

Home worship for July 2022

by the Revd Mary Duckworth

Sunday July 3 Finding a wife for Isaac ‘The LORD will send his angel ahead of you’

Read Genesis 24:1-27 [or carry on to the end of the chapter if you enjoy a good story]

*“The LORD who rules heaven brought me here from the land where I was born and promised that he would give this land to my descendants forever. When you go back there, **the LORD will send his angel ahead of you** to help you find a wife for my son.” v7 CEV*

After the death of his wife, Sarah, Abraham sends his trusted servant to the land where he came from, to find a wife for his son, Isaac, from his relatives, who still live there. He did not want Isaac to marry a Canaanite woman from a nearby tribe. If the woman did not wish to return with the servant, he would be released from his oath but he hadn’t to send Isaac there to look for himself.

There are some cultures today where parents are involved in finding a wife or husband for their son or daughter. Not many young people appreciate this and rebel against it, wishing to choose their own partner. Though some arranged marriages may be successful, others are suffered under duress.

We may think Isaac old enough to find a wife for himself and had no need for his father to interfere, although the arrangement does seem to work out happily for both Isaac and Rebekah. So why is this story included in the Word of God? Simply from the account itself we can be aware of the Lord’s provision by sending his angel ahead of the servant to help him in his mission. So too he goes ahead of us preparing our way. It is not just up to us. We don’t have to be bowed down by responsibility. The power of prayer is shown and the faith of the servant in calling on the Lord, the God of heaven, who was his master’s God, and thanking him for fulfilling his promise to Abraham.

“You, LORD, are the God my master Abraham worships. Please keep your promise to him and let me find a wife for Isaac today.” v12

“I thank you, LORD God of my master Abraham! You have led me to his relatives and kept your promise to him.” v27

Through a knowledge of its inner meaning this story can reveal to us how the Lord reforms us and can make us into a human being fit for heaven, if we are willing and that is what we seek. On the spiritual level this story is about the preparation for the marriage of good and truth within each one of us. Isaac represents our rational mind where good resides from the Lord. Rebekah represents truth in our outer mind or memory, which is based on facts there, knowledge we have gained and teaching from the Word learnt at church or Sunday School maybe. This knowledge is the basis for truth but is not really truth until it is united with good [Rebekah marries Isaac]. There has to be an affection for good for this to happen and this is represented by Laban, Rebekah’s brother. This process is all organised by the Lord in a way beyond our understanding. He cares and provides for us wonderfully and won’t leave you - **the LORD will send his angel ahead of you** – we have simply to trust in him. *Lord, I believe; help my unbelief. Amen*

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Sunday July 10 Jacob seeks a wife ‘I am with you and will watch over you’

Read Genesis 28:1-5, 10-22

“I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go... I will not leave you.” v15 NIVUK

This story is rather similar to last weeks except this time it is Jacob who goes seeking a wife for himself but at the behest of his father, Isaac. Isaac blesses him and sends him off to his family in Syria, not wanting him to marry a Canaanite woman. He prays that God will bless him with many descendants and give him the land on which they live.

On the way Jacob lies down for the night and dreams of angels climbing up and coming down a stairway leading from earth to heaven. The Lord is standing above it and promises Jacob what he had promised both Abraham and Isaac and what Isaac had prayed for. Jacob is awestruck by the experience and says, “This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.” He takes the stone he had used as a pillow and sets it up as a pillar calling the place Bethel, House of God, and promising that the Lord would be his God, if he watched over him and cared for him until he returned home safely.

The stairway represents the gradual process of regeneration that takes place within us. The angels ascend the stairs to heaven beginning at the bottom step representing the lowest earthly knowledge, which can be enlightened and its use seen and loved. This fact becomes truth when it is united with love [at the top of the stairway] and put to use. The angels descending the stairs represent our doing good actions because we love to do them, love leading the way, rather than making ourselves do the right thing because it was right [truth leading during the ascent]. Thus we see the effort made when our higher mind is trying to lead us from self-serving to serving others, [ascending the ladder] and the ease by which we serve others when we have come to love to do so [descending the ladder]. It is not we who are ascending and descending, but angels. It is the Lord through heaven who is gradually leading us from our self-centred earthly life to loving others as the heavenly way of life.

