



Home Worship for 2025 by Revd. Helen Brown

the kingdom of heaven is like ...

Sunday 5th October: Please read: Matthew 13:

Awakening to spiritual growth

In Matthew chapter 13 we find 6 parables each of which starts with the phrase..." The kingdom of heaven is like". It seems that this chapter is giving us clues as to how to find the treasure; the treasure that is experiencing heaven. Each parable is a clue to how to seek out and experience heaven within us. In our reading today heaven is described as a mustard seed and yeast or leaven used in the making of bread.

Mustard Seed: Mustard is considered a weed even today in Galilee. It grows freely and spreads without being sown. Maybe farmers sow it because it adds rich nutrients like nitrogen to the soil, thereby enriching the soil for future crops. It's a form of 'green composting'. [What enriches your spiritual life?](#)

The mustard seed is the good intentions we have. It is the smallest of all seeds, because at times we believe we do good on our own. But by ourselves all we do has some evil (self orientation) involved. As we are on a spiritual journey or process, we have a trace - the smallest possible trace of goodness. Later as the truth we believe in becomes more closely connected with love, it grows larger, a plant. When the connection is completed, it turns into a tree, and then the birds of heaven (true ideas) nest in its branches (the true facts we know).

[Have you got a 'germ of concern for others could be planted somewhere in your life for it to grow?](#)

In our reading, yeast or leaven is also a parable for the kingdom of heaven. Yeast is a catalyst for transformation and ferment - it changes the nature of the final product. The word leaven is applied to that substance, which is small in quantity, yet thoroughly pervades a thing by its influence. We can all recall people or situations that have been a catalyst for change in our lives.

In the gospels we see the very presence of Jesus acting as a catalyst to heal, transform people's lives. A catalyst doesn't change but is an agent for change. This is a mirror of how the Word as we openly engage with it is a catalyst for change in our spiritual lives. This also creates a ferment as we are challenged, it brings uncomfortable questions about what we call true and our intentions. This we see played in Jesus's interactions with the Pharisees.

Flour: The flour we use to make bread that nourishes our body symbolises the truths we know that can be used or connected to enable us to receive loving goodness. Perhaps we learn that to love our neighbour is a good thing, it is a truth we know. As we go through life, we learn more about how we can love our neighbour by encouraging the goodness in them.



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Spiritual Leaven: In our spiritual journey there will always be mistaken ideas in our mind, which have yet to be discarded. These can be a barrier to how much we can receive and live out loving goodness. Sometimes these misconceptions come from our up bringing or from oversimplifying the truth - perhaps we have judged people from a very black or white perspective through not understanding their background or motives. We all have blind and contrary ideas mixed in with truths [flour] These false ideas are symbolised by leaven. Spiritual growth involves a process of choosing to live out truths rather than false ideas or misconceptions. And this brings inner conflict. The pricks of conscience make us stop and look at the choices we are making. Although difficult, this is essential to our spiritual life, otherwise truths are not rooted in our being and life. **DP 25**

Lord Jesus Christ,

We know how imperfect our understanding and judgement is without the light and clarity of your truth shining into our minds. We affirm that you alone have the power to enlighten our darkness and bring love into being in our hearts and minds. We turn to you trusting in your guidance and healing power in our lives now and for eternity

Amen



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Sunday 12th October: Please read: Matthew 13: 24–30

Developing Spiritual Discernment

When sowing seeds, you hope that they germinate and grow but so too do a lot of other seedlings – weeds. Often you can't weed them out for fear of uprooting the plants you want to grow. Otherwise, you will lose those as well. You need to wait until you are sure which seedlings are weeds and those that are not. [Tares (a ryegrass) which looks much like wheat in its early stages of growth. Roman law prohibited sowing ryegrass among the wheat of an enemy, suggesting that the scenario presented in this story was realistic in Biblical times.

And all this is a mirror of our spiritual life. Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven within each of us is like a field ready to receive spiritual seeds and produce great abundance. However, there is also work to be done separating out the spiritual weeds also growing there.

Imagine for a moment a bare field prepared and ready for sowing – this is a picture of the 'field' of our outer mind. When there is an open mind on this outer level then the Lord can develop and grow the spiritual seeds he has sown in the innermost part of us. What spiritual concepts have been used as guiding truths to sustain and support a path in life that leads towards a heavenly inner state?

However, alongside the spiritual seeds are weeds. Weeds on a spiritual level are those ideas that are false and illusory. These arise from one's self-absorption and placing one's own concerns first and foremost. This can take many forms, doubt, fear, anxiety, arrogance self-pride, contempt, hatred. We are all familiar with these. All of this keeps us from loving and seeing good in others and encouraging all that is good which is alive in them.

