

HOME WORSHIP SERVICE PREPARED BY PAULINE GRIMSHAW

SUNDAY 3rd APRIL

READINGS: GENESIS 22:1-12, MATTHEW 4: 1-11 ARCANA CAELESTIA 847(2) 1661(2)

Each year in the Christian calendar there are two periods of time that are periods of preparation for a specific festival. One of these times is Advent which is the period of preparation prior to Christmas and the other is Lent which is a time of preparation for the festival of Easter. The period of Lent begins on the day after Shrove Tuesday and ends on Easter Sunday - a period of forty days. In our own church the observing and practising of Lent has been rather low key. This period though, reminds us of the beginning of the Lord's ministry on earth when he spent forty days and nights living alone in the wilderness, the arid, desert country of the Holy Land, fasting and praying and preparing for his ministry of teaching and healing.

During this period, the Lord underwent the gravest temptations from the Devil, including the temptation to turn stones into bread when he was hungry from fasting; to throw himself from the pinnacle of the temple and trust angels to save him; and to finally to be offered all worldly power if he were to worship the Devil. To defeat the powers of hell and to ensure the spiritual freedom of humanity was the Lord's very purpose for living on earth. Jesus said, 'Get thee hence Satan; for it is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt Thou serve.'

Lent can be a useful time to reflect exactly what the use of temptation in our own spiritual life and consider what we can do to turn our backs on temptation and in so doing overcome it. The first of the above readings dealt with the temptation of Abraham when seemingly called upon by the Lord to sacrifice his precious son Isaac. The Lord did not, of course, demand the sacrifice for his own sake but valued the love for him that Abraham had demonstrated.

When we say the Lord's Prayer we say the words 'Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.' This might seem a contradictory statement especially as it seems to imply that it is the Lord who leads us into temptation. However, it is not the Lord's wish that we are led into temptation but it is rather a provision and a permission that enables us to have the ability to use our own free will to make a choice as to whether to act in a good way or in a selfish way. Temptation is the means by which we can resist and overcome our own selfish desires and in so doing grow spiritually. If we make the right choices then we gradually begin to orientate our lives towards heaven but if we make the wrong choices then we gradually orientate ourselves towards hell.

The Writings of church tell us that we cannot be spiritually tempted unless we have had good and true ideas implanted within us. Children cannot be spiritually tempted until they have grown into the rationality of adulthood and know the difference between right and wrong ways of living their lives, for it is only when we know this that a conscience can be formed and only when a conscience has been formed can we be truly tempted. After a period of successfully overcoming temptation we enter a period of peace, but like the wet fronts in the English weather system other temptations are waiting in the wings. The more we know the more we are tempted but ultimately the more heavenly and angelic we become.

Lent perhaps provides us with an opportune time to perhaps examine and take stock of our actions and some of the reasons or motives underlying them - a kind of annual spiritual spring clean and stock taking. We might uncover selfish or thoughtless habits and ways of life, love of ourself sneaks in everywhere in even the best of us. Many of our selfish tendencies can be hard to eradicate and we need to acknowledge the power of the Lord and ask for his help in fighting the temptations that come into our lives. Then in the vacuum that is left when we have hopefully shunned or put aside selfish ideas angelic influences can in flow and hopefully we will begin and continue to do good for its own sake. May we use this period of Lent to prepare to welcome the Lord into our own hearts and minds.

PRAYER. Lord Jesus Christ, our Heavenly Father, send us your strength and your love when we are tempted to do things that we know to be wrong. May we fight temptation as you did in your life and by so doing become more and more you AMEN

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PALM SUNDAY 10th APRIL

READINGS: PSALM 24, LUKE 19 28-40

AC 1298 'Stone' in the Word means truth. The reason stones meant truth was that the most ancient peoples used it to mark out boundaries by means of stones and raise up stones to testify that something was so: that it was the truth. Consequently, stones in the Word mean truths.

On Palm Sunday we usually and quite naturally think of palm crosses and palm branches. We might think of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey or people laying down their cloaks in the path of the donkey as the Lord passed through the gates into Jerusalem. Probably thoughts of stones might be the last thing to occur to us. Yet in the Holy land stones lie all around and are perhaps the most common feature of the landscape.