The Lord arranges all our thoughts and feelings in order from the most worldly to the most heavenly so that we can be linked with heaven and with him and gradually change our focus from ourselves to others and to him. As this link with heaven increases and our thoughts and feelings become more heavenly, slowly we are being prepared for our eternal home. It is not just a future life, for as we change/are reborn, we live in a more heavenly way whilst still on earth.

Lord, be with me as you were with Jacob, watching over me, never leaving me so that I might fulfil your purpose for me now and always. Amen

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Sunday July 17 God’s angel to prepare the way

As the Israelites were journeying from Egypt, where they had been slaves, to Canaan, the land the Lord had promised them, the Lord called Moses, who was leading them, and summoned him to Mount Sinai where he gave him the ten commandments. He also gave him other laws they were to keep, and then said,

‘See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says.’ Ex 23:1-2 NIVUK

Read about this in Exodus 23:20-30.

In the Old Testament the Lord appears to people in the form of an angel, as here, where it is the Lord’s Divine Human or Divine Truth coming forth from the Divine Itself or Divine Love. No-one can see the

latter since Divine Love is invisible. It is only when the Divine comes forth and is manifest in such a way as this that he can be seen and known. So the Lord is assuring Moses that they will be protected all the way to the promised land. He will terrify the nations who live there and drive them out, but the Israelites must not worship any of the gods they find there. These must be destroyed completely along with any structures or practices. There must be no mixing whatever with these peoples.

This might appear on the surface as a barbaric way of treating these people. We can only see the truth of God's Word here when we understand something of its inner, spiritual meaning, which is why it is written in this way. The Lord insists that he alone is to be worshipped. For us this means we are to hold Divine Good and Truth as foremost in our lives. Evil ways and false thinking are to be overcome and put aside so that good actions and true thoughts can take precedence. We have to want this and strive to overcome our desires to do otherwise, but this story makes clear that it is the Lord who drives these out. The Amorites, the Hittites and all the nations the Israelites encountered represent evils and falsities in our hearts and minds. Very gradually these have to be overcome. As they are, the Lord blesses 'our food and water' and 'takes away sickness' [v.25]. The good of love and the truth of faith increase within us without being damaged or harmed.

Lord, we thank you that when we manage to stop thinking only of ourselves and hurting others and start wanting to help others, you bring about an easing of our spirit and peace of mind. Lord, keep me listening to you and obeying your commandments, for you only want what is best for us – heavenly joy and blessedness. Amen

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Sunday July 24

Jesus teaches Nicodemus

Read John 3:1-21

'No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.' John 3:3 NIVUK

Arcana Caelestia 5342.4 Because no one can be let into heaven and find acceptance there unless he has acquired spiritual life, and no one can acquire spiritual life unless he is being regenerated, and no one can undergo regeneration except by means of goodness of life coupled to truth taught by doctrine, this is the way spiritual life is acquired by him. The fact that no one can enter heaven unless he has acquired spiritual life through regeneration is stated plainly by the Lord in John,

Truly, truly I say to you, unless anyone is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. John 3:3.

And just after this: *Truly, truly I say to you, unless a person has been born from water and the spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God.* [John 3:5](#).

'Water' is the **truth taught by doctrine**, and **'the spirit'** is **goodness of life**.

Though Nicodemus recognised Jesus as 'a teacher who has come from God', he had no idea what he meant by being 'born again'. We cannot come out of our mother's womb twice! Jesus explains that we have to be 'born of water and the Spirit' to enter heaven. It is not a physical rebirth, but a new life by means of **'water'**, by which he meant **'truth taught by doctrine'** or true teaching when believed in and followed; and by means of **'the Spirit'**, or **'goodness of life'**, which ensues when a true way of life is lived and loved.

Regeneration or rebirth is twofold. It begins with being led by the truths of faith towards the good of charity, and is followed by being governed by the good of charity. Truth leads in the beginning and good leads in the end. This is the way we acquire spiritual life, a life fit for God's kingdom of heaven. We advance from living a self-centred life to living for others.

