

HOME WORSHIP for APRIL 2023

by the Revd Mary E Duckworth

Sunday 2nd APRIL PALM SUNDAY

The Triumphal Entry MARK 11:1-11

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Zechariah 9:9

Please read in Mark's gospel 11:1-11 of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem at the start of his last week on earth. He enters riding on a colt, which we might regard as rather a lowly way of riding, but the crowd in Jerusalem recognised the significance of this. Judges and kings rode in this way. The people were wanting a king to lead them and free them from Roman oppression, so they hailed Jesus as their king crying out to him, "Hosanna!" [Save us!] "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!" They acknowledged him as the Messiah, who would come and save them, long promised by prophets. Jesus is fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy [see above] as he enters Jerusalem in this way.

But Jesus has come to save them spiritually, not to be an earthly ruler. Everything on an inner level in the story is about this. Jesus rides on an ass. This represents our natural reasoning, the faculty that sorts out the information we receive from our senses so that we can use it in our everyday living. But we have to do more with our lives than just live from day to day. We have to learn how to best live our lives here on earth as a preparation for eternal life, which we enter when we pass from this life to the next. Left unchecked we would just live our lives suiting ourselves. In the story the disciples, who represent the church, the Lord's people on earth, throw their garments over the ass for Jesus to sit on. Garments represent the truths we 'clothe' ourselves with, the ideas we live by that guide us in our lives. We need to make sure that how we live is in keeping with Jesus' teaching and would meet his approval. By 'throwing our garments in Jesus' way' we are showing that we want to live by his commands, under his rule, according to his will. Throwing branches before him means something similar, wanting to follow his way of life. *Prayer: Lord, I welcome you into my life here and would follow you for ever. May I never abandon you but turn to you always, my King, my Saviour, my Strength, my Guide. Amen*

HOLY WEEK

It is such a leap to go straight from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, so let's follow Jesus and his disciples through this last week of Jesus's life of earth. He had warned them twice before and again on the way to Jerusalem that he would be betrayed, killed and rise again on the third day, but the disciples struggled to understand. It was a bitter-sweet week for them, having started so well with such acclamation. But Jesus was aware of the short time he had with them. He was keen to teach them what they would need to know and to prepare them for what lay ahead in the coming days and when he would no longer be with them.

MONDAY Jesus is outraged at the religious practices in the temple. **Read MARK 11:15-18.** *When might you make his house 'a den of robbers'?*

TUESDAY Jesus' authority questioned **Read 11:27-33.**
By what authority do you live your life? Yours? Other people's? The Lord's?

WEDNESDAY Jesus anointed in Bethany **Read 14:1-9.** *What precious thing do you offer him?*

MAUNDY THURSDAY The last supper **Read 14:12-26.** *Reflect on what this means to you.*

GOOD FRIDAY The crucifixion and death of Jesus **Read 15:21-41.** *What spoke to you? Stay with it a while. Share it with the Lord in prayer.*

SATURDAY The burial of Jesus **Read 15:42-47.** Thank you, Lord, for being born into this earthly human life and conquering all human weakness. When we suffer, we know you understand because you suffered too, way beyond anything we have to bear. You overcame the power of hell and subdued it for our sake. Thank you for the freedom you gained for us. Amen

+++++

Sunday 9th APRIL EASTER SUNDAY The Resurrection MARK 16:1-8

“He has risen!” [16:6]

We are told about the women, three of them - Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome – who had watched at a distance from the cross, and seen where Joseph of Arimathea had laid Jesus’ body in a tomb hewn out of the rock. When the Sabbath was over, at sunrise the next morning they bought spices and went to the tomb to anoint Jesus’ body, wondering how they would remove the stone to gain entrance.

They didn’t need to. It was already rolled aside. Inside they saw a young man, an angel, sitting on the right, who immediately tried to calm them. “Don’t be alarmed!... He has risen! He is not here...” What were the women to make of this?

First, the stone rolled away. Second, someone else in the tomb, and third Jesus’ body gone, not taken away, but risen! He had risen! They had gone to anoint his body, to do the only thing left for them to do, the last care they could give him - and now they couldn’t. They, who had followed and ministered to him so often – their care suddenly ended. They could not even anoint his body. They were stumped, bewildered, wondering whatever had happened, afraid - so they fled.

Jesus had so much more to teach and tell his disciples. He appeared to Mary Magdalene that first morning, but his disciples didn’t believe her, nor two others to whom he had also appeared. When Jesus himself appeared to the eleven, they had to believe he had risen and was alive.