We often use the phrase 'if only stones could speak.' But as we all know stones in this natural world are silent. When we read the Palm Sunday story it is very seldom that the little incident of the stones in Luke's gospel is read out. Luke is actually the only one of the gospel writers to mention it. We tend to think that everyone in the crowd that welcomed the Lord into Jerusalem hailed him as their King but lurking in the crowd were the Pharisees, coldly calculating, implacably hostile, and determined to silence Jesus. Even though the Lord appeared to be the triumphant leader, the seeds of evil were still there undermining and challenging the authority of the Lord and foreshadowing things to come. This also tells us something about our lives. It tells us that although we claim to truly worship the Lord Jesus Christ and acknowledge him as the most important being in our lives nevertheless seeds of evil, the seeds of self-will and self-love are still active and awaiting their opportunity.

In the story the Pharisees, displeased by this welcoming of Jesus as a King, and viewing it as a blasphemy, said to the Lord, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples'. In return the Lord replied, 'I tell you that if these should hold their peace even the very stones should immediately cry out.' In other words, even if the Lord were to silence his own followers, forbidding them to acclaim him then the very stones of Jerusalem would call out and testify that he was the King.

Yet as we all know stones are dumb. What then are we to make of this and what has it to teach us in today's world? The Writings of our Church tell us that there is a spiritual as well as a literal level to the Word of the Lord, and that in a deeper sense, stones correspond to or represent the power of the truth. Stone, like truth, is not manmade. Stone unlike brick, is a natural substance which has tremendous durability, strength and permanence. Buildings made of stone may be dismantled and toppled but the actual stones will still remain. Buildings such as the pyramids and wonderful buildings of Egypt still remain after thousands of years, as imposing as when they were first built. The truth too has this wonderful power of durability and strength unlike bricks which crumble away. Truth might seem at times to be dumb and powerless and to lie in ruins but it still remains.

Stones represent truth and truth ultimately is its own witness. We ourselves and those around us and many throughout the world may not shout out and bear witness to the Lord but in the end the power of the truth still comes through and cries out. The power of the truth will in the end prevail.

As Holy Week unfolded, we can see how the people then, as people still are today, were fickle, easily swayed and capable of changing their allegiance. The name of Barabbas was hailed instead of the name of Jesus. When the going got tough, the most fervent followers of the Lord sloped off and made themselves scarce, denying however temporarily that they ever knew him. Only the stones, the silent stones remained to testify.

Like Peter we too will go through many phases in our lives when we doubt and when we cease to believe or when we cease to live by the precepts that he taught us and when we do not know which way to turn in our lives. At times like this we can turn to the stones-the basic truths contained in the Word of the Lord. These simple truths point the way for us once again to become his disciples and hail him as our King.

PRAYER. Forgive us Lord when we err and stray from your paths. May we find you again through the stones of truth contained in your Word and make you indeed the King within our lives AMEN

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EASTER SUNDAY 17th APRIL 2022

READINGS: JOHN 20 1-18: TRUE CHRISTIAN RELIGION 126

We often lose or mislay things from time to time -keys being my speciality. We search everywhere becoming more and more panic stricken and desperate and then a miracle they turn up in most obvious place, the place we think that we have searched time after time! What a relief and what a joy when we finally find our lost possession.

Not only though do we mislay objects in our everyday lives we also from time to time forget, overlook or mislay the really important things of life. Material and worldly things have a habit of growing so much in importance that they overshadow and block out the really important things in our lives, the things of the spirit. Perhaps it is only when things go wrong in our lives that we realise that material things are not the truly important things.

Today on Easter Sunday we call to mind the events of that first Easter so many years ago as narrated in the gospels. We read the story of Jesus hailed as King. Later in the same week we think of the Last Supper and then of Good Friday with its culmination of the Redemption achieved by the Lord overcoming the powers of hell by his victory on the cross. After the crucifixion events moved swiftly and the body of the Lord was removed quickly and secretly from the place of the cross and placed in the freshly hewn tomb provided by Joseph of Arimathea in a quiet garden.