Thank you, Lord, for showing us the way to heaven, both by the way you lived when here on earth and what you taught. May we follow your example of seeing the good in all people, especially those society neglects. Amen

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Sunday July 31

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul

Psalm 25

We have been looking at how the Lord leads and provides for us in our life's journey from earth to heaven. A journey requiring being born again, living from a new perspective, a total change round of our life. The Lord does not create us and then just leave us to get on with it. He is with us every step of the way. And how we feel the need of his help when things get tough! But we only know we can call on him because we have learnt about him and come to love and worship him, especially through his Word and the church community and following his commandments. Most of the time we are not aware of him and only turn to him in trouble.

How do you respond to the Lord from all you have learnt this month about his constant leading and working in our lives? **Read** the whole of **Psalm 25**, then again section by section:

Verses 1-6 *'To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul; in you I trust, O my God.'* vv1-2. The psalm begins with an expression of hope and trust in the Lord that with his help we will not betray him, but seek his truth to guide us on a new path.

Verses 7-14 *'Forgive my iniquity, though it is great.'* v11. Aware of our turning away an appeal is made to the Lord's goodness to forgive our weakness and draw us into his love.

Verses 15-22 *'Turn to me and be gracious to me.'* v16. As we feel the pressures of the wicked increase against us, we call on the Lord begging his assistance in rescuing us. He is our only hope and our Redeemer.

Lord, you are my God and Saviour, my hope in whom I trust. You never leave me nor forsake me. You come to my rescue when I am in trouble, when I feel I can't cope with what is demanded of me, when I am in danger of forsaking you. Praise be to your Name for ever. Amen

Read the psalm again and note any phrases or sentences that stand out for you, maybe some words from each section. Let the Lord speak to you through these for a few minutes, then respond to him silently in your heart, or aloud or in writing.

August Home Worship by Revd Christine Bank

Sunday 7th August 2022

Ezekiel 20 begins with the dreadful state the house of Israel has fallen into. The people profane what they know of the Lord's love and goodness by offering sacrifices He has not asked for, whenever and wherever they choose, and the Lord refuses to accept this as worship. However, all is not lost, as this verse makes clear.

Ezekiel 20:40 *For on My holy mountain, on the mountain height of Israel," says the Lord GOD, "there all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, shall serve Me; there I will accept them, and there I will require your offerings and the firstfruits of your sacrifices, together with all your holy things.*

The Old Testament laws make clear that 'firstfruits' are to be offered; this is 'choice gifts' in some translations but the idea of the first is important. Harvesting the earth's produce takes many forms and in making a sacrifice or offering then we see the thankful recognition it all comes from the Lord. Offering the first portion of a harvest is a clear signal that the people acknowledged and were grateful for the physical blessings they received.

The internal sense of the Word is speaking of the recognition the Lord is the only source of life, also that in the wider sense of 'people' meant by the house of Israel, they also offer sacrifice confirming there is no part of lasting goodness or truth which originates within the human race, it is all from the Lord. Acknowledging the Lord in this way, making a sacrifice and a gift to Him in the way He asks of us is part of putting our life into the heavenly order. The prophet is speaking to a disobedient nation, but it has a message for us in our personal life when we look to offer worship and give thanks too.

To act as if we know best, to offer things we choose, however generous or extravagant, in ways which we decide, is to subtly turn away from the Lord and His guidance. He asks us to trust and obey; if we follow His direction and guidance this will lead to the best of all outcomes for our life to eternity.

AC 9223.3 ... *That the firstfruits were to be given to Jehovah, signified that it is the first of the church to ascribe all the goods and truths of faith to the Lord, and not to self. To ascribe to the Lord is to know, to acknowledge, and to believe that these things are from the Lord, and nothing of them from self; for as above shown, everything of faith is from the Lord. The "firstfruits" have this signification because they were offerings and gifts, which were thanksgivings for the produce of the earth, and an acknowledgment of blessings... from the Lord; and consequently were an acknowledgment that all things are from Him and in the internal sense, an acknowledgment of the goods and truths of faith, which are signified by "harvest," by "grain," "oil," "must," "wine," "wool," and "fruits," of which the firstfruits were given.*

Prayer

Lord Jesus, as we think of where the 'firstfruits' are found in our life help us to recognise again how much we receive from you, and how little we can do without You. Help our worship to be based in how we lead our daily life, using the gifts you have provided for us which are in turn offered back to be used in service of others. Amen

Sunday 14th August 2022

Luke 21: 1-4

Offering worship to the Lord in the way He wants is obviously important. The Old Testament stipulations around acceptable animal sacrifice are very precise and although we don't offer livestock these days the requirement to bring only 'perfect' specimens clearly removes the possibility of keeping the best for oneself while presenting the inferior or unwanted individuals as an acceptable offering.