Notice in the story that it is the servants who recognise the presence of the spiritual weeds. What is the servant of good or love – it is truth that we have received, can be used to disperse ignorance and bring clarity and guidance into our lives. It enables a discernment concerning the presence of evil and it's attached misguided concepts and thoughts working in us. It is essential that we do so.

It is at this point of recognition that the Lord can separate the spiritual tares [weeds] from what he gives us freely which are truths that arise from love and goodness. Then we can choose to allow the Lord to fight and side-line this tendency.

This is a process of spiritual growth – continuing through the cycles of growth.

Swedenborg's writings describe how this separation from evil takes place. The Lord flows into us with good when we are receptive inwardly and outwardly of this Divine goodness. As we turn towards the Lord and away from evil (isolation just within our concerns) it is as if it no longer has



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an existence or power in our lives. This is how the Lord continually holds us in his love - holding us in heaven and shielding us from evil. It is only possible with his presence within us.

This is truly a blessing.

Dear Lord

You tell us repeatedly to - 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near'.

Your kingdom of unity and love is here now, waiting for us to welcome it into our lives.

It is here. We are in it. Heaven's all around.

Are we ready for it?

Let us 'repent' and turn again afresh to the Lord,

letting go of all that might block his entering in and dwelling with us.

Then we can walk in his way, follow his direction. And let his kingdom of Love live in our minds, hearts, and bring his heavenly kingdom into our earthly existence.

Amen



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Sunday 19th October: Please read: Matthew 13: 44 - 46

Hidden treasure

Our reading begins with a farmer overlooking and buying a field. He needs to evaluate whether it will grow a valuable crop. This field symbolises a life that is focused on the loving goodness that comes from the Lord. This is treasure beyond price. We can choose to let go of self-absorption, all that matters to a life just lived for ourselves and receive this abundant Life that is heavenly.

A merchant's focus or intention is to seek out what is of value and buy it. In our spiritual life we are faced with the question of what is of value to us in this moment in this situation. This is our inner work, our challenge to look honestly at the intentions.

Spiritually speaking the precious jewels including pearls are symbolic of valuable concepts and ideas of what is good and true that can guide our understanding and subsequently influence our choices in life. That is, of course, if we use this precious spiritual treasure. Over our life we gather these seeds of truth and goodness, and they are held safely in our depths, ready for us to draw on if we choose to do so. We are not aware of this inner storehouse until we are in a dilemma and are seeking for answers, asking questions such as what is the best I can do in this situation or to support this person in need? Or even what would the Lord do in this situation?

We read in Secrets of Heaven 2967[7] *The Lord's words in Matthew show that a merchant is someone who obtains knowledge of truth and goodness and consequently understanding and wisdom.*

When faced with a difficult choice or challenge to how we are approaching a situation in life we can access the spiritual ideas that form the foundation of our faith or spiritual beliefs. In this instance we become spiritual merchants seeking for beautiful pearls. We have a phrase 'pearls of wisdom'. What are some of your spiritual pearls I wonder?

Always seeking to learn more of what is spiritually alive and truly nourishing is important. In fact, it is a vital first step in the search for heaven within.

However, the merchant didn't only seek out pearls he also sold everything that he had and bought the fine pearl. Selling everything that we previously held dear and that has been of value for us. This begins to strike at the heart what we hold onto what is 'ours', what our priorities are. To be a spiritual merchant also involves being changed; listening to what is good for the wider community or the long-term, rather than a knee-jerk quick fix. Then the fine pearl of neighbourly loving goodness is active within us, it is a gift that is given to us to bring into the life situations we find personally challenging.



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The pearl of great price symbolises an entrance to this creative and transformation relationship with our Lord and creator. Each gate to the holy city is entered via a pearl of wisdom. Though using the truth that is found in the way we live, letting go of what the outer world values and we consider to be 'good'. We say in the Lord's prayer that he taught us -

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

Dear Lord,

We know so little and are easily distracted from what is the essence of life.

For our outer self wants to be in control, to take the easy way.

But you show us a different way of being. You challenge familiar patterns of thought and reacting.

Give us your strength to keep us walking in your Way.

To allow your Life to flow in.

To allow your Truth to enlighten those who are in confusion and darkness.

To allow your Love to reach those who need its comfort. Amen



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Sunday 26th October: Please read: Matthew 13: 47 -52

The Necessity of Seeking Spiritual Knowledge

In the gospels we find stories concerning fishing and fishermen. In fact, some of the disciples that Jesus called to follow him were fishermen at the time. In these times a heavy dragnet was pulled along the bottom of the water to seek fish to be caught for food. The previous parable describes the spiritual life being a path that seeds of spiritual knowledge coming into development and growth in the minds and way of living in each person who chooses to allow this transformation. We are now presented with the image of the kingdom of heaven being like a fishing net which catches all manner of fish.