Each of the four gospels give accounts that vary in the details of that first Easter Sunday morning. We can imagine though the sorrow felt by Jesus' friends and disciples on that Sunday morning. All was lost! The wonderful vision of Jesus as king on Palm Sunday had disappeared and all their hopes seemed to have been wiped out by the crucifixion. Now there seemed nothing that could be done except to anoint Jesus' body with sweet smelling spices and ointment, as was the custom. The women especially thought that this was the one way in which they could still show their love for their Lord.

How perplexed and baffled they must have felt as they peered into the tomb and saw that the stone had been rolled away, the grave cloths were folded and the body of the Lord had gone, despite a seal having been placed on the tomb. They looked but did not or could not see. They did not see the reality or the significance of the Lord's teachings concerning the resurrection. It was Mary who saw the angels and Mary who saw Jesus but who at first thought him to be the gardener. Imagine the joy though that she must have felt when she finally recognised him- the joy that the lord truly had risen.

Strip away all the trimmings of the worldly Easter – the chicks, the eggs, the easter hare and all the commercial frippery and you are left with the plain unvarnished truth that Jesus rose from the dead and that because he lives we also have the gift of eternal life.

Easter is indeed a truly joyful time. Wherever we look we see new life coming forth. Who would ever have thought that the bare and barren soil of winter time could be hiding new growth? – the whole of nature seems to have come alive. We see again the renewal of natural life in the cycles of the year and the resurrection all around us in the humblest things of nature.

Where do we find the Lord and his life today? We certainly do not find the Lord in the love of materialistic and worldly things. We do not find the Lord in the emptiness of a blocked- up tomb. We find the Lord in his living Word- the Word that tells us of him and the way in which we regenerate and develop spiritually. The reading from Arcana Caelestia tells us that each day the Lord rises again in the hearts of those who are in goodness and truth. If we truly try to love the Lord and to show that love by the way in which we treat other people then the Lord will indeed have truly risen within us. The Lord shows by his resurrection that there is enduring life to eternity. The words the we use from John's gospel at a funeral service are the words that we also associate with Easter.

“ I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on me though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”

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DOUBTING THOMAS 24th APRIL 2022

READINGS: JOHN 14 1-6, JOHN 20 19-29, ARCANA CAELESTIA 8078(3)

Thomas – an ordinary, solid, sensible and dateless name, borne throughout the centuries by generations of men. It is also of course the name of one of Jesus' disciples. Thomas is only mentioned three times in the gospels, one of the occasions in the lists of chosen disciples, once in John's accounts of the events immediately following the Last Supper when Thomas asks the question 'How can we know the way?' and of course the incident after Easter-the incident that led to his name becoming popular in Christian countries and in our own language becoming a 'figure of speech!'

A 'doubting Thomas' is an expression that most of us will have heard at one time or another. I expect too that most of us have been a 'doubting Thomas' at one time or another and perhaps we still are. How exactly would we define, 'a doubting Thomas?' I would say it is someone who refuses to believe something unless they can see it or experience it with their bodily senses. Perhaps they would be the sort of person termed, 'Down to earth' or 'head screwed on, and feet on the ground' – a no nonsense type of person.

'I'll believe it when it happens, is a phrase people often use. Many of us, from time to time, refuse to believe things until they can be proved physically or scientifically and even then we might need a great deal of convincing. Yet there are still very many things in the world that we cannot prove scientifically and that we will be able to do so. There are many things that involve the elements of faith and belief.

When the Lord chose his disciples, he didn't choose the brainiest, the richest, the strongest or the most influential. He chose a wide range of men to be his followers, men of varying temperaments, with both the strengths and the flaws of character that all human beings normally have. As well as disciples who loved him dearly, he also chose the one who not only let him down but who was instrumental in betraying him and precipitating the events that led to the crucifixion.

On a spiritual level the chosen disciples represent things within ourselves and our own minds-generally speaking they represent the good and true things that minister to the Lord and that care for the good things within us. The reading from AC says that there are two types of faith -natural faith that is outward, and spiritual faith. The outward type of faith is the sort that can be convinced by miracles and it can exist when a person believes because he or she has actually seen something with their very own eyes or experienced it solely with their physical senses.