Human nature is understood and exposed. The scriptures ask for only the best which means the offering must be a certain quality or standard and the underlying self-serving possibility of 'generously' donating a few worn-out specimens well past their best in preference to a prime beast we would wish to keep is foreseen.

The Lord asks us to bring our best to him and on the face of it that is a very simple thing to do. Yet so much of our thinking is along the lines of "I'll do it this way and it will be fine" and in the process we've adapted the focus away from what is asked for and turned it round into being all about what we are deciding to give.

Luke 21 *And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, ² and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. ³ So He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; ⁴ for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had."*

It's fairly clear that the poor widow is giving 100% while the wealthier have casually donated larger sums. While not ignoring the value of financial contributions we may make to any number of worthwhile charities or good causes, the message here also applies to the deeper sense of our spiritual commitment and the effort we make.

It's perfectly possible to lead a life which fits all the visible criteria for 'good' as we obey all laws, behave appropriately, act with care and consideration or offer our services to some good cause, even going over and above what would be expected. Jesus makes the comment about the poor widow's offering which highlights the true value of her monetary gift when recognising her material poverty but also her spiritual commitment and dedication as she freely chooses to offer the entirety of her available resources in the way she lives out her faithful life.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you give us the gifts and qualities which we can bring to your service and we can offer generously to those around us. Help us to recognise the gifts we can offer and once we see a way to be of service may our commitment and dedication be wholehearted and sincere. As we make our choices and live day by day enable us to learn and grow, and to remember that however small our sphere of influence appears there will be something You provide for us to offer when we truly place our life into Your hands.

Amen

Sunday 21st August 2022

Before I formed thee in the womb I knew thee, and before thou camest forth from the womb I sanctified thee; I will give thee as a prophet unto the nations **Jeremiah 1:5.**

*This is said of the prophet Jeremiah, but yet "prophet" means in the spiritual sense one who teaches truth, and in the abstract sense the doctrine of truth; therefore "to form in the womb," and "to know before he came forth from the womb," signify a foreseeing that one can be in truths from good by regeneration, thus that one can receive and teach the Word. "To sanctify" and "to give as a prophet to the nations" have the same meaning; "nations" are those who are in good, and who from good receive truths. **Apocalypse Explained 710.12***

Jeremiah recalls the time he became aware the Lord was calling him to take on the role of a prophet. There is a sense of destiny being fulfilled and of the Lord being the source of power which enabled a young man to move out into a prophetic life with confidence and authority. As the above extract from AE highlights, this is also much more than an inspiring sense of purpose for one man.

There is also a sense that reference to the Lord's life on earth is included in this passage, a prophecy of His own coming into the world. The Lord was born, and His ministry was foreseen; in terms of His teaching and example then the life of Jesus fulfilled these and other prophecies and we recognise that this is "the Word made flesh" and living among us.

The reference to being in the womb and of being set apart or sanctified is worth considering. As it applies to the Lord himself it is the highest level of meaning, but the inner sense of the Word also fills all states of angelic understanding in the heavens as well as our world where readers who are sincere and humble as they read and seek the Lord's way find His words enrich and sustain them during their time on earth. The human race is the seed bed of the heavens and the continual miracle and wonder of everything that leads to new people being born into the world is one which is full of correspondences with the celestial and highest heavens. It is also a timeless and continuing process; this Biblical verse is one of an ongoing state of creative foresight as regeneration or "sanctified" becomes a theme.

Regeneration is the process by which we become more aligned with the heavenly ways of life, as we work towards obeying the Lord's truth and guidance, preparing us for eternal life in the heavens. We also need to choose to reject influences which would draw us towards the hells in our actions or thoughts. In this way we are slowly reformed, remade and regenerated.

This single verse shows that all can have a role to speak the truth, to be a prophet, and that this is the Lord's desire – He makes us all with the capacity to be angels and He wishes us to choose to live in heavenly states of joy for ever.