When a decision needs to be made, we can gather knowledge to make a more informed choice. On a purely outward level, a comparison of workmen offering to repair one's house gives choices. One can decide which is the best value for the work to be done. This is even more vital when choosing what action to take on a spiritual level which has an eternal dimension.

Our mind is like a storehouse full of information. This storehouse is in the natural mind and its memory. Here, everything we have learnt and know is stored up to be recalled when needed. But we also have a spiritual mind that stores spiritual knowledge and experiences of loving goodness. These are stored and protected in each person ready for the development of the person's inner spirit.

To allow new spiritual life to be born in us we go through many cycles of learning spiritual ideas, trying to live it out, going through conflicts and difficult times that test our resolve to live following the Lord's guidance. In a sense, we need to come to the end of our own resources - to turn and ask the Lord to give us a life lived lovingly and truthfully. All the truth we know, and use has no other meaning than to bring the love of God into the world to help others.

The necessity of seeking truth is being highlighted in the parable. We cannot depend on our own resources and limited viewpoint or what the outer world values and pursues.

Our mouth and nostrils etc help us to discern good food from bad. So, to can our mind be used to discern what ideas are wholesome for our spiritual wellbeing. *"The kingdom of heaven is like a net"* is showing us that a heavenly perspective enables our minds to discern the difference between the Lord's goodness and what we think to be 'good'.

In the parable the fish that are caught in the net enable the separation into what is good and what is bad. It is the connection we have with heavenly influences and ideas stored up ready for use that enables our minds to be raised up to receive a higher perception of what is good and true. In spiritual terms, the net, symbolises this heavenly ability to sift and sort out what we will choose to enter our mind and change our life. The fish are nourishing for our physical bodies. We can also 'fish for



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knowledge' that nourishes our spiritual lives. We can search for spiritual ideas and knowledge to help put things into perspective and to see our place in the world. It can help develop our spirituality within the world we live in.

Our Father who is goodness itself.

In the moments when I'm truly present with you, I let go of my need to achieve.

I let go of my need to own what you give me. I let go of my need to control outcomes.

I realise that I know nothing without you. That I am powerless without you.

That I wish to serve your purposes and be part of a Life that creates, gathers,
and embodies the experience of heaven.

Thank you for all you give to each one of us. Amen



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Sunday 2nd

Debt and the Lord's Prayer

Suggested Readings: Matthew 18:21-35; Matthew 6:5-15

All of us have debts of one sort or another, maybe a mortgage or a loan for a car or an outstanding amount on a credit card. And if you have none of these you may still owe the milk man for last week's milk. Sometimes we get into difficulties with our debts and find we are unable to make the repayments. Fortunately, with professional help most of these difficulties can be worked through with time but for some people there is no way out and ultimately even the roof over their head is sold to cover their debts.

Our obsession with money and material things tends to cloud our view and we think that what we owe other people is just money, when in reality we owe so much more. What we owe to other people, our most important debt to them, is really the love and goodness they have given us through a kind word, a helping hand, a smiling face, a listening ear or a gentle touch. And this can go on happening each day of our lives without any acknowledgement of the debt of love that we owe to all these people. And if this is true of our relationship with other people how much more is it likely to be true of our relationship with God from whom all love has its source. What is our debt to God and what should we do about it?

A key to the answer to this question lies in the Lord's Prayer. In the prayer, given by Jesus for our use, we are asking God to forgive our debts, as we also forgive our debtors. The first thing to notice is that this part of the prayer is concerned with giving and forgiving. What God gives to us freely, continually and unconditionally is our life which we can use or misuse in complete freedom. We can use that life to serve our own needs or we can use it to serve the needs of others.

Now what God wants is for us to do the right thing, and use the life we have been given for the benefit of others - to use our time, our abilities, our strength for others first and ourselves second. If we do this we become more and more an 'image' of God because we freely and unconditionally give to others. But if we fail to live this way then we build up a big 'debt' to God. Picture this, if you like, as a growing 'debt' mountain of all the time, ability and strength, that we have heaped up on ourselves and our needs rather than giving of them to others. We 'owe' God because we have failed to use his life in the way intended.

The Lord's Prayer reminds us that God will forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. We are to become 'images' of God by freely giving to others. And part of this involves us in forgiving others even when they seem to ignore, reject or misuse what we try to do for them, just as we ignore, reject or misuse what God tries to do for us. God's relationship with us through giving and forgiving is the perfect image of how we should relate to others. And all the time we should seek to live this image of God more fully and more perfectly in our lives. God of course forgives our debts as soon as we



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start to build them up, because that is the nature of God. But we will only feel and acknowledge that forgiveness if we too in turn freely forgive others their debts to us. Are we in debt to God?