This is not to say that Thomas was negative. He did not approach the question of whether the Lord was alive with a totally closed mind or deny the evidence of his senses. Once his senses were satisfied he responded with the greatest joy and affirmation, acknowledging 'His Lord and God.'

There are times in our own lives when we face real and grave doubts about the existence of God, about life after death and the reality of the spiritual world. Doubt in this sense is a form of temptation. When we witness suffering or personal tragedy, we can so easily begin to doubt that behind the functioning of this world there is the unseen guiding hand of God.

Like Thomas we might find ourselves demanding actual physical proof. Unlike Thomas we cannot put our hands into the wounded hands and side of the Lord; we can only put our hand into His hands through reading his Word-His spiritual revelation of himself through prayer and through a faith grounded in belief. If we call upon the Lord at such times he will hear and answer-not physically as he did so many years ago but his spirit will enter into us and gradually calm. Quieten and restore our faith so that like Thomas we too will believe again.

PRAYER: Lord I believe, help my unbelief. Be with us, in all the stresses of life in this world and in all its temptations and bless us with the true joy of this Easter Season. AMEN

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own evil" (Matt. 6:34).

Some people seem to worry more than others. More than one of my family wake up in the middle of the night and start worrying so much they have to get up and read for an hour or two to calm the mind. Others, myself included, can wake a few times during the night but return to deep slumber again within minutes. What does Jesus tell us about worrying? Well, there it is in the quote above from Matthew's Gospel, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things" or in other words "sufficient unto the day are the worries thereof".

The Lord isn't telling us not to plan ahead, or consider situations and plan, He is telling us not to *worry* about them. Easier said than done, you might say and I agree. But He is also telling us that we should concern ourselves with our spiritual not worldly needs and put those first.

Not worrying about tomorrow means accepting Divine order. It means being content with our lot in life and not only that but being content with the mercy of the Lord.

Swedenborg explains what is meant here from Arcana Caelestia 8478.

"He who looks at the subject no more deeply than from the sense of the letter may believe that all care for the morrow is to be cast aside, and thus that the necessities of life are to be awaited daily from heaven; but he who looks at the subject more deeply...from the internal sense, is able to know what is meant by 'care for the morrow.' It does not mean the care of procuring for one's self food and clothing, and even resources for the time to come; for it is not contrary to order for anyone to be provident for himself and his own. But those have care for the morrow who are not content with their lot; who do not trust in the Divine, but in themselves; and who have regard for only worldly and earthly things, and not for heavenly things".

"Do not worry about your life," Jesus said, "what you will eat or what you will drink ... Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? Therefore do not worry.." (Matt. 6:25, 27., 31).

When starting to worry I remind myself to "Let go and let God". Perhaps that might help you to rest in the Lord's loving arms when worries surround you too.

A prayer in times of worry and stress:

Dear Lord, the worry and stress in my life can reach overwhelming proportions. My body, mind and spirit struggle to cope. Some days anxiety stalks me and worry draws me in. At those times help me to remember I belong to You, the giver of love and sound mind. Your Word assures me You are always there upholding me, thank you Father, and help me to remember you are always with me. Amen

We are what we love

There is a saying "You are what you eat". In the New Church you could say we are what we love because we talk a lot about "ruling loves". But how do we know what we love – *really* know? You might think one's feelings tell us but feelings do not always reveal what we love although we might think so. You might be feeling good but is that good feeling from good or evil roots?

The way to discover what we *really* love is by looking at what we make time for. What do we do frequently and consistently? What are we committed to? What do we do even though we don't feel in the mood to do it, out of commitment?

Let us think of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane close to the time of His crucifixion. Think of Jesus' situation, He was being falsely used and abused by those around Him and even His disciples would soon desert Him and He knew it. He was utterly alone, even t so He prayed the famous prayer asking to be released from what was to come yet still He said, " O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will but as You will." You see He loved God within Him so much He went through with physical and mental hell out of commitment to free the human race from falsity. That is how much He loved and continues to love us.