Our love for the Lord, who he is and what he means to us, is what draws us to him, and makes us seek him out in times of distress and need, like the women staying by Jesus at his crucifixion and seeking him at the tomb. That is why he appeared initially to them and not to the men, who represent our rationality, which can struggle at times when what is happening before our eyes doesn’t make sense, so we flee, turning things over in our mind and blocking out reality. Jesus had tried to prepare them. Three times he had told them he would be persecuted, condemned and put to death, and would rise again. They couldn’t take it in. It was beyond their ability to grasp, way beyond anything they could imagine; so they fled and mourned Jesus’ death. It was not until Jesus appeared also to them that they could believe he had risen.

Prayer: Lord, it is easy to believe when you are powerfully in our lives. Help us to turn to you even when you seem absent, for we know you are with us always. You never stop loving us. Amen

+++++

Sunday 16th APRIL Jesus’s appearances MARK 16:9-14

Lack of Faith

Three times Jesus had told the disciples what would happen to him – that he would be betrayed, persecuted, condemned and put to death and **would rise again on the third day**. He reminded them the third time just as they were on their way to Jerusalem. The first time Peter was affronted by the

thought and argued against it with Jesus [8:31-33]. The pain this caused both of them can only be imagined in Jesus' rebuke to Peter, "Out of my sight, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Jesus was attempting to prepare the disciples for the horrific events that would happen at the end of his life. Peter was having none of it – unimaginable! That could and should not happen to Jesus, his Lord and Master, whom he acknowledged as Christ, the Messiah. No, not to Christ! Unthinkable! But what a rounding he got for this from Jesus. It would take all Jesus had got to face what lay ahead. He wanted no encouragement to deny it, to flee from confronting it. It was his Father's will, his mission to fulfil: this is what he had come for. Peter had no idea of the turmoil and challenge Jesus was undergoing.

Is this why the women at the tomb on Easter morning were told to tell the 'disciples **and Peter**' that they would see Jesus in Galilee – proof of this all happening?

After the second prediction [9:30-32] we are told the disciples did not understand. How could they? Jesus tried again a third time on the way to Jerusalem, but it was just too much for them to take in. Even when it all happened as Jesus had predicted, their loss was just too much: they were too overwhelmed to comprehend that Jesus had in fact risen, as he had said he would. Even when they were told by the women and two others that they had **seen** Jesus, they couldn't believe it. It was only when Jesus appeared to them that they believed. He upbraided them for their lack of belief! 'He rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen' [16:14].

Reflection: How hard it is for us to believe that the Lord will really 'appear' in our lives, that he will give us the power and strength to tackle what lies ahead, the wherewithal to care for a sick child or parent, to face those in our lives who are challenging to deal with; that he will deign to come into **my** life when there are so many people in need!

Remember his sayings: 'I will be with you always.' [Matthew 28:20]
'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me.' [John 14:1]
'You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.' [John 14:14]

+++++

Sunday 23rd APRIL

"Go into all the world..."

MARK 16:14-18

What are the Lord's commands that guide your life? The two great commandments? 'Love one another as I have loved you'? 'Do to others what you would have them do to you'? The ten commandments?

The Lord's last commands to his apostles were about preaching and believing in him and the signs that would accompany these. According to Mark's gospel he appeared to them and after speaking with them and giving them these commands, he then rose into heaven. These must have been important words for them. What did he actually say?

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

We read in the Acts of the Apostles that they did just that and that these signs accompanied them. At that time miracles made people listen and they were persuaded by them to believe in Christ's message

and the power of the Holy Spirit, but it didn't always last. Today miracles would go against our freedom to act in accordance with our reason and understanding. Some believe without miracles but many aren't interested. Those of us who do believe value following the deeper meaning within Christ's teaching.

The disciples are to 'Preach to all creation', because people will be re-created through it, have a new outlook, be filled with faith and charity, new life from the Lord. Anyone who believes and lives according to his faith will be regenerated [the inner meaning of 'baptised'] and saved:

For in the internal sense 'being baptized' means being regenerated, and being regenerated is being led into the good of love and charity by means of the truths of faith. AC 9032.2

Believers won't be deceived by hypocrites [snakes/serpents] and hurt by them [poisoned]:

But those who are led by the Lord, believing what is true and leading a good life, cannot suffer injury from their poisons [of hypocrites], since they live in light received from the Lord, and in that light those full of guile [hypocrites] are seen as serpents and their guile as poison. AC 9013.5

The sick can be healed when believers lay their hands on them because they believe in the divine power of the Lord working in and through them: *In*
order that the Lord may operate anything with man by faith the Lord's Divine must be present in man, and not outside of him. AE 815.8

+++++

Sunday 30th April

The Ascension

MARK 16:19-20

'He was taken up into heaven.' [16.19]

The Lord's work on earth was ended. Through overcoming every temptation he had restrained the power of the hells so that evil spirits could no longer enter peoples' minds and overwhelm or take possession of them, which they had been doing.

He had told his disciples and all who would listen, what they needed to know to enter the kingdom of heaven and to teach and lead others to do so. Through miracles he had demonstrated divine power showing who he was and where he had come from, the 'Son of God' doing the will of his Father. Now it was time to return to the Father. 'He was taken up into heaven and sat at the right hand of God' [v.19]. He had put off all the humanity he had received from his mother, Mary, and put on a divine humanity from his Divine Father as he overcame temptations, until finally, he was totally united with the Father. 'Sitting at the right hand of God' is not to be taken literally, but means he acts with power, the right hand signifying 'power'. We speak about someone being a person's 'right hand man'. We can know God through his divine humanity acting powerfully within us in a way not possible before this time. God had been more remote from the human race. How fortunate we are to be able to have this close relationship! As Jesus explains:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and **be with you forever—the Spirit of truth**. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for **he lives with you and will be in you**. I will not leave you as orphans; **I will come to you**. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. **Because I live, you also will live**. On that day you will realize that **I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you** [John 14:16-20].

Prayer: Lord, be my strength and shield. Lead and guide me in your way. Your will, not mine. Amen

Please Read John 2: 13-22 and 1Kings 6: 1-7

Arcana Caelestia 3720 (1)

When the house was built, it was with stone prepared at the quarry; so that neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in the temple, while it was being built. 1Kings 6: 7

Solomon built the Lord's temple from stone, but it was not until the later part of the 19th century that we learnt where Solomon had obtained that stone. A vast white cavern was discovered and within the outside walls of the ancient city there was an enormous subterranean quarry with passages running off in all directions under the old city – and there were steep drops into more workings beneath the upper ones. They found piles of stone chips and off cuts just as if they had been cut yesterday instead of over three thousand years ago! This was the place where those stone masons of long ago had trimmed the great blocks exactly to shape, before they were dragged through underground passages to the temple area, and then swung up through a vertical shaft by rope and pulley onto the building site.

The architects had planned the work so precisely beforehand that the quarrymen and masons knew the exact shape required for each stone, and so they reached the temple ready for placing into position. The house of the Lord was built with reverence. Even the noise of the stones being cut, could not be heard because it was well below ground and some way off. (See text)

The laws that applied in the text to the building of the temple in Jerusalem also apply today, but not to any material structure, for this is the temple of our hearts, which is far more important than any physical or material building.

How do we build this temple within us? Stones correspond to the truths in the Word of God, in other words our doctrines, teachings or belief. We can see this clearly in the Ten Commandments, for they were written on tablets of stone. Our doctrines of the New Church are based on the Word of God, and this is the quarry from which we must dig out and discover, by reading and reflecting upon what the truth is asking of us and how we must apply it in our lives and in the way that we must change our behaviour and attitudes to others. The truth powered by the love of God and showing to us the true love and compassion to all we meet along our pathway of life.

There were two levels in the building of Solomon's temple. On the lower level was all the activity, measuring, hammering and chiselling, moving blocks of stone around. But on the higher level it was quiet, for this was the house of God. The temple had two main rooms – and we have two great abilities of love and wisdom. All our understanding is expressed through our love, for our love is the way that wisdom expresses itself. The holiest room in the temple was the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was kept – the inmost dwelling of God within each of us, far beyond our human understanding of it. The rest of the temple stands for the wisdom we must all gain to guide and use our love from the truth we understand.

In our lives as we work to build this temple within us, we must leave behind the clamour and confusion of this world – for this building is on a different level altogether. This world must have its noise and bustle and we must be a part of it, but it is in the spirit that we find our calmness and peace. When each of us need this peace then we must leave the quarry down below and lift ourselves to a higher level close to where our Lord resides in the inmost regions of our soul. Amen.

Please read Matthew 5: 1-12

Please read True Christian Religion 528 and 530 (Repentance)

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Matthew 5:8

This beatitude asks of us to stop and think and then to take stock and examine our motives, our thoughts and intentions, what the truth is asking of us, the changes it is asking of us, and in the way that we see our relationships and attitudes with others. The Greek word for 'pure' is *katharos*. One of its meanings simply means 'clean'. For example, dirty washing washed clean. And so, its basic meaning is being cleansed and unmixed or unadulterated. That is why this beatitude for myself is so demanding! It could be translated as 'Blessed is the person whose motives are always clean and unmixed, for that person shall see God.'

We know that the heart corresponds to our will, our desire, our love, but what is purity of heart? Where does love get its quality? And the answer of course is that it gets its quality from truth. To purify something is to wash or cleanse it, or in some cases to refine it so that it does not contain extraneous or contaminating elements. To have a pure heart, therefore, is to be sincere, to love without pretence or hypocrisy, and especially to love what is true, or to put in another way, to let the truth guide us in love. In order to appreciate this beautiful blessing, we have only to consider what it is like NOT having a pure heart, that is, being conflicted in our motives and intentions, not knowing which way to go or even how we really feel about things. We wish to serve our Lord and our neighbour but we also wish to please ourselves, and so we move from one attitude or feeling to another, and from and from one course of action to another. One moment we are happy and content and an hour or so later we are upset or angry; one day the world looks rosy, and the next day it is a mess!

And we can get ourselves into some real messy situations making decisions from good motives one day and not so good motives on another day. But for the person who has a pure heart, that is, a whole heart and singleness of purpose in following the Lord, then life can be free of stress and relatively simple. **BUT OF COURSE, IT IS NOT EASY!** No one ever said it would be easy but at least our lives would be more straightforward. Yes, we can have a pure heart if we love the truth in the Word of God because it is simply God's truth. We have the strength and ability to receive and understand it and most importantly ACT UPON IT!

"Blessed are the poor in heart, for they shall see God." To see God is to understand how He works; it is to "see" His truth. For it is the pure, cleansed heart that shall see God.

As Christians we can have a serene and an untouchable joy which comes from following the teachings and commands of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and for me personally, the beatitudes speak of a happy and heavenly joy that nothing in this sometimes-fickle world can ever be taken away from us.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me." Psalm 51:10

Home Worship Series: Stephen Thomas Sunday May 21st

**Please read Acts 1: 1-11
Please read Luke 24: 36-53**

“You are witnesses of these things.” Luke 24:48

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1: 8

Jesus is speaking those words to his disciples after his resurrection and before his ascension into heaven. Almost certainly Jesus was again echoing those same words that God had spoken to Israel in the prophet Isaiah:

“You are my witnesses,” says the Lord, “and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He. Before me no God was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the Lord, and besides me there is no Saviour. I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witnesses,” says the Lord. Isaiah 43: 10-12

Jesus Christ, our one God and Saviour of heaven and earth is again entrusting the truth about Himself to those who had witnessed Him. Originally, of course, those words were spoken to the disciples who had indeed witnessed to the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus.

In Deuteronomy there is an ancient law that no one was ever judged and put to death on the evidence of just one witness, there had to be two or three witnesses. Deuteronomy: 17: 6

this is not just a useful precaution for judges in a court of law – it expresses a fundamental characteristic of genuine religious life. There are two aspects to such a life: the commandments of truth that our faith understands, and the will to obey and use them is at the heart of a truly religious life. Unless the desire is present to use the truth we know, there is no true religion. One can quote the truth to condemn others, support our own selfish ambitions. It is not a true witness unless it is being used to bring love and service into the world. The first witness is the truth and the second witness is love. Where truth and love agree, then you have something that is confirmed. The third witness is useful actions. So, if you know the truth, if you love the truth and if you live by the truth, then the truth really saves you. It lifts our life to a higher level. Each one of us must come to a point where we love the truth and are willing to follow it and bear witness to it wherever it takes us, because it is only through the truth that we can grow spiritually and come into the Lord’s kingdom.

Like those first apostles who began the building up of the first Christian church, so we too are called upon as Christians to bear witness to God and to the authority and sanctity of His church in the world. In our experiences of life by following the truth we understand, and powering it with love and compassion we can give true witness by our example and certainly not by force or coercion.

Truth in the Word of God is of course its own witness – not the result of argument and debate or depending upon a neat balancing of probabilities. By its very nature truth comes from a higher level than our own earthly reasoning.

We shall all of us be a true witness if we power the truth we understand and act upon it with a true desire to serve our fellows. And of course, the truth in the Word of God depends simply on one witness – **the love of God that made it.**

Whitsunday – Pentecost

Please read Acts of the Apostles 2: 1-4

Please read John 14: 15-31

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” John 14: 16-17

Imagine for a moment that you are walking on the pavement beside a huge lorry or a train at on the station platform. Then they suddenly emit a noise like thunder with an appalling hiss and their brakes come on. It is very safe for the traffic, but devastating to those of a nervous disposition! Why this noise instead of the normal quiet of the average car brakes? Lorries and trains have “air brakes” – they are using the power of the atmosphere around them to stop their heavy loads. Their braking systems create a vacuum by emptying out all the air. When their brakes are applied, the pressure of the air around them in let in to apply the brakes.

The air around us presses on every surface with a force of 151 pounds to the square inch! It is pressing down on us and our homes with more that 17 tons of weight! But luckily for us, our homes and our bodies are full of air also. If we were to make them a vacuum we would certainly be crushed!

So why all the calculations? Well without them, we would be liable to say “O yes, that is just air pressure” without realising what a tremendous force it really is. Now, just as there is an atmosphere of air around our bodies, there is also an atmosphere of spirit breathed around our souls and minds.

For me personally, the word spirit is rather an unfortunate term. Come to think of it, ghost is even worse. Both these words imply something separate from the Lord, something personal in its own right.

The true translation for the Holy Spirit is breath. “Jesus breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit. (breath)” When we speak of the Holy Spirit at Whitsuntide, again, we tend to say, “O yes, I know there is the Holy Spirit” without realising again what a tremendous force it really is!

It can breathe into us with the most enormous power for love and understanding. But to allow the Lord to flow into us, we have to create a vacuum by emptying out our selfish inclinations.

When we think of the war in Ukraine and the sad loss of innocent lives, this world certainly needs an enormous power to turn it back from its greed, hatred and folly. Yet, that power is all around our souls and if only we allow it in and use it! The wonderful thing the Holy Spirit will do for us is to “bring to our remembrance” all that the Lord has taught us. This is not to recall an idle memory of words, but to recall their meaning to our lives. When we face a situation, the spirit will challenge us by helping us to see from the truth we understand, our responsibility for our fellows, and the love that we should show to them. This is why the Holy Spirit is spoken of as advocate/counsellor. The idea pictures someone who will stand by us in any problem or difficulty and counsel us for the best.

At every moment the Lord is breathing His Holy Spirit upon us; and may we receive it and know its eternal life.

In our temporary time here in this world we have the wonderful opportunity to worship Him as our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ. And knowing as well that He is the one God and Saviour who creates us, who redeems us, and who moment by moment recalls to our remembrance, and who breathes new life within us whenever we allow Him too!

And for so great a gift this Whitsunday – let thanks be to God.

Home Worship for June 2023 prepared by Revd Clifford Curry.

In the book of Psalms we find so much to reassure and support us on our life's journey. They span the full range of human emotions from joyful praise and thanksgiving to the depths of depression and despair. They also bring us close to our Saviour, whose inner life both as to joys and temptations, are described in the inmost sense.

June 4th "He makes me to lie down in green pastures " Please read Psalm 23 vs 1 – 6

AE 375/34 "By these words, in the internal sense, is meant, that he who trusts in the Lord is led into all the goods and truths of heaven, and abounds in the delights thereof. By my shepherd is meant the Lord; by pastures of tender grass are signified the knowledges of truth and good; by waters of rests are signified the truths of heaven thence They are called pastures of tender grass and waters of rests as if they were comparisons, because the Lord is called a shepherd, and the flock is led of the shepherd into green pastures and to limpid waters, but yet they are correspondences".

We live in a world where rest and inner peace are increasingly rare and precious.

Phillip Keller a shepherd reflects :-

"The strange thing about sheep is that because of their very make up it is almost impossible for them to be made to lie down unless four requirements are met.

First *owing to their timidity they refuse to lie down unless they are free from all fear.*

Second *because of their social behaviour within a flock sheep will not lie down unless they are free from friction with others of their kind.*

Third *if tormented by flies or parasites, sheep will not lie down. Only when they are free of these pests can they relax.*

Fourth *sheep will not lie down as long as they feel in need of finding food. They must be free from hunger.*

It is significant that to be at rest there must be a definite sense of freedom from fear, tension, aggravation and hunger. The unique aspect of the picture is that it is only the sheep-man himself who can provide release from these anxieties. It all depends upon the diligence of the owner whether or not his flock is free of disturbing influences.

When we examine each of these four factors that affect sheep so severely, we will understand why the part the owner plays in their management is so tremendously important. It is actually he who makes it possible for them to lie down, to rest, to relax, to be content and flourishing. A flock that is restless, discontented, always agitated and disturbed never does well. And the same is true of people."

Perhaps our peace of mind and our prayer life are even more directly connected than we realise. Whilst the Lord doesn't lift us out of the conflicts and complexities of our modern world, He can lift our hearts and minds onto another level of trust in his providence, so that freed from fear we relax and say "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing".

PRAYER – Lord Jesus Christ our good shepherd open our hearts that we might trust your lovingkindness to watch over us and those we love. Whilst we know you will never provide all we want, help us believe you will provide all we need to find eternal happiness. Amen

June 11th “Your rod and your staff they comfort me” Ps 23 v 4 Please read John 10 v 7 – 16

AC – 9310 'The sheep' stands for those who are governed by the good of charity and faith; 'hearing the voice' stands for obeying commandments; and 'calling by name and leading out' stands for conferring heaven in keeping with the good of charity and truth of faith, since 'name', in regard to people, means the nature of their love and faith.

Life isn't all green pastures and still waters. The valley of the shadow of death that the 23rd Psalm describes is part of everyone's journey in one form or another. Following the Lord does not change that, as the Beatitudes at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount remind us in Matthew Chap 5. What does change when we follow the Lord is that He is with us and we need not be afraid. Our Shepherd carries His rod and staff.

David's story to King Saul of defending his sheep from a lion and a bear, illustrates that the open country of the Holy Land could be a perilous place for sheep and shepherd alike.

So the shepherd carried his rod to defend his flock. This was a heavy club, sometimes made from a strong branch with a root ball at one end that hung from the shepherd's belt. With this weapon he could defend his flock from wild beasts that might hide in the caves or some rocky valley. Let us take comfort that our Good Shepherd carries His rod, the power of His Divine goodness and truth, keeping our souls safe from spiritual foes. He declares “My sheep shall never perish, no one can snatch them out of my hand” John.10v28

The shepherd also carries a staff, which has a very different purpose. The staff, sometimes called a crook, is constantly in the shepherd's hand as he walks ahead of the flock. It is used to restrain the sheep from wandering, to correct them, and to guide them away from danger. This is being used when His goodness and truth nudge our conscience, keeping us on the right path.

The rod and staff correspond to qualities we find in our Good Shepherd's care for our spiritual wellbeing. They highlight the means His love uses to watch over, protect and guide us. Even when there may be dark times, and the shadows of sorrow, disappointment, and even the death of those we love, darken our lives; we can find comfort and strength in His constant companionship.

Later, the psalm describes a table laid before us in the presence of our enemies. This reminds us that the Lord is able to bless and nourish our spiritual life even in the dark times of the valley of shadow. As one writer puts it, our Lord is :-

*“Weaving blessings out of trials, out of grief evolving bliss,
answering prayer by wise denials, when his children ask amiss.”*

PRAYER Lord Jesus Christ. Today we would pray for those facing the darkness and difficulty of their own valley of shadow, who need to feel the reassurance of the nearness and constancy of your love for them and those they care for. We name in our hearts those whose needs we are especially aware of: those who have suffered loss, those who are depressed, those who are lonely and isolated, those who are sick or in hospital. Open our ears, open our eyes, open our hearts, to recognise how we can be a blessing to them. Amen

June 18th “they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven
with power and great glory” Matt 24 v 30

Please read - Revelation 19 v 5 – 16

TCR 791 - 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 (7:13, 14) and in Revelation (11.15).

“Blessed are they who come to the wedding supper of the Lamb” Rev. 19:9.

This happened on the nineteenth of June in the year 1770. This was meant by the Lord's saying Matthew 24 v 31 “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”.

Tomorrow, the 19th of June, we celebrate the anniversary of this event as “New Church Day”.

Having just explained in TCR that the “End of the Age” refers to the spiritual death and then the rebirth of the church, Swedenborg tells us of the parallel new beginning in the spiritual world as he is publishing TCR as new light for the church on earth.

