in His mission to save mankind. And the serpent itself - in this negative context - refers to wild sensuality not yet controlled by the bridle of wisdom. And so the Lord came as He said He would and resisted all the temptations which came His way - even to the Cross - so that He could set us free and show us the way back to Eden. God in fullness of time kept this first promise: *“And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.”* (Luke 2:7)

He keeps His promises and we should endeavour to keep ours: Jesus said, *“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you....”* (Jn 15:12-14) When the Lord makes a promise he does so from perfect knowledge, whereas we don't, we are bound to make mistakes on the way, the Lord knows that, so if we fall down, we can always get up and try again. The Lord's forgiveness is eternal if we are willing to carry on; learn from Him and get wiser as we go; for He is *“gentle and humble in heart.”* We are only really as good as our promises?

A Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, help us to keep our promises and to think carefully before we make them. Amen.

Week 4 – Sunday 23rd May 2021

“You’re upsetting me!”

‘The Lord said, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”’ Mtt 10:34.

As Christians, we are committed to becoming better people; aren’t we? *All of us* have habits, qualities and loves which - if we are honest with ourselves - we should like to change. We live in a world which encourages ‘me’ or ‘I’ to be dominant in our thinking instead of ‘the Lord’ and ‘them’ as well as ‘I’ or ‘me’. Sometimes we do need to think of ‘I’ or ‘me’ first such as in an aircraft where we have to put the oxygen mask onto ourself before our child, but this is so that we won’t pass out before we can put one on our child. So our thought is really for our child first. But this, perfectly acceptable and necessary type of ‘first’ is not the type I was thinking about. I was talking about self-centred or ego-centric thinking and living: ‘blow everybody else.’ This type of thinking is responsible for us taking what we *want* rather than what we *need*. For instance we can be hooked up on fashion, and the purchase of items which will be thrown away in perfectly good condition next year - ‘*consumerism*’. This approach makes a significant contribution to the wasting of the planet’s resources.

Many years ago, I was studying engineering, and we had to spend a day in the Department of Textile Engineering. We were shown a machine which rubbed samples of cloth with sandpaper and recorded how long it took to wear out the sample. The technician said, “This cloth is no good; it lasts too long. We will need to tweak the molecular structure of the polymer.” I was shocked. To me, there was something intrinsically wrong with this approach. I don’t know how many others in the group were similarly affected, but I got the impression that to openly criticise this policy would have upset somebody. The truth is that this kind of wasteful mindset is largely responsible for the environmental mess we find ourselves in today. Surely we should strive to become responsible stewards of the Lord’s provision for us, and we should take what we need, rather than what we want. Science is very good but we need to have the wisdom to use it properly?

There is a tendency these days for people to say, “You are upsetting me,” and this goes much further than considerations of wasting the Earth’s resources. It relates to all aspects of morality as described in the Bible in detail under the ‘Law and the Prophets,’ the spirit of which emerges out of the two great commandments to love God and our neighbour as ourselves (See: Mtt. 22). These relate to theft, adultery, coveting our neighbours property and so on in all their variety.

We are told in the Word of God and in the Writings that we should approach our brothers and sisters and kindly point out to them if we see them living in error. *“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.” (Mtt 18: 15 - 20, see also Swedenborg, New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine, Section 318).*

This is often difficult to do without *upsetting* the other person. Learning to do this effectively, is part of life’s long journey; it requires empathy wide ranging knowledge, and wisdom. It’s worth bearing in mind that **the Lord’s Word does the judging**, not us.

The Lord’s Word - the Law and the Prophets - is His sword. It cuts through false beliefs. It nearly always upsets us when it is shining a light on our grubby corners. If someone points out an issue and they are correct, it means we have to change our beliefs, our behaviours and our loves; pangs of conscience and internal struggle begins before we turn away and change. Sometimes these can be extremely difficult for us. This is regeneration, so if someone points out our ‘fault’, then to say ,

“You are upsetting my feelings” and walk away is to defeat morality. However, a good start might be: “You are upsetting me, but I am prepared to hear you out and try to change if necessary.” Otherwise we can make ourselves the victim and the other person the aggressor.

We should welcome the Lord’s sword cutting through our false and misleading beliefs. It is our’s and our neighbour’s eternal life which should be at the forefront of our concerns; this comes from true charity and will often cause consternation in the here and now.

A Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to listen to your Word and live accordingly. Help me to receive from others who have my best and eternal interests at heart. Amen.

Week 5 – Sunday 30th May 2021

Freedom

Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (Jn 8: 31 & 32)

Read John Chapter 8.

This quotation comes towards the end of John Chapter 8 and in a sense begins to usher in the conclusions of the main principles of the chapter. The chapter begins with Jesus entering the temple to teach, followed by the famous scene of the woman who was caught in the act of adultery being brought into the temple by the scribes and the Pharisees and thrown at the feet of Jesus for him to pronounce the judgement of stoning. Then Jesus said, *“Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” ... those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? “No one, Sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.” (Jn 8: 7 - 11).* In our key verses 31 & 32, Jesus establishes Himself as the bringer of the truth and at the end of the Chapter Jesus establishes Himself as the “I am”.

My sense is that this is the first time the woman has met Jesus. She was presumably brought up as a Jew within the hard line regime of the Pharisees, but our Lord showed an altogether more compassionate approach to her adultery, and brought into the world the concept that none of us are perfect, so we must think very carefully about judging others, because by doing so, we judge ourselves. Jesus tells her not to do it again. At the end of the Chapter, just after Jesus says to them, “before Abraham was, I am” (vs 58) Jesus slips away from the Temple because the Pharisees are so annoyed that they try to stone him.

Interestingly, stones - which represent hard and clearly defined essential truths of the Word - feature fairly prominently in this chapter; which is about the Lord introducing Himself as Divine Truth incarnate. The practise of stoning people as prescribed in the Old Testament Word *represented* the fact that truths from the Word were needed to kill false beliefs and resulting adulterous actions. The main problem with this is that once dead, the miscreant was not them in a position to reform their beliefs and ways. Jesus brought with Him the Holy Spirit and a new compassion into the world. But He still told her not to do it again.

When people give their lives over to the Lord, the freer they are and feel. On entering heaven, they can roam it's vast inexhaustible domains as opposed to the limiting and narrow confines of Hell. The Lord said, “... the truth will set you free”.

From our earliest childhood the Lord supplants good feelings of security and peace into us and continues to do so throughout lives. These reside in a special ‘compartment’ in our hearts and the Lord calls them ‘remains’. It is from these that we have urges to do good ourselves, and so we search for truth; so eventually, we can have a heart of goodness. We also have a compartment in our hearts harbouring selfish desires, and one in our heads harbouring false beliefs which support these selfish desires. To the extent that we do take on truths from the Word and do good from these, resisting the urges to be selfish, we are by degrees set free.

A Prayer: Dear Lord, May we act from your Love, take your truth, and do good. Amen

HOME WORSHIP for JUNE 2021 by REVD MARY DUCKWORTH

This month's theme is based on chapter 14, the last chapter of Swedenborg's work, *True Christian Religion [TCR]*, which is headed '**The Ending of the Age, the Lord's Coming, and the New Heaven and the New Church**'. At the end of the chapter Swedenborg adds a note about what happened in the spiritual world on the 19th of June 1770, which we speak of as New Church Day. So what led up to this event?

SUNDAY JUNE 6 The Darkness of Night Reading: Matthew 25:31-46

'If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.' Matthew 24:22

The song, 'Doh a deer, a female deer,' from the musical 'The Sound of Music', has been going round in my head since I watched it a couple of weeks ago, keeping me cheerful amidst the daily news update in the last 24 hours of the thousands of new people who have contracted the Covid 19 virus, the thousands who have entered hospital and the death toll of thousands diagnosed with the virus during the previous 28 days. A gloomy saga indeed – along with the restrictions of lockdown as I write this in January this year.

Bleak times, dark times in the depths of winter. The bright light on the horizon is the arrival of the vaccine. I had my first jab a few days ago. The hope is that this will enable resistance to the virus and allow people to live, work and relate to each other in a more normal way once more. Night giving way to day.

The regularity of the daily pattern of evening – night – morning – midday [the light cycle] reminds us that we are never stuck in perpetual night, but that morning always follows. The Lord created this pattern for us. It allows us to rest at night and recover our strength to freshly greet a new day, to be ready to meet whatever challenges might face us. Spiritually speaking, we move from the darkness of ignorance into the light of truth as it dawns in our minds, giving us an understanding of life and its purpose.

The pandemic has spread throughout the world affecting the lives of everyone. It has made life more abnormal and inhuman than anything I have known – the lack of human contact, the inability to touch, to hug, to express our love for each other. A cold, winter time indeed! But winter gives way to spring and summer, heat warms the earth bringing to life snowdrops, daffodils and then buds on trees. It was wonderful last year to watch the leafing and blossoming of the trees in my garden and the woods opposite. Then the herbs growing and the bees buzzing around the flowers; the birds singing away in the trees and nesting under the eaves. Nature carried on as we 'stayed at home' more aware of it than ever before. We slowed down, observed, became present.

Turning to the quote from Matthew at the top of the page we might want to say, "The pandemic has cut short the lives of millions of people throughout the world. We are desperate for the shortening of the pandemic so that others may live." But Jesus was talking about the time they were living in. Dark times when church leaders were driven by hypocrisy, more concerned with strict adherence to the letter of the law than to the spirit of the two great commandments – love to the Lord and the neighbour - which Jesus emphasised. These dark times Jesus referred to as 'the end of the age' – the end of an era in the life of the Jewish Church. The true message of the church was no longer being taught and followed, so a new message was needed, which Jesus preached and lived, heralding the dawn of the Christian Church.

Similarly in Swedenborg's time, the eighteenth century, the Christian Church had passed into dark times preaching that faith alone was necessary for salvation and believing in a trinity of persons in the Godhead. Love again had been lost. The end of an era for the Christian Church. Swedenborg had witnessed the Last Judgment taking place in the spiritual world a few years earlier, when those who had followed the Lord

leading good lives [sheep] were separated from those who had gone their own way [goats]. This restored a balance in the spiritual world enabling people on earth to again have the freedom to choose the Lord's way. A new understanding of God's Word was needed for this. *Now read the parable of the sheep and the goats, **Matthew 25:31-46**.*

Prayer Lord Jesus Christ, help us to support and encourage each other so that together we can face whatever we find daunting. Give us courage and strength to cope with the challenges of dark times and to seek the light of your truth to guide us through them. Amen.

SUNDAY JUNE 13 The Lord's Coming in the Word Revelation 22:1-6, 17

'Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.'
Matthew 24:30

When Christ was born on earth as Jesus, it was to bring the human race back to the Divine through accomplishing its redemption. The power of the hells over the human race was so strong at that time that this could only be done as a human being overcoming the evils and falsities of the world through temptations and thus restoring the balance of good and evil in the spiritual world and hence human freedom here on earth.

The Lord could not come again in person when the darkness of falsity was in danger of overwhelming the human mind in Swedenborg's day. After his resurrection and ascension into heaven he was united with the Father, the Human and Divine becoming One.

As foretold in both the Old and New Testaments the 'Son of Man' would be seen 'coming with the clouds of heaven' [Dan.7:13 & Rev.1:7] and 'coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory' [Matt. 24:30]. So in this second coming would he appear in the sky?

Swedenborg explains that the 'clouds of heaven' are the literal sense of the Word, the literal meaning hiding within itself the glory of the Divine - divine truth - just as clouds in the sky hide the brightness of the sun. The Divine would make himself known to humankind by means of the Divine Truth within the literal sense. This inner meaning had not been known in the Christian Church before this time.

The key to this inner truth or spiritual sense is through the correspondence of natural things to spiritual or heavenly things, our natural world being an outer expression of the spiritual world. So while the words God speaks to us guide our behaviour outwardly, they also have an inner message to guide our heart, mind and spirit. When we are invited to drink of the 'water of life', we know we need to drink water for our bodies to stay alive, but we are also being invited to drink of the water of truth, to learn of God's truth within the Bible, to take it into our minds and follow it in our lives. That will enable us to live his way and receive his love, his joy, his peace, his life. That is how we truly drink the 'water of life'. *Enjoy reading about the water of life in **Revelation 22:1-6, 17**.*

Prayer Lord Jesus Christ we thank you that when we want to come close to you we can read your Word in which you speak to us and make yourself known. Thank you for not only revealing yourself to us but also for helping us know ourselves and how to live with one another. Thank you for bringing us close to the angels of heaven and opening your Word to them as we read. Amen.

SUNDAY JUNE 20 The Beginning of the New Church Daniel 7:13-14; Revelation 11:15

And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. Matthew 24:31

June 19 is celebrated in the New Church as New Church Day, because on that day in 1770 Swedenborg tells us at the end of *True Christian Religion*:

After the completion of this book, 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](#).

791 True Christian Religion – translation by John Chadwick (1988)

The message of the New Church is that **the Lord God Jesus Christ is king, and His kingdom shall be for ever and ever**. So what does that mean to you in your life? How is the Lord your king? What difference does it make to you that he will never stop reigning?

Pause, become still, focus and give yourself time to reflect.

For me, it's acknowledging that when I just get on and do things the result isn't always as good as I might like it to be. Whereas when I place myself into the Lord's hands, because he knows what is best for everyone and I trust his leading, [in other words, I let him rule] things seem to flow smoothly with a good outcome. When I regularly begin the day reading from a spiritual book and/or the Word of God I feel connected with the Lord, under his influence and at peace. It feels like allowing him to reign in my heart and mind and so in my life. This does need to be regular because it is so easy to think I know how things should be, and that is putting myself in charge and keeping the Lord out. It happens all the time. So I need to be vigilant, especially when I am concerned about something important or feel I don't really know what to do or say in a situation. That is when I have to acknowledge my helplessness to the Lord and turn to him to lead me.

With the Lord God Jesus Christ as king for ever, that means that the powers of darkness – evil and falsity – cannot reign supreme. They might appear to have the upper hand at times, but it cannot last. I can trust in what is right and good and that true power is with them, because all good and truth are from the Lord who is all-powerful. I find it helpful to keep thanking the Lord for any good thing that happens or I might do, because I can't do it of myself; it is the Lord working through me.

It makes a huge difference to me to know that he will reign for ever and ever. I find it so reassuring that he will always be there for me and everyone. I'm not going to be suddenly left on my own. He will continue to give me all the good things I have, especially my life, which he sustains every moment. I am totally dependent on him for everything. He is reliable since he is a God of Love and will always continue to love me and forgive me no matter what I do. He doesn't change and never will. How wonderful!

Prayer Lord Jesus Christ, rule in my heart always. Not my will, but yours be done. When I am struggling, call me to you so that you can take control and all will be well. Thank you for all you give me, my life and all I need, companions to love and live with, so that together we might grow to become angels one day in your heavenly kingdom. Amen.

Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,'... I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. Rev. 21:1-2

This vision of a New Church was given to the apostle John on the isle of Patmos, which he recorded in the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible.

Read his description of it in Revelation 21:1-21.

John's Vision

The New Church is described as 'the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God'. Its beauty is like that of a bride ready to meet her husband. Its walls are of jasper, clear as crystal – the truth shining out, bright as day. Its streets are of gold – everything rising from pure love. All this glory from the Divine presence everywhere. The city's features describe different qualities of the New Church and of those who are part of it.

How does this Holy City descend from heaven to earth? How can a New Church begin here?

Swedenborg's instrumentality

Like John Swedenborg had his spiritual eyes opened by the Lord to see into the spiritual world and speak with spirits and angels there. As he was reading the books of Genesis and Exodus, the Lord revealed to him their spiritual meaning – what it meant to those in the heavens. He recorded this in his first book of teaching for the New Church, '*Arcana Coelestia*'. He also wrote '*Apocalypse Revealed*' and '*Apocalypse Explained*' revealing the heavenly meaning of the Apocalypse or Book of Revelation. These all incorporate many references to other parts of the Bible.

Unlike the prophets and other writers of God's Word, who wrote at God's dictation, Swedenborg was allowed to understand the teaching revealed to him and to write it down for the use of the New Church. As well as seeing through the clouds of the literal meaning of God's Word and revealing its spiritual meaning, Swedenborg was able to tell us what the spiritual world is like in which we will all live after leaving this world. In fact our spirits inhabit the spiritual world throughout our life here but we are not aware of it. He reveals to us the nature of God, his Divine Love and Wisdom and how God cares for us through his Divine Providence. These are all new teachings needed in this world so that we can respond to God's love and learn how to grow towards angelhood in heaven.

Swedenborg was being prepared throughout his life to be the Lord's servant in revealing these teachings, so that a New Church with a new understanding of truth could be established on earth.

Swedenborg's testimony

Since the Lord cannot show Himself in person... and yet He predicted that He would come and found a new church, which is the New Jerusalem, it follows that He will do this by means of a man, who can not only receive intellectually the doctrines of this church, but also publish them in print. I bear true witness that the Lord has shown Himself in the presence of me, His servant, and sent me to perform this function. After this He opened the sight of my spirit, thus admitting me to the spiritual world, and allowing me to see the heavens and the hells, and also to talk with angels and spirits; and this I have now been doing for many years without a break. Equally I assert that from the first day of my calling I have not received any instruction concerning the doctrines of that church from any angel, but only from the Lord, while I was reading the Word. True Christian Religion 779

Prayer Lord Jesus Christ we thank you for revealing yourself to us through the teachings of the New Church and through the opening of your Word. Raise our minds so that we can see how we need to change our pride into humility and understanding, fear and condemnation into mercy and compassion. Give us courage and strength to do so. Come and make your home within us. Amen.