I guess the nearest we can approach such a commitment is to be willing to lay down our physical and/or spiritual life for the sake of somebody else. In or out of the field of conflict. The Lord Himself said that was the greatest act of love anyone can offer, to lay down one's life for a friend. Such love – true love – acts on what it knows to be good, not what feels good even to the point of self sacrifice.

Once love is seen as commitment to good, the Writings teach us that we are conjoined to the Lord by what we *do*. Once we know that a feeling we are experiencing is coming from a good love the Lord wants us to enjoy that. To delight in it. But we must be discerning and aware too that the hells can manipulate our feelings. If unsure about the origin of our feelings we are advised to ask ourselves "If I follow this feeling out does it lead me to good or evil?" If the feelings lead us away from the right path we must shun them. Yes it is not easy to do so and we might feel terrible at times. Sometimes we may fail. However we will learn that love in the form of commitment is more enduring and more powerful than transitory feelings and what is even more wonderful we can discover the joy of allowing the good feelings the Lord has given us to delight us. May you enjoy the love of the Lord and His great blessings and grace.

From the Church's teachings - Heaven and Hell 396

All delights flow forth from love, for that which a person loves he feels to be delightful. No one has any delight from any other source. From this it follows that such as the love is such is the delight.

"He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to humble yourself to walk with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

Apart from the one who was perfect, Jesus, everyone at some time or other in their life will do or say something that in hindsight they regret. When we realize that we have done what is wrong we can experience the fear that the Lord's love is lost to us forever. Maybe we *will* finally be accepted by the Lord but feel the pure joy of heaven cannot be ours because we don't deserve it.

There must be many people, and we might be among them, who would love to turn to the Lord, and perhaps in their hearts they *are* turning to Him, but the hells have taken hold of their minds and they feel more deeply that they are forever inferior. They have sinned too badly so they – maybe we at times – feel the pure love of God cannot be theirs - or ours.

In the book of Micah it says, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the high God? Does He want me to worship Him with my lips a great deal" and he goes on to quote other sacrifices that could be made. But the Lord God in His great love for mankind reassures us with these wonderful words, ""He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to humble yourself to walk with your God?" (Micah 6:8) Such a comfort to the soul that is grieving, and feels the heavy burden of sin.

In the book of Micah the king, Hezekiah, asks what does the Lord want of me? We might also ask, what does He expect, especially considering my past wickedness? External worship, extravagant gifts, or the sacrifice of a child whose birth formed one of the most precious moments of my life? This passage, together with several others, is often quoted in the Word as an illustration of the fact that external worship, confession and prayer do not purify us. Rituals and worship are not by themselves pleasing to the Lord. Nor does He want them by themselves. So what does He want?

A good life, led by Him in acts of kindness, charity and mercy; to be humble and faithful. Swedenborg tells us that "All religion has relation to life, and the life of religion is *doing* good". Worship and all that goes with it is good but it must be acted out by kindness, generosity and goodness to others always with the Lord as focus. This pleases the Lord our God.

"Take my life and let it be dedicated Lord to Thee" – may this be our prayer and acted out in acts of kindness. Amen

“Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father (John 14: 8 -9)

One way we differ from so many other Christian Churches is in our understanding of there being only one God as opposed to a Trinity of 3. In this quote from John’s Gospel the New Church teachings explain that Jesus is telling His disciples, and so in effect us also, that He and God are one. This is what so enraged the Jewish leaders who considered this blasphemy

Jesus says that people who believe in God believe in Him, not separate from the Father but *in* the Father, God. ‘He who sees Me sees Him who sent Me.’ Also in John’s gospel Jesus tells us: ‘I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; and I go to the Father’ (16:28). ‘To come forth from the Father’ means Jesus was conceived of Him, and ‘to go to the Father’ means ‘to be fully united to Him’.

Of course at first Jesus had to be born human and grow as any other boy into manhood even though he was deeply religious. So when we read in the Bible that He was the "Son of God" some understand this to mean only that He was in some sense Divine, but that He still has a human part inherited from Mary. Yet later in His Ministry Jesus says the words quoted above, “He who believes in Me does not believe in Me but in Him who sent Me; and he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me”.

This means that anyone who believes in the Lord believes in Him not separate from the Father but *in* the Father; and Jesus said,, ‘He who sees Me sees Him who sent Me.’ Again it is in John’s gospel that Jesus tells us, “‘I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; and I go to the Father’ (16:28). ‘To come forth from the Father’ means to be conceived of Him, and ‘to go to the Father’ means ‘to be fully united to Him’” (Apocalypse Explained 815:15). So readers, we can now understand that Jesus’ human part was now Divine. It was no longer the Son of Mary, but the Son of God, the Offspring of God, the Divine Human. He had glorified His human. Not only did God become man, but man had become God. How wonderful to know this Heavenly Secret!

John 14:7

King James Version

If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

Prayer: Thank you our Lord and God for coming to earth to teach us, lead us and show your great love for us in human form to help us understand the Divine. May our belief in You never diminish but only grow in depth and strength and love always. Amen

Jesus led them out of the city as far as Bethany , where he raised his hands and blessed them. He was then taken up into Heaven.

Last Thursday 26th May marked ascension day. It occurs 39 days after Easter Sunday. We know that Jesus was 33 when he was crucified and resurrected. His ministry on earth was completed but what happened for the 40 days before His ascension after His resurrection? Let us look at that time now.

He proved to His disciples who had witnessed His death that He was truly alive again. They had seen him die and they needed to know that He was truly alive by His appearing to them and hundreds of others and speaking to them, even eating with them. Thus He assured them of the reality of His resurrection, even to doubting Thomas who wouldn't believe until he had felt the holes in Jesus' body.

Jesus also taught constantly about the meaning of His kingdom during this time. The disciples continued to misunderstand. Jesus wanted His followers to know that the kingdom meant a spiritual rule and not a physical earthly rule as had previously been believed.

As soon as Jesus ascended, His ministry would be passed on to His disciples and they needed to know this and be prepared for it. Whatever Jesus had done, they would do. Jesus promised His followers that they would not execute ministry in human strength alone but in the power Holy Spirit which He poured into each one of them.

Jesus would have never have ascended and left earth if His mission had not been completed. The fact that He ascended back to the Father testified that everything necessary for the human race's future to be free to know the truth was completed. Jesus had successfully overcome every temptation and thus gave us freedom to choose between good and evil, truth and falsity in the knowledge of truth.

Soon after Jesus ascended, messengers came to some watching, stunned, lonely disciples. They told them that Jesus would come again, that He would return for Jesus Himself promised His future return. We in the New Church believe that return has happened in the revelation through Swedenborg of the spiritual sense of the Word. Thanks be to God.



"No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the son of man"
(John 3:13)

Home Worship for June 2022

By Revd. Clifford Curry

This month we will explore some of Elijah's story and its significance. Not only is he one of the stand out figures of the Old Testament, he also features in the gospel story. He appears talking with Moses and Jesus on the mount of transfiguration (Mt 17 v 1-8). He is also linked to John the Baptist as Zechariah, John's father, is told "he will go on before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Lk 1 v 17).

June 5th "there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word"

Please read - **1 Kings 16 v 29 to 1 Kings 17 v 6**

Arcana Caelestia 6752 - There are two people primarily who represent the Lord with respect to the Word, namely Moses and Elijah. Moses represents the Lord with respect to the historical books, Elijah with respect to the Prophets. In addition to those two there is Elisha, and lastly John the Baptist, who is therefore the one who is meant by 'the Elijah who is to come', Matt. 17:10-13; Luke 1:17

Nowadays the "Word of the Lord" is in the form of the written text of the bible. In Elijah's time the majority of the people were not able to read or write. Divine guidance came through the words that the Lord gave the prophets to speak. Swedenborg writes "prophets were instructed by a living voice from the Lord". This is why we so often read a prophet declaring "the word of the Lord came to me saying....."

In Elijah's life, King Ahab and Queen Jezebel directly oppose Elijah and reject the worship of the Lord in favour of the false god Baal. They represent the unregenerate side of our nature, our 'inherited tendencies to evil'. King Ahab pictures our reasoning. His heartless and ruthless queen, Jezebel, who is the power behind the throne, represents self love and love of the world.

The good news in this story is the way the Lord protects and provides for his prophet, and by extension, for our spiritual life. Having warned the king of the coming drought, Elijah flees into hiding. Looking at this story from a personal perspective, we are being shown how the Lord hides away in us the truth we don't want to hear, and refuse to respond to.

Just outside the Holy Land is the Kerith Ravine to the east of the river Jordan, where the ravens feed Elijah. Similarly the teaching of the Lord's Word can be just outside of our thinking and conscious awareness. Yet here we are shown how the living voice of his Holy Word - the prophetic voice of His Holy Spirit - is preserved by the Lord and hidden in our hearts. How his love provides the blessing of a challenging conscience when we get too immersed in our own concerns and ambitions.

PRAYER We thank you Lord for the blessings of the good times, when all is going well. Thank you too for watching over us when difficult times try our faith. Help us continue to believe in your love and providential care when life starts to become dry and difficult, and we too easily just focus on ourselves rather than supporting others. Amen.

June 12th “the jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry”

Please read – **I Kings 17 v 7 – 24**

AC 4844 - All this was representative, like everything else recorded about Elijah, and in general throughout the Word. 'A famine in the land because there was no rain' represented truth laid waste within the Church, 'a widow in Zarephath' those outside the Church who have a desire for truth; 'a cake which she had to make for him first' the good of love to the Lord, whom, from the very little she had, she was to love above herself and her son.

What a heart warming story of the kind of generosity that we can readily admire, and that which the Lord's word encourages us to emulate. Here is this widow with next to nothing, close to starvation at a time of severe drought, yet she is willing to share some of what she has with Elijah! I am reminded of a house to house collection for Christian Aid made by some students I knew years ago now. One of them remarked that the poorer areas of the town gave much more generously than the upmarket homes because they knew what it is like to have to go without.

In the widow's sharing something wonderful happens. Her jar of flour and cruse of oil are replenished each time, just as the prophet, who asks her to cook for him, tells her will happen. Through this story, the Word that Elijah represents, is asking us to use our abilities skills and resources in the service others, with the same promise that in striving to be a blessing we ourselves will be blessed, in loving others we will find love, in providing for others the Lord will provide for our needs.

Seen at a personal level this widow's hospitality is about making the Lord's Word welcome in our life and doing things for the Lord's sake. Her flour is the truth we know and her oil the love we offer. Outwardly Elijah's request seems a lot to ask when she had so little. What the Word asks of us can also seem a lot to ask, but inwardly the reverse is the case. In the contribution we can make to increase the happiness of those around us, lies the joy of usefulness and ultimately the life of heaven.

A 'new life' theme now develops as the widow's son becomes ill and stops breathing until Elijah intervenes and prays for his healing. I am reminded that the Lord told his hearers “I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly” John 10v10. The story is saying to us that the Lord's Word even has the power to transform our spiritual life from 'deadness' to new vitality, hope and energy. It prefigures the raising of Lazarus and the Easter resurrection story.

PRAYER Lord Jesus enable us to reflect and learn from the widow's selfless hospitality and willing obedience so that we welcome your Word into our daily living. Help us to find encouragement in the promise of renewed life and vitality that your Word teaches, and that we see in the Widow's son raised from the dead. Amen.

June 19th - New Church Day

“Blessed are they who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb” Rev 19v9

Please read - **Revelation chapter 19 v 1 - 16**

Today we celebrate New Church Day when on the 19th of June 1770

“ the Lord sent his disciples 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. And that blessed are they who come to the marriage supper of the Lamb” **TCR 791**

In an increasingly materialistic and agnostic age, it is clear the world needs a New Church or we might say the church made new with a new vision of Jesus Christ as King - the ruler over all things both here and hereafter.

Unlocking Revelation. Swedenborg sets out the challenging journey that has to be made from the old to the new. The church is seen by some as magnificent buildings for prayer and worship and by others as uplifting Sunday gatherings. Experienced as a way of life, rather than a pause from the pressures of life, requires radical change.

Getting Married we all know means radical change or it isn't going to work! It is about a love relationship that involves every part of who you are. At the final climax of Revelation is a marriage, the beginning of a new transformative love relationship between the Lord as the Lamb, and his church as his wife. This marriage is at the beating heart of Revelation's New Jerusalem, picturing an intimate relationship with Immanuel – God with us – In Jesus Christ. Heralding this new spiritual awakening to our King, and a new loving reason for living is the message of the 19th of June . .

A bride abandoned at the altar comes to mind as I recall how “faith alone” so often appears in Swedenborg's laments over the inner state of the old church of his day. Like Romeo and Juliet, faith and faithfulness were made for each other, that goodness and truth might be united in life and give birth to transformed living. Jesus said “I am come that they might have life”. Those who maintain that he came that we might have faith, whilst true, is only half the story! Faith must join with beautiful love to have life.

“How long, Sovereign Lord” Rev 6 v 10 cry the souls under the altar as the 5th seal of the scroll is opened. I identify with this cry, as although we can see much has changed in our world in a positive way, the New Church – the New Jerusalem of Revelation- remains a promise for the future. At present the moral compass of our government is called into question, whilst a god who condemns sinners to hell is not adequately questioned. But let us remember the Word is fundamentally about the transformation of the person who reads it. As John Bunyan realised, the journey to the celestial city is also personal. Let us aspire to be part of the answer rather than part of the problem.

PRAYER Lord Jesus we thank you for the hope and optimism in the book of Revelation. Help us all to play our part, however small, in enabling the journey toward John's vision, that dreams of a better fairer and more loving world, and a reborn renewed Church where you are loved and worshipped as King. Amen.

June 26th “the god who answers by fire – he is God” 1 Kings 18 v 24

Please read – **1 Kings 18 v 15 – 39**

Arcana Caelestia 6832 - The reason why 'a flame' is God's love, is that love in its earliest origin is nothing other than fire or flame from the Lord as the Sun. The fire or flame of this sun is what supplies each individual person with the being (esse) of his life; it is that life-giving fire which fills a person's interiors with warmth, as one may recognise from what happens with love.

What a scene! Hundreds of prophets of Baal dancing and shouting and praying with increasing frustration at their utter failure. I am reminded how we can search for happiness in the wrong kinds of ways believing, for example, that all we need is our wants satisfied. To follow Baal is a false faith in self gratification. It tends to end up like The Rolling Stone's song “I can't get no satisfaction....an' I tried , an' I tried” or faces us with the kind of realisation we find in the Beatles song “Can't buy me love”.

Like Baal's prophets, not realising they are following a 'false god', some people behave as the prophets did and just try harder, even hurting themselves and others in the process. Sadly there are too many examples of striving for the self-centred materialistic kind of satisfaction and happiness, that worldly success seems to offer, and that Ahab and Jezebel his queen wanted. All too often it seems just out of reach. Elijah's taunts to 'try harder', and his suggestion that perhaps their god has 'gone to sleep' can give us all pause for thought.

Can we? do we? sometimes ignore and refuse to believe in the warm inner joy that comes from showing the kind of generous love the Lord advocates. Some 'pour cold water' on Christianity's self-forgetful approach to life, and on expressing gratitude by counting our blessings. Pour all the water you like and do it again, Elijah tells them. Then he offers his sacrifice to the Lord in the spirit of the psalmist who wrote, “Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due to his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts.” Psalm 96 v7&8 AV. Then divine fire falls from heaven!

The Lord is still “the God who answers by fire” when we offer that which is pleasing to him. The Lord's love enabling and accepting our offering leaves us warmed by the fire of his Holy Spirit. Reassured outwardly, happy and satisfied inwardly, with the peace the world cannot give. He is “the God who answers by fire”, and feeling the living flame of his heaven sent love we can know today – “He is God”

PRAYER Dear Lord, help us all to stand up for our faith as Elijah did, even when others might pour cold water on what we believe is right and true. Thank you for those times when we have had the courage to do what in our hearts your spirit was encouraging us to do, and for the times that, through expressing our worship in the way we have lived, we have felt the warming flame of your love and approval in our hearts. Amen.