Prayer. Dear Lord Jesus, we cannot grasp how deeply you know and understand each person. You give us the incredible gifts of life and also the freedom to use it as we see fit. As we see more of your wonderful love and care may we be braver in choosing to do what it takes to stand more firmly as a Christian in this sometimes very difficult world. Amen.

Sunday 28th August 2022

Jeremiah 2: 1-13,

Jeremiah doesn't sugar coat the message he gives to those in Jerusalem where he is sent to speak the word from the Lord. This nation have the true God who has done wonderful things for their ancestors and who will continue to bless them into the future – and they are squandering all this by their pursuit of idols and living in ways which do not recognise or honour God; and this extends to their priesthood and leaders too.

These are not going to be a popular message and we may know the expression that to call someone 'a Jeremiah' is saying they are a pessimist and always focus on the bad things that can happen.

In verses 13 Jeremiah is specific: *'My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.'*

We may remember that Jesus spoke to a woman at a well (John 4) and they talked of living water at that time. Cisterns were for water storage so the way the people are said to have sinned is to turn away from the Lord as a spring of living water and to make their own attempts to find and store water instead – with no success at all.

Water is an expression of heavenly truth; it can be living, vibrant and life enhancing in every way. It slakes thirst, it cleans, it supports life at every level with plants and animals as well as people all needing good water supplies. In the opposite sense a drought or dirty, stagnant, foul water has correspondences to hellish states where true happiness in life is drained out and there is no joy or real pleasure.

So our people are said to have tried to dig for their own water supply instead and it has been a total failure, as it is if we rely completely on our own efforts.

When we turn away from the Lord, we may at first find life is good. We are doing what we want and very often it is not that we are being 'bad' but simply exploring a bit, seeing how things feel for us and have a little less focus on the overall direction of travel. It is over time that the drifting leads to sense of things falling a bit flat, that the inner joy isn't as it used to be, and we aren't perhaps as spiritually settled as we think we should or could be. An inner niggle that life isn't quite on track perhaps.

If this is life with the cistern we've dug away from the Lord and our own struggle is to find a refreshing, invigorating source again how do we do it? Digging deeper or wider won't help as the whole point of the Lord's life is that is His gift to us. We are given it freely and no amount of our own effort or work can earn us entry to heaven.

Repentance, turning away from the old and back towards the Lord is the only way. It's a simple, powerful message, but not an easy one to hear, accept or adopt.

Prayer. Lord Jesus, we come to you acknowledging our need for humility and to trust you. Help us renew our commitment to you, turn away from our own ideas and recognise the life you give us is the truest and richest of all. Amen.

Home Worship for September 2022 by Revd. Helen Brown

Sunday 4th September: Please read: Psalm 18

The Lord as a Rock

The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge Psalm 18:2

Stone has an enduring quality and strength that can be used to give structure and foundation to buildings that will last over centuries. It is firm and immovable – solid.

If one wants to leave a marker that will last, stone is an appropriate material. Throughout the Word stones are used to witness to relationships or promises made between people and their God. I guess the most memorable are the tablets of stone on which the 10 commandments were written, but there are many other stories where stones are used as a witness.

The function of a witness is to have personal knowledge or experience of an event, to confirm that this is the truth, this is what happened – it is so – It is True.

So, it is no surprise to find that stone symbolises truth. It is truth that we can depend on in times of crisis; truth that helps us endure the storms of life, truth that is a foundation to how we live in a spiritual way.

This is the aspect of truth which is solid and strong, yet does not transport us to a higher spiritual perspective or move us further on our spiritual growth. It has the function of reminding us of our spiritual values and what the truth is, when we get swayed by what is going on around us and forget the Lord our God. This reminder is symbolised in the story in Joshua, where 12 stones were carried from the river bed of the Jordan and set up there as a memorial to the Lord's care and protection towards his people.

It is truth which provides us with solid guidelines as to how we can live with honour and respect for others. We wish to give our children these moral and ethical values which will mould their choices in life. These stand as a moral or spiritual boundary beyond which is what is outside of the framework of what is acceptable. As adults, each of us has to decide what this boundary is.

The stone pillar erected by Jacob in Genesis 31: 45 as witness between himself and his father –in-law Laban, is the symbol of truth received in the lowest level of our mind, the level of the everyday routines and life. In these experiences, we often need some very concrete truths to guide us towards moving to a spiritual life that can reach the spiritual heights of wisdom.

We read this in Psalm 18:31-33:

*For who is God besides the Lord?
And who is the Rock except our God?
It is God who arms me with strength
and makes my way perfect.
He makes my feet like the feet of a deer;
he enables me to stand on the heights.*

Prayer: Dear Lord, We thank you for the enduring quality of your Divine Truth that is a rock and sure foundation to our spiritual life.

Remind us of that truth, day by day, so that we may seek it with hope, trust and expectation, hearing your voice, discerning your will, receiving your strength and responding to your call. Amen

Home Worship for September 2022 by Revd. Helen Brown

Sunday 11th September: Please read: Luke 6: 43 - end

Building on a rock

A 'home' or house is where you live, it is bricks and mortar or wood and provides a shelter. But it is much more than just the materials it is made out of. It is hopefully a place where you feel at home and the spaces and rooms within it are useful - for resting, socialising etc. There is an emotive aspect to what our house is for our life, perhaps this is why some of us have a gut feeling about buying a house. What is that phrase 'home is an Englishman's castle'? And whatever form the place we live takes, how we live in it and what we place in it, to some degree, tells a story about who we are and what is important to us. We make the outer shell and the rooms within it work for us - it needs to be functional, useful. We put our stamp on it; otherwise we will not really settle there and live in it.

There are certain necessities about building construction - a good foundation is paramount otherwise the house will not be stable and endure. The strength of the building materials and how it is constructed has a bearing on what can be built. With modern materials such as steel we can build tall skyscrapers - but if you only have timber and wattle and daub then your final product is limited to something much more earth hugging. But overall, I would suggest that the most important aspect of all this building is - does this construction function as we need it to! Something that looks good yet is not functional is of no use in the long run.

I now want to turn to what is built within each of us and the same principles of construction come into play. I start with the question - 'What sort of inner spiritual home/house is being built in you?'

Just as we dwell/ live in physical houses, so too do we live in or from a spiritual home that the Lord builds in us. OR we live from something we have constructed. We need to come to an awareness of what we are inhabiting, in terms of a spiritual life, at any moment.

We see how unreliable our human type of spiritual building is in the parable of the wise and foolish builders. This parable shows us two things; one to be careful and discerning about what you are building your house and your spiritual life on. We need to review and reflect on our fundamental principles of life.

Secondly, the importance of living and acting from these spiritually strong truths and principles and having them rooted in life. Otherwise when the storms of life come along, our spiritual beliefs will not stand up to the crisis, we will depend on our own resources as our spiritual foundation only existed in the mind, and were external to our heart and life.

The essence and foundation of spiritual life is encapsulated in the two great commandments, which Jesus taught in his ministry on earth. To love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And secondly to love your neighbour as yourself. When the tests and challenges of life come along, we need to *remember* these commandments. In remembering them and giving them priority in our choices and reactions to inner conflicts allows the Lord to build what is angelic within us.

Prayer: Dear Lord, We thank you that your purpose extends beyond this life into eternity; that you are able to give us more and more as we grow closer to you.
Teach us to walk with you each day - each moment, knowing that you are always by our side,
Help us to really trust in you, and be secure in your love and guidance,
the providence and protection that you provide for all your children, without ceasing and to eternity.
Amen

Home Worship for September 2022 by Revd. Helen Brown

Sunday 18th September: Please read: Psalm 127

Do we trust in our own resources more than the Lord's?

These words from Psalm 127:1 points out the relevance of this question and how important it is to ask it of ourselves. In the book Prophets and Psalms, it explains this psalm as being concerned with a new spiritual era/cycle in a person, that something being built up out of the ashes of the old.

In Genesis, we read the story of building the Tower of Babel. This was constructed of manmade bricks instead of stone. And what reasons did the builders of the Tower of Babel give for this action? We read: *'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.'* Genesis 11:4.

Of course, this is about our spiritual life and what happens when we try to reach heaven or the heavenly life through our own endeavours. When we are in this inner state we believe that we do the work, and understand using our *own* reasoning powers. We feel good about ourselves, empowered. We want to feel good, this is part of our human nature to want to look good in others' eyes. But this leads to fragmentation, isolated in our own little worlds, building our 'castles in the air'.

We no longer connect lovingly with other people if what we are intent on is building a spiritual life that has our own needs at its centre and reason for being. There is no heaven in this. There is no clarity, no light of truth, only confusion.

And so, a tower built purely on our own desires and understanding will fail.

The Lord is always present to build something new and truly alive from what has fallen away from His commandments. In spiritual terms 'to build' is to raise up what has fallen. The stories in the Word are a dynamic cycle of death or falling followed by renewal or rebirth. The story of Adam and Eve is a falling away from close connection with the Lord, so too is the flood and the Tower of Babel and so it goes on.

What is to be built? Well, only the Lord is the architect, he knows the plan, he knows what is needed to construct a vibrant, joyful spiritual life. He provides the materials, the thoughts, ideas, principles, motivation, love, all that is needed to build an angelic person, a dwelling place for his life. All these things we receive from the Lord are utterly essential. And furthermore, he breathes life into it.

If we try from ourselves then, as Psalm 127 says, we labour in vain. It cannot be done. We have seen the consequences of self-reliance in both the Tower of Babel and the parable of Wise and Foolish builders.

Prayer: Dear Lord,

Help us to use this time of reflection as a time of dedicating ourselves to you and the Way of Life you put before us.

We need so much of your Light and Love to meet life bravely and creatively.

Lord, how could we live without you? For in you we live and move and have our being.

We couldn't move a finger without your help - and yet,

how often do we live our lives as if we belong to ourselves?

And because we do make this mistake, a common human mistake, we find ourselves in such trouble, doing such foolish things.

Help us to turn asking for your guidance.

Amen

Home Worship for September 2022 by Revd. Helen Brown

Sunday 25Th September: Please read: Psalm 27

I wonder what a dwelling place means to you?

Many people were nomadic in Biblical times, especially the times of the Old Testament, and lived in tents that could be struck, moved and re-raised quickly. Others, of course, lived in houses, generally made of stone and wood and quite permanent. In between the two were larger, more elaborate tent-style structures called tabernacles or dwellings; the tabernacle Moses built for the Ark of the Covenant is on this model.

To “dwell” somewhere, then, is significant, it’s much more than just visiting, but is less permanent than living there. And indeed, to dwell somewhere in the Bible represents entering that spiritual state and engaging with it, but not necessary permanently. A “dwelling,” meanwhile, represents the various loves that inspire the person who inhabits it, from the most evil – “those dwelling in the shadow of death” in Isaiah 9, for example, to the exalted state of the tabernacle itself, which was built as a dwelling-place for the Lord and represents heaven in all its details.

The reality, of course, is that the Lord is always with us, with all people, no matter what our outer circumstances are or what inner state we are experiencing. In our inmost place, in the depths of our soul is where the Lord comes to us and is *his* dwelling place. This is protected from us, kept inviolate and cannot be harmed. In fact, our souls are closest to the Lord, closer even than the heavens. This is a place of safety, peace and stillness. It bears no resemblance to the life that we take ownership of and create for ourselves. Psalm 27:1 has these reassuring words:

The LORD is my light and my salvation –
whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life –
of whom shall I be afraid?

I notice in myself that there are times when I fall into familiar patterns of thought. This seems to be most pronounced when I’m under pressure. I take up my usual attitude or perspective on a situation or person. It seems easier to focus on the outer situation or other person as the cause of the difficulty rather than an uncomfortable inner searching that might ask me to change.

The only way we can allow the continuing creation of our inner dwelling place, is to see for ourselves the limitation and illusory nature of what we have been mentally inhabiting, for perhaps many years. The light of Divine Truth works to illuminate our inner darkness or blindness.

This light of truth can be an idea that can shine like a star to give direction in dark times in our life. But at times, it needs to be as earth-shaking as a shock wave to break through the walls or barriers of our old habitual patterns of thought and attitudes to life and people. Like the walls of Jericho, these outdated mind structures need to be broken down and let go of, so they no longer hold us back for embracing a deeper, more profound connection with our Divine Creator and Friend.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Turn me toward your presence when my concerns overwhelm me.

In times of testing and despair open my ears to hear the ‘still small voice’

that calls to me and is ever present. Move my mind, heart, and will to choose to open my consciousness to the goodness hidden within my depths. With this trust and hope, I can step forward and once again be comforted by your Presence. Amen