Prayers

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for taking care of me and loving me all through this past week. I know that that I have not been as good as I should all the time. Sometimes I have been lazy or disobedient and wanted my own way. Sometimes I have been quarrelsome and lost my temper. I have been greedy and selfish, wanting all the best things for myself. Please forgive me and help me to be better in the week ahead. Thank you, Lord, for everything good and lovely but most of all thank you for yourself and your great love for me.

Lord Jesus Christ, I find it so hard to forgive those who are unkind to me, or who blame me for things which are not my fault. I go on bearing a grudge against them and even when they try to make it up I feel bitter and hard. I know this is wrong. When Peter asked you how many times he ought to forgive someone who wronged him, you said he must go on and on forgiving. You even prayed for forgiveness for those who crucified you. Please help me to be more like you, to be willing to forgive whatever the situation.



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Sunday 9th

Remembrance Sunday – War and Peace

Suggested Readings: Isaiah 48:18; Deuteronomy 20:1-9; Isaiah 2:1-5; Heaven and Hell 290

I first led a Remembrance Sunday service in the late 1980's or early 1990's. At the time my mother remarked that she couldn't see how I could lead such a service when I had had no experience of the war, unlike so many of her generation who had either been in the forces or had managed life on the home front. And the situation has not changed except that wars and conflicts have continued unabated and the dreadful effects can be watched directly on tv and thus to some extent be better understood than through black and white films and documentaries from the distant past.

On Remembrance Sunday we traditionally take time to reflect on those who made the ultimate sacrifice in the two world wars of the last century. And yet we all know that wars and conflicts have continued around the world to this day. Warfare, however conducted, leads to death and destruction – the death of many of those directly taking part and the death of many innocent bystanders – the destruction of villages, towns and cities and the destruction of the lives and hopes, for at least a generation, of all those affected.

But what of the peace that ought to follow war and conflict? In this country we have been incredibly fortunate to have been able to live in a state of peace for 80 years. And yet as a country we have taken part in many other wars and we have been involved directly in conflicts very close to home, for example in the island of Ireland. And in the latter case the effects of that conflict included many atrocities in our own major cities.

But, I would suggest, the peace we have lived through has really only been a general absence of war rather than a universal heart-felt peace. Whilst in retrospect the 1950's and 1960's might have been a period when there was a whole-hearted desire to learn from the 2nd World War and build up a cohesive society based on peaceful growth and development we seem to have witnessed in more recent decades an increasing divisiveness. Yes, it is true that tolerance of people regardless of belief, race, colour, and sexual orientation has been a major focus of social attitudes in this period. But at the same time there has been an increasing intolerance of what people are allowed to say and express in public with a lack of respect for diverging opinions and a movement towards harsh and violent speech and behaviour. This is hardly a state of peace of which we can be proud.

Jesus tells us: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

In these words Jesus is making a profound contrast between the peace that is the absence of war and the true peace that only he can give - a peace that is essentially spiritually in nature and which comes following victory in temptation.



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It is perhaps a very common view that peace is something we seek to bring to a country first and then hope that out of that overall peace, communities and families and ultimately individuals will themselves find peace. But Jesus is pointing in a different direction. He is showing us that real, lasting, spiritual peace can only start within each one of us. This is the peace that comes when our hearts and our minds are at one – when there is no conflict between what we feel and what we think – when we desire to do good for others and know it is the right thing to do. And this ought to be the pattern not just for individuals and families but communities and nations.

Prayer

O Lord, you desire that all people should live in peace one with another, so please grant us an understanding of that inward peace which you alone can give. While we remember the sacrifices of war, and honour those who gave their service and their life in our country's cause, let the lessons that you have taught us sink deeply into our mind, so that that we may strive with all our being to remove the hatreds and the fears that lead to war. Teach us to fear nothing in the cause of justice and freedom, but ever to fear those evils that set people against each other and estrange them from you.



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Sunday 16th

Doing the Truth

Suggested Readings: John 3:1-21, Doctrine of Life 38,39, 1 John 4:7,8

We are accustomed to the idea of speaking the truth and in a legal setting we may have to swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. But rarely would we say that we ought to **do** the truth or though we might say that we ought to do what is right. And yet in the Word and in the Writings we find clearly stated the idea of doing the truth.

The key words in John 3:21 are variably translated: In the New King James Version - *But he who does the truth comes to the light*; in the Revised Standard Version - *But he who does what is true comes to the light*; In the New International Version - *But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light*; in the New Living Translation - *But those who do what is right come to the light*.

In this sample of four translations we have the following: *does the truth*; *does what is true*; *lives by the truth*; *do what is right*. The first two are very similar as truth is what is true. But the third one adