



HOME WORSHIP JULY 2024 - Revd Robert Gill

Sunday 7th July - “Son of David”

Readings: Psalm 110; Luke 20:41-47

The Book of Psalms is surely the most read and possibly the best loved book of the whole Bible. Originally written to be sung as part of temple worship and still sung as part of the daily liturgy in cathedrals and parish churches, the Psalms are nonetheless equally fitted to the solitary reader who looks to them for spiritual comfort and guidance. There is no human experience - hope, doubt, conflict, despair, struggle, joyfulness or victory - which is not to be found in the words of the Psalms. All human life is here contained.

King David is widely regarded as having copyright of the Book of Psalms and is named, “*the sweet psalmist of Israel*” [2 Samuel 23:1]. Few would doubt that David did write and assemble a collection of psalms, although many others were composed long after David’s death and added to the collection in later centuries. A quick check tells us that 74 psalms are given the ascription “Psalm of David”, though this by no means guarantees that they all came from his pen. What is known, however, is that by New Testament times it was the accepted tradition among the Jews to regard David as the author of the Psalms.

It was also a tradition among the Jews that the coming Messiah would be a direct descendant of David, *the sweet psalmist of Israel*. The genealogical tables, in both Matthew 1 and Luke 3, list David as a forebear of Jesus and as a consequence the Lord was often addressed as, “*Son of David*”. Jesus, however, refuted this relationship, “*How can they say that the Christ is David’s son?*” [Luke 20:41]. He then quoted Psalm 110:1 where David speaks of the Messiah not as “*my son*” but as “*my Lord*”. Yes, Jesus started out as a descendant or “son of David”, a member of the human race with all its self-centred loves. But he fought to put this off so that he might put on the Divine Human, or *Son of God*, from Jehovah so as to become the living presence with us of Divine Love.

This process of putting on the Divine Human was the fulfilment of all that is written in the Psalms. The Christian pastor and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-45) saw this clearly when he described the Psalms as, “*The prayer book of Jesus*”. Our own church also teaches, “*The fourth style (of the Word) is that of the Psalms of David.....there in the personage of David as king, the internal sense deals with the Lord.*” [Arcana Coelestia 66:2]. And in an unpublished work, “*Summaries of the Internal Sense of the Prophets and Psalms*”, Swedenborg sets out some major themes found within the Psalms, these include: *Temptations of the Lord even to despair* –



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Combats of the Lord with the hells, Victory over them, Passion of the cross, Glorification of the Lord's Human. Every single day of his life, the Lord prayed the Psalms and lived out their teaching.

Remarkably, the Psalms are also our prayer book, for they bring us into the nearer presence of the Lord. What the Lord was able to achieve in his earthly life, he can now work for us in our lives. The Psalms chart our own spiritual battles and victories. They are a mirror in which we see ourselves and it is impossible to under-estimate the value of the daily reading, contemplation and praying of the Psalms. Here, day by day, we discover the Lord and are blessed with his guidance and strength.

Prayer: Read and Reflect on **Psalm 71:1-6**; followed by **Lord's Prayer**.



Sunday 14th July “Angels to guard you”

Readings: Psalm 91:1-16; Luke 4:1-13

In Psalm 91:11 we have one of the loveliest expressions of God’s ceaseless protection of his people, “*He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways*”. Here is biblical confirmation of God posting guardian angels to watch over us. The words are a comfort and strength through all the gamut of human experience. We can sleep in peace for angels are guarding us against the hells!

But now for a shock. Luke tells us that when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, the devil used the psalmist’s promise of angelic protection to waylay him. Jesus is carried away to the pinnacle of the temple, a dizzy height that induced giddiness on anyone who stood there. To step off was to plunge hundreds of feet down the steep, drop into the Kidron valley below. Here was an easy way to win instant wonder and popularity with the crowd without having to endure the messy agony of the cross. Jesus knew that, such was the love of the angels for him, that they simply could not stand by and watch him plunge to his death. They would intervene to save him, bearing him up so that he might paraglide to a safe landing. The craftiness of the temptation was that if Jesus called on this angelic help so as to avoid the hard brutality of the cross, he might win popularity but his whole work of redemption would fail.

It hardly seems possible that the angels actually co-operated with the devil in these temptations. Yet the following teaching tells us otherwise: “*The Lord at length fought with actual angels, indeed with the whole angelic heaven.*” [Arcana Caelestia 4295:2]. The angels, wishing to help Jesus, were putting temptation in his way. Under normal circumstances angels would never co-operate with the devil in this way, but at that time circumstances were far from normal as can be seen from the following teaching:- “*At the time of the Lord’s first coming the hells had grown to such a height that they had not only thrown into confusion what is called the lowest heaven, but they had even attacked the middle heaven.*” [True Christian Religion 121:1].

Such was the arrogant power of the hells in those last times before the “Day of the Lord” that they were invading the lower heavens and were looking to enslave the angels. To meet this threat, and in order that he might assist and redeem the heavens, the Lord must now take human flesh. This demanded of him that he live, to the fullest extent, the life of regeneration that forms a person for heaven. It was a mighty task beyond the capability of any other person or angel. Jesus had to fight from his own strength alone: “*In order that the Lord might bring the whole of heaven into proper heavenly order, He even allowed angels into Himself to tempt Him, who insofar as they acted from their own self, did not do so from good and truth.*” [Arcana Caelestia 4295:3]



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The Lord came on earth, among other things, to redeem the angels and form a new heaven in which they could live in safety. No longer can the hells arouse dormant evils in the angels. Those evils, present in all angels and born out of lapses into selfishness when on earth, are now covered over by the Lord. Through his own victories over hell the Lord provides protection against further attacks. Now the angels are able to act for the Lord as our guardians, bearing us up in times of temptation and defending us against the hells. There is nothing magic about this security for it is founded on our willingness to focus our hearts, minds and lives on Jesus our only Redeemer.

Prayer: Read and reflect on **Psalm 69:13-18** followed by the **Lord's Prayer**.



Sunday 21st July “*Not one of his bones will be broken*”

Readings: Psalm 34; John 19:28-42

Crucifixion was a terrible death. The victim could linger for days whilst slowly dying of thirst, exhaustion and eventual suffocation. In the case of Jesus, however, the authorities could not allow him to linger for days. The Passover Sabbath, a high day for Jews, commenced at 6.00pm on Friday evening and in the Mosaic Law it was forbidden to leave a body on “a tree” overnight [see Deut 21:22,23]. It was essential that the bodies be removed from the crosses or the festival would be profaned. For this reason, the Jews asked Pilate to have the victims’ legs broken. The sudden shock of this might kill them but even if it didn’t it would prevent them pushing up with their legs to keep the chest cavity open. Suffocation would quickly follow.

The legs of the two thieves were now broken but when the soldiers turned to Jesus they found that he was already dead. This may have been due in part to an exceptionally severe flogging meted out to him and which had greatly weakened his body. As he was already dead, there was no need to break his legs and thus were the words of Psalm 34:20 fulfilled, “*Not one of his bones will be broken*”.

Nothing in the Lord was broken, every bone in his body was intact. Why does the psalmist deem this to be of such importance? Of all the parts of the body, the bones have the least vitality, yet without them the body would have no shape or strength. A broken bone leaves a limb unfit for purpose, but what use would the Lord be as our Saviour if he was not fully fit for purpose? When, on Easter Day, Jesus rose with his whole body there was to be no part of him broken.

Consider if you will the bare bones of religion. These are the facts and teachings we first meet in the Word. They are almost lifeless in themselves, and yet without them there can be no beginning in us of heavenly life. Such bare bones include, for example, the Ten Commandments. When we first come across these, we store them up in our memory. As yet they are bare bones that seem lifeless, but if we later choose them as principles to live by, these bones are transformed into a living faith. Ezekiel captures the miracle for us: “*Thus says the Lord God to these bones: ‘Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live’.*” {Ezekiel 37:5,6}.

This formation of the new “us” is only possible because not one of the essential bare bones is broken. We have the Lord to thank for this and not ourselves. All too easily we turn a blind eye to the spiritual instructions in the Word and break them, but the Lord never did. When he took on human flesh, he paid careful attention to every



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instruction in the Word. Not only did he store them in the memory, he also lived by them. In Jesus every single bare bone of religion is intact, in place and fit for purpose.

Unlike Jesus we often break the bare bones of our faith and this renders us incapable of spiritual action. However, those same bare bones are intact in the Lord with his life and power in them. In turning to the Lord and drawing life from him, his unbroken bare bones are gifted to us. The teachings of the Word are restored in us enabling us to live and act in the heavenly pattern. Humanity may be broken but the Lord is intact and he will heal and restore all who choose to walk in the way of his teaching.

Prayer: Read and reflect on **Psalm 119:33-40** followed by the **Lord's Prayer**.



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Sunday 28th July “The Cornerstone”

Readings: Psalm 118:15-29; Mark 12:1-12

A relative of mine has the knack of building dry stone walls and fireplaces. Examples of his work are to be found in and around Upper Wharfedale and they will long outlast him. The work, of course, looks easier than it is and requires skills developed over many years. One of the essential skills of the trade is being able to select the right stone for a particular place in the wall. As the wall is constructed the builder will need to choose foundation stones, through stones, filling stones, capstones, and many others. If the wrong stone is chosen for a key position the wall will be unfit for purpose and, sooner or later, will collapse.

Of all the stones in a wall, the cornerstone and the keystone are the most important. These are the stones that hold all the rest in place, making for strength and stability. From this simple rule of thumb, learned by the artisan from long hours on the job, comes a deeper spiritual insight. Those who wish to build lives that are strong and firm enough to stand and last, in this world and the next, need to choose the right cornerstone because everything else depends upon it.

“The reason why strength and firmness is meant by ‘corners’ is that the greatest resistance [to pressure] resides there, and also the whole is bonded together there. Because ‘corner’ means strength and firmness such as Divine Truth derived from Divine Good possesses, the Lord is called “the cornerstone” [Arcana Caelestia 9494:1].

Just as the builder of dry stone walls must gather together the stones that are needed, so the Christian must gather together the Lord’s teachings from the Word. These are the stones with which a good life can be built; but this new build will not stand if we overlook the most essential stone of all. The psalmist writes of *“the stone that the builders rejected”* [Psalm 118:22], and as we pick up the stones with which to build our new life, there is one stone which, to begin with, we invariably discard.

We discard it because we don’t realise that we need it. Confident in our own strength and ability to live the new Christian life, we overlook the selfishness that powers so much of what we do. Yes, we may have picked up lots of teachings from the Word and, yes, we might speak eloquently about them, but our selfish loves simply build them into their own design. This new build will not stand up to the troubles and tests of life. What is needed is the self-sacrificing love that the Lord brought into the world and which enabled Him to care, heal, teach and save the people. This love is generous and self-giving, transforming our every action, duty, and relationship. It is only found in the Lord and can only be accessed by putting self to one side and opening our hearts to his love for others.



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Once the Lord's love is powering our living, each and every teaching that we pick up from the Word is placed in its correct position and given life by the Lord. All the component parts of the Christian life are bonded together now. We become much more effective at bearing witness to the Lord and at loving others in a generous and complete way. But we should never forget that it is the Lord's love that holds this new life together. Far from taking any credit ourselves, we must remember that this great work is, *"The Lord's doing"* and it should for ever be *"marvellous in our eyes"*.

Prayer: Read and reflect on **Psalm 119:97-104** followed by the **Lord's Prayer**.



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HOME WORSHIP FOR 4 AUGUST 2024

TREVOR MILLAR

Read Isaiah Chapter 6 verses 1 – 8

This month we will be looking at how some people in the Bible responded to God's call. This week we will examine the response of the prophet Isaiah.

Verse 1 recalls that in the year King Uzziah died, Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty, and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Further, we are told that the building shook and that the house was filled with smoke. The prophet was afraid and said in verse 5 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and live among a people of unclean lips, yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!'

How did the Lord respond to Isaiah's sense of unworthiness? A seraph touched the prophet's lips with a live coal, taken from the altar with a pair of tongs and said to him 'your guilt has departed, and your sin is blotted out.'

This reminds us that the Lord can forgive sins where these are acknowledged by the sinner. In addition, the Lord can equip his followers with what they need to do his work. Isaiah is no longer unworthy to convey God's word to his people, as he appears to realise in verse 8. "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I, send me!'"

The Lord had clearly opened the spiritual eyes of the prophet when it was appropriate. God waits for the right moment to make his presence felt by his followers, some of whom have been waiting a very long time. Consider Abram (later Abraham), who was ninety-nine years old before the Lord appeared to him and made a covenant between them – Genesis Chapter 17 verses 1 and 2. In the New Testament we find Simeon and Anna in the temple in Jerusalem, Luke Chapter 2 verses 25 – 38. These two were very old before they were able to set eyes on baby Jesus, the long-promised Messiah.

This can be encouraging to older people today, to realise that they are never too old for the Lord's service. Not every flower in the garden blossoms early! The Michaelmas daisy has its appointed time, as does the snowdrop. We all need to cultivate patience as we grow where we have been planted.

PRAYER

Heavenly father help us to trust in you. If you are helping us, nothing is impossible. Let us go forward in confidence to do your work. Amen.



HOME WORSHIP FOR 11 AUGUST 2024

TREVOR MILLAR

Read Luke Chapter 1 verses 26 - 38

This week we will look at how the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph. This young woman was called Mary. Betrothal, at that time, lasted for a year and was just as binding as marriage and could be dissolved only by divorce.

We know from the text that Mary was perplexed by the angel's initial salutation 'Greetings favoured one! The Lord is with you.' She must have asked herself why she was so specially favoured? She was just an ordinary girl from an ordinary family, living in an ordinary town. Gabriel told her not to be afraid because she had found favour with God. What followed was both astounding and scary in equal measure. She was to be overshadowed by the power of the Highest and to conceive and bear a son, who would be holy and called the Son of God.

This was problematic for a young, engaged woman in Israel at the time. The penalty for having a child by other than her spouse would be disgrace and social isolation at the very least. It would involve courage and great trust in the Lord to agree to this proposal.

Mary's response was to accept the risks involved and to assent to God's plan for her life. Then Mary said 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her. (verse 38).

We know that in worldly terms Mary was nothing special. She highlighted this in The Magnificat – Chapter 1 verses 46 – 55. Her song of praise began 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.'

The very ordinariness of this woman is encouraging for all of us. We too can serve God's purposes. "Holiness is for the many not the few." Said Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

Much of Mary's life would have been spent in doing commonplace tasks, like keeping house, being a good mother and wife. Our lives can seem repetitive too, but what matters is not so much what we do as how we do it. To do what we must do, but with great love.

PRAYER

Lord, as Mary said yes to what you asked of her may we say yes to what you ask of us. Amen.



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HOME WORSHIP for 18 AUGUST 2024

TREVOR MILLAR

Read John Chapter 1 verses 35 – 42 and Chapter 6 verses 1 – 14

This week we will look at Andrew, a disciple of John the Baptist until the day following the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan. Chapter 1 verses 35 – 37 tell us how this came about. “The next day John was again standing with two of his disciples. And as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed ‘Look here is the Lamb of God!’. The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus”.

We do not know the name of John’s other follower, but we do know that Andrew became the first disciple of Jesus. His first action was to find his brother Simon and to bring him to Jesus. Verses 41 and 42 tell the story as follows: “He first found his brother Simon and said to him ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas’ (which is translated Peter).

The Rev. William Bruce in his Commentary on the Gospel of John (3rd edition) says that Andrew represents obedience to natural faith, acknowledging the leading truths of the gospel; shunning evil and doing the good which it teaches, from a sense of duty rather than from affection. He goes on to explain that Andrew finding his own brother Simon refers to natural faith leading on to spiritual faith, which is based on an affection for truth, which disposes and opens the mind to its reception.

Moving on, to the feeding of the five thousand in Chapter 6, Bruce contrasts the approach of Philip in verse 7 ‘Six months wages would not buy enough bread for each to get a little’ with that of Andrew in verse 8 ‘There is a boy here with who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many?’ The difference is that Philip thinks only in terms of purchasing, whereas Andrew discovers an admittedly poor source of supply in themselves. These loaves and fishes represent the scanty remains of what was good and true in the church at the time of the Lord’s Advent. Yet it was these remains that the Divine hand was able to multiply to more than satisfy the spiritual needs of the people.

Andrew is a favourite of mine, in that he leads people to God, and discovers some source of love and truth in people for the Lord to work with and multiply.

Finally, I must mention that Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland with a feast day on 30 November.

PRAYER

Lord, help us to look for the good in people, and grow that of good and truth in us so that we may live a life of use. Amen



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HOME WORSHIP FOR 25 AUGUST 2024

TREVOR MILLAR

Read John 20 verses 1 – 18

There has been much speculation about the role of Mary Magdalene as a follower of Jesus on earth. In particular the second century gnostic Gospel of Mary suggests that she was singled out for special teachings from the Lord and understood Jesus' teachings better than the other disciples.

All four canonical gospels record that Mary Magdalene was present at the crucifixion and John 19 verse 25 attests that she was standing near the cross with his mother, and his mother's sister' Mary the wife of Clopas. This week, however, we will focus on the events of Easter Sunday as recorded in John Chapter 20.

The drama begins in the very first verses. "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So, she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Interestingly Mary's use of the word 'we' suggests that she had not gone to the tomb alone.

What follows is that Peter and John visit the empty tomb and confirm Mary's story, before returning to their homes. Mary Magdalene alone remained, weeping outside the tomb. I do not intend to repeat the gospel account word for word because it is so well known. However, it is noteworthy that neither Peter nor John saw the two angels in white or had a personal encounter with the risen Lord. How was Mary's situation different to their experience?

Unlike the male disciples Mary lingered by the sepulchre and, while weeping, stooped down and looked into the tomb, where she encountered the angels. They are able to explain to her that the Lord had risen, although she did not at first recognise the risen Jesus, mistaking him for the gardener. This is because the Lord in his risen state was transformed; he was now not an object of the natural but the spiritual senses. When she heard Jesus use her name 'Mary', recognition was instant.

The Lord commissioned her to go to the disciples and say to them "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." This she did. Mary Magdalene, a woman, was chosen by the Lord to be the apostle to the apostles! Jesus did not appear to the men until later that day, in the evening.

What is the lesson for us today? That the lord is always with us even if we are not aware of him.

PRAYER

Lord make us aware of your presence in our hearts, and to recognise you wherever you are to be found - in family, friends, strangers and neighbours. In the created world, and in art, science, music and literature. Meet us where we are and show us what we can become as your followers. Amen.



A Series for Home Worship in September 2024 by Alan Misson

Sunday 1st

The Lord as Prophet

Suggested Readings: Jeremiah 17:19-27; Matthew 13:53-58; John 6:10-14; Songs for Worship 169

Today's theme is the Lord as Prophet. It is the first in a series of three services in which I will reflect on the way we can come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Prophet, as King and as Priest. In this service I will firstly look at the role of prophets in the Old Testament and secondly see how the Lord acts as a prophet in the New Testament and how we can respond to him in that role. As an example of an Old Testament prophet I have chosen Jeremiah who appeared as a prophet about 100 years after Isaiah.

Think for a moment about the passage from Jeremiah 17. It is typical of many passages in the prophetic parts of the Old Testament where the prophet tells the people "*If you do this ... then this will happen*" and also the reverse "*If you do not do this ... then this will happen*". The contrast in these two states is stark. Literally in the passage from Jeremiah, listening to the Lord and obeying him brings peace, prosperity and endless life for the city of Jerusalem. But not listening to the Lord and not obeying him will bring swift destruction to the city. The prophets in the Old Testament presented the Word of the Lord and its teachings to the people to act as a sort of mirror in which they could see the true state of their spiritual life.

At the beginning of his ministry Jesus walked into the synagogue at Nazareth and stood up to read these words from the scroll of the book of Isaiah: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*

The prophets of the Old Testament frequently went around denouncing the sins of everyone they met in the strongest of terms and Jesus was no different. In Matthew's gospel you can find a series of 7 woes Jesus proclaims to the Jewish leaders including this one: *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.*



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Tough words from the Lord as Prophet! But what about the “*If you do this .. then this will happen*” style of the Old Testament prophets. Search the gospels and you will find examples like the following:

If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

As with the Old Testament prophets Jesus is describing spiritual realities – the idea that certain spiritual states will inevitably follow as results of the actions we take. So when Jesus says: *If you keep my commandments* - he follows those words with the inevitable spiritual result – *you will abide in my love*.

Now it is easy to find these positive statements of Jesus – the positive spiritual effects of God centred positive feelings, thoughts and actions but it is less easy to find the negative ones.

The Lord as Prophet confronts us to reflect on the way we are living our external lives and he is the perfect mirror in which we can see the true state of our inner spiritual life if we want to. He does not judge us but unconditionally loves us and wishes us to change and become more like him – to love others as he first loved us. But we need to listen to the Lord as Prophet – to hear him speaking to us in his Word – to be challenged by him - to allow him to show us what we need to change and to accept his power to make those changes.

Prayer

From our unfaithfulness we turn to you, faithful and unchanging.

From our changeable moods we turn to you, constant and true.

From our weakness and fear we turn to your strength and security.

From our sin and guilt we turn to your salvation and experience your peace.

From our busyness and tiredness we turn to you in worship and we find ourselves lifted up.

Thank you, Lord, that we can turn to you.



A Series for Home Worship in September 2024 by Alan Misson

Sunday 8th

The Lord as King

Suggested Readings: Luke 19:38; Psalm 145; John 18:33-40; Songs for Worship 42

In today's service I hope to lead you in thinking about the Lord as King, what his kingship involves and how we can respond to him in this role. The Old Testament is of course full of stories of kings but I am not going to dwell on them. Rather I want to concentrate mainly on the description of Jesus in the Gospels as 'King of the Jews' and how he reacted to this description and what we can learn from it.

Many churches and indeed cathedrals around the world have adopted the name of 'Christ the King'. Perhaps the most famous of these in the UK is the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Liverpool completed in 1978. More recently a giant statue of Christ the King was completed in Poland in 2010 and stands over 170 feet high and the crown alone is 10 feet high.

This association of Christ as King is a key element of the gospels. It is focussed on in the very well-known passage in Matthew describing the visit of the wise men and again in the lead up to the crucifixion. The wise men or magi, commonly called the three kings, arrive in Jerusalem to see King Herod and enquire of him "*where is he who has been born king of the Jews?*" So right at the start of the gospels we have Christ and King linked together.

In John 18 we find these words: *So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"* Jesus does not respond directly but questions Pilate as to whether this is his own idea or merely something he has picked up from someone else. Later we read: *Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."*

Jesus makes it abundantly clear that he is not concerned with the issue of being King of the Jews in the way Pilate imagines and then he responds: *For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world - to bear witness to the truth.* Now Jesus radically changes the focus of the discussion between himself and Pilate. He moves off the subject of kingship and makes it clear that he is only concerned with truth prompting Pilate to say: *What is truth?*



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But Jesus is not just a witness to the truth, he **is** the complete embodiment of the truth - he **is** the Word made flesh – Divine Truth manifested in our world. He has not just taught the people, he has lived out his teachings to the full in his own life – he has taken the truth and made it flesh by living according to it.

In this conversation with Pilate we can perhaps begin to see the very close link between the Lord as King and what the Lord teaches – his truth, and the fundamental need for us to receive, accept and acknowledge his truth and allow it to rule in our lives. The Lord as King offers us his truth because it is through allowing his truth to rule in our lives that we begin to make, with his support, the changes necessary to transform our lives into images and likenesses of God. Let us all acknowledge Christ as our King – seek his truth in his Word – and allow it to rule our lives.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ we pray:

For those who bring hope where there is none,

For those who bring love where there is hatred,

For those who bring peace where there is war,

For those who bring sustenance where there is hunger,

For those who bring water where there is drought,

For those who bring comfort where there is sadness,

Bless them all Lord Jesus Christ, whatever their faith, and even if they think they have no faith.

For all love has its source in You, and every act of selfless giving comes from You alone.



A Series for Home Worship in September 2024 by Alan Misson

Sunday 15th

The Lord as Priest

Suggested Readings: Hebrews 5:1-6; Genesis 14:18-20; Arcana Caelestia 9808:2

These declarations show what the Lord as a priest, consequently what the priestly office within the Lord represented, namely the whole work of saving the human race. Arcana Caelestia 9809:2 extract

In today's service I hope to lead you in thinking about the Lord as Priest, what this involves and how we can respond to him in this role. Nowhere in the Word is Jesus directly referred to as a priest and he does not describe himself in that way. Yet traditional Christianity does consider Jesus as a High Priest because this is the emphasis of chapters 5,6 and 7 of the Epistle to the Hebrews. And Emanuel Swedenborg refers directly to the subject of the Lord as Priest as described in Hebrews in True Christian Religion 715, part of the section on the Holy Supper. Whereas the Lord as Prophet confronts us to reflect on the way we are living and the Lord as King offers us his truth so that it can rule in our lives, the Lord as Priest loves us, cares for us and redeems us.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus shocks us by telling us that a priest walks past the injured man on the other side of the road – surely, we think, the priest ought to be the one to comfort and help the man. But no, he doesn't! But then part of the parable is telling us about the state of Jewish priests at the time and what they represent – lives that seem all right on the outside but at heart are empty of love for others.

New Church Teaching presents the process of the Lord's redemption of mankind as a battle. Here is what it says in True Christian Religion 126: *The Lord's battle with the hells was not a battle of words, like people arguing a point or disputing in a court of law. That sort of battle is quite ineffectual here. It was a spiritual battle, Divine Truth fighting with the strength of Divine Good, that is, the very life force of the Lord.*

In his role as Priest the Lord loves us and cares for us, and as the Psalmist says - *he forgives all our iniquities, he heals all our diseases, he redeems our life from the pit, he crowns us with steadfast love and mercy and satisfies us with good.* This is the true priestly role that was entirely absent in the life of the priest who walked by on the other side in the story of the Good Samaritan.



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But the Lord does not force himself on us – that is not his way. If we want him to remain on the other side of the road when we are in pain and difficulty then that is our choice. But he is always knocking on our door, desperately wanting us to open our hearts and minds and let him in – but it is our choice to let him in or not because that is the very freedom he won by coming into our world and battling against the power of the hells. How can we come to know the Lord as Priest? How can we come to experience his love and care and redeeming power? Well, Jesus has clearly shown us the way as in John 15:9-11,

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

In a very real way we can know the Lord as Priest if and only if we try to be priests in our relationship with others by loving them and caring for them as Jesus has first loved and cared for us.

We must not walk by on the other side!

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus

For your Spirit of Peace that calms our minds and stills our lives, we give you thanks.

For your Spirit of Love that touches our hearts and reaches out to others, we give you thanks.

For your Spirit of Joy that lifts our souls and makes us glad to be alive, we give you thanks.

For your Spirit of Power, that gives us strength to do what is good and true, we give you thanks.



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A Series for Home Worship in September 2024 by Alan Misson

Sunday 22nd

Your will be done

Suggested Readings: Matthew 18:12-14; John 9:28-32; Mark 14:32-36

And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." Mark 14:36

Your will be done, as in heaven, so upon earth.

In these words of the Lord's Prayer we pray that the Lord's 'will' should be done. But we might ask – what is the Lord's will? It seems to me that the Lord's will comes as it were in two parts. There is what he desires for us – an example being that he desires we should live in spiritual freedom. But there is also what he desires that we should do – an example being that we should follow his commandments. There are numerous examples in the Writings that we could usefully reflect on. Inevitably translations vary and so sometimes we have the word 'wills' and at other times 'wishes', 'desires' or 'intends'. Firstly here is a quotation exploring the nature of the Lord's will or desire for us.

Hence it is clear that as the Lord desires the salvation of all He has also provided that everyone, if he lives well, may have some place in heaven. Divine Providence 254:6

Secondly a quotation exploring the Lord's desire for what we should do in response to what he offers.

For the Lord is continually present, and wishes to enter; but a person must open the door by the free will which the Lord gives him. True Christian Religion 285

The Lord wills and desires that all should be saved and thus experience the heavenly blessings that come from abiding in him and he wills the means by which this is achieved. And the Lord also wills that we should follow his commandments in humility and open the door so that he can fully enter into our lives.

Your will be done, as in heaven, so upon earth.

I imagine that most of the time when we repeat these words we think in terms of the earth as the world in which we currently live and heaven as the world we aspire to fully enter after this physical life. And it is of course right and proper that we think in these terms since it is only by living out the Lord's commandments in our daily lives that we



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begin to bring heavenly joy and peace into the world around us and make personal progress on the path of regeneration. But we can also reflect on these words at a deeper level of consciousness.

At the very inner core of our being and the highest level of our minds is the Lord's love and life. If it were not so we could not be human. At that inexpressible heavenly level of our human existence the Lord's will is continually being done – it cannot be otherwise. What the Lord wills, wishes, desires and intends is that we should open up to the creative power within us and allow his love and life to flow down through all the levels of our existence right down to the natural physical plane of life in this world. In this way his will is done as in heaven, so upon earth. So when we pray for the Lord's will to be done *as in heaven, so upon earth* we pray not just for his kingdom to come in the world around us but also in the world within us. And in both cases we pray for the transformation his love, wisdom and power can bring to life.

Your will be done, as in heaven, so upon earth.

Prayer

Lord there are times when I need your healing presence in my life, not only when I am physically unwell but also when inner and deeper problems beset me - when I am filled with - anxiety, doubt, darkness and depression, concern for the future, helplessness, loss of control over life. Help me Lord when I face such inner problems to place my trust in you, to hold firmly onto your hand and to let you lead me to a better place – to a state where I can be healed by ever greater confidence and trust in your eternal providence.



A Series for Home Worship in September 2024 by Alan Misson

Sunday 29th

The Mustard Seed

Suggested Readings: Genesis 1:11; Matthew 17:20; 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18,19

This parable of the mustard seed occurs in Matthew, Mark and Luke but not in John. There is a lot of common ground but also some subtle differences. Matthew and Mark describe the seed as the smallest of seeds but Luke makes no comment on this aspect. Matthew has the seed sown in the man's field; Mark has the seed sown on the ground; Luke has it sown in his garden. Mark describes the seed growing to become larger than all the garden plants but Matthew and Luke tell us that it becomes a tree. Finally, all three gospels refer to birds nesting in its shade or branches.

Some of these differences have made it difficult to decide what the plant is that is being described. But a common consensus is that the plant is *brassica nigra*. This is an annual plant cultivated for its seeds which produce, when ground, black mustard. The seeds are technically not the *smallest of all the seeds on earth* as Mark puts it but to Jesus' audience at the time they were probably one of the smallest they were aware of. It can grow from 2 to 8 feet tall with an abundance of small yellow flowers. If we had some growing in our gardens it would probably be *larger than all the garden plants* as Matthew puts it. It would also be as large as a substantial shrub but we probably wouldn't describe it as a tree.

The parable of the mustard seed is a parable of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is not telling the people about a place called heaven but about what living the heavenly life really involves. He tells the people how to build the kingdom of heaven within themselves - a kingdom that we can build up here and now. To grow spiritually we must be ready to receive Jesus' message of truth as it is sown within us and then live according it in daily life acknowledging that any good we do comes from him alone. The seed of truth has within it its own goodness and it is the good within the seed of truth that is the real driving force for spiritual growth and development.

But although the kingdom of heaven may be ultimately limitless it can only start within the minds of each one of us as something very small – the smallest of all the seeds. After all it has got to compete with a mind full of selfish desires which see everything in life as something to serve our own needs and ambitions. The kingdom of heaven is a state of loving and being useful to others so it is diametrically opposed to a focus on loving ourselves. Yet, even the tiniest feeling and thought that we should love others can take root in our minds and cause us to see that there is another way to live and to



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be. Such a feeling and thought, of course, can nevertheless be lost, tucked away in the back of our minds, not finding the right conditions in which to grow. If the truth that we should love others is just something we think about then the good within it will remain the smallest of all the seeds in our minds. But if it is linked with goodwill towards others it will lead on to useful caring action and spiritual growth will get underway.

Initially only a small plant will develop – there will be just a small part of our minds where a focus on being of use to others has taken root. Elsewhere we will remain focussed on a self-serving attitude to life. But the plant from the mustard seed grows and develops branches just as a small focus on serving others can grow and branch out in all sorts of directions influencing the way we think, feel and act in favour of others and away from ourselves. Then a great change takes place and a ‘tree’ develops in which birds can nest.

At this stage of spiritual development we have left behind an obedient or understanding way of living the truth we know and have come to loving the good that truth can do in our lives. Our life’s love is focussed on others and has become a living thing full of affection for the life that truth brings, pictured in the parable by the birds nesting in the branches. This is the spiritual stage when truth and goodness from the Lord proliferate and grow beyond measure. What a wonderful harvest!

Prayer

Lord of the abundance of Harvest, we acknowledge that all good things come from you. The world, full of life, reflects your glory and sings your praise. You call us all to share fairly the bounty of your creation, and the gifts you give us. But so many people in this world of plenty do not have enough to eat. And so we ask you, Lord of all, to create in us a desire to make all things new, to help break down the barriers that prevent your goodness being shared by all, so that all those in need may eat and be satisfied