In Matthew 24, (also Mark 13 and Luke 21) the disciples ask the Lord “What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age”. A time of trials and tribulations is described to them. Immediately after this time the tribes of the earth mourn. Then “they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”.

On June 19th we celebrate the new light the Lord has given through the writings of Swedenborg. He comes anew to His church by opening the spiritual sense of the Word.

This is clearly a very different coming; not as the infant Lord but as the risen sovereign Lord and King. The shepherds were told they could find a baby in Bethlehem wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. But today where do we find the risen Lord, the Son of Man, who comes on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory?”

Those who believe the Lord will arrive like a bolt of lightning as people grieve over the chaotic end of the earth, have missed the point. This has intuitively been recognised in the hearts of those who loved the Lord down the centuries.

The Risen Lord is to be found in the pages of the scriptures, in the Word of the Lord.

The clouds of heaven refer to the outward literal sense of the Word, where “we see through a glass darkly” as Paul puts it. Our understanding there is clouded or foggy. Yet the inner life and spirit of the words we read shine a light of truth into our heart. They bring hope and courage, show mercy, offer forgiveness, teach us the way, truth and life. They reveal to us the Risen Lord - present and alive in what we read. Present “with power and great glory”..

On the deepest level the Lord has never left us. As we discover his voice, his message, his mercy, his love in what we read, he comes again to you and me “in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” Swedenborg explains the spiritual sense, showing how the Lord opens his mouth in parables (Mt 13v35) so that the Word speaks not of past history but of present reality, of the Lord of the 23rd psalm who is **my** shepherd **today**.

PRAYER Lord Jesus Christ help us to recognise how your Holy Word is a bridge to bring us to your throne in heaven. Open our eyes and our hearts to the majesty of your name woven into the words of your Holy Word. As we read of your love for us and the need we all have to love and care for each other; come to us in ways we can recognise and respond to. Amen

Please read - Psalm 91 v 1 - 16

H&H 295 - The kind of spirit that is associated with us is determined by the kind of person we are in respect to affection and love, though good spirits are assigned to us by the Lord while we ourselves summon the evil ones.

302. I have talked with angels about the union of heaven with the human race and have told them that church people actually do say that everything good is from the Lord and that there are angels with us, but few people really believe that angels are so close to us, much less that they are in our thought and affection..... If we believed the way things really are, that everything good comes from God and everything evil from hell, then we would not take credit for the good within us or blame for the evil. Whenever we thought or did anything good, we would focus on the Lord, and any evil that flowed in we would throw back into the hell it came from.

Psalm 91 speaks to us of the Lord's protection but is addressed to our **inner** life experience. It is the soul that is able to dwell in the shelter of the most high and rest in the shadow of the Almighty. Most of us have to face some challenges and trials in life, and sometimes it seems that some of the best, most loving and deserving, face some of the biggest problems.

Think of some of the people in this world who face trauma and tragedy. Reading psalm 91 literally as about the outward situation they might say, “how can this be the truth? ‘the picture’ isn’t quite right!” But read spiritually it is about the soul and spirit of the reader who is committed to the spiritual path and devoted to God. Rather than their outward circumstances, the picture the psalm paints is of unseen and often unrecognised help primarily supporting our **emotional and spiritual life** when we are at our most vulnerable.

It is wonderful how a psalm like this speaks to people who are anxious and insecure – those who do fear the terror of night, and who are undergoing life’s trials and tribulations. This is because it describes the inner strength and endurance the Lord provides for us when we turn to him for “strength equal to the tasks we have to face” or for courage to face “the fears we dread”. It describes the heavenly inflowing of **Divine encouragement**.

The words of Psalm 91 are not given to describe a God who sweeps away outward difficulties. Rather they describe how the Lord is always with us in our inner struggles if we reach out to him, and stay close to his love and guidance. The endeavours of the angels focus primarily on our soul needs, on the inner essence of who we are: the real person who will live forever, whatever happens in this life. We all have the potential to become an angel. It is this potential that the Lord protects, and his angels guard and rescue when they “lift you up in their hands so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

PRAYER Lord Jesus Christ, help us to dwell close to your will, in the attitudes we take, and the decisions made in amongst the ups and downs of daily living. We thank and praise you for the constancy of your generous and forgiving love that looks on our struggles with infinite understanding, as we strive to become more like the angels, trusting in your care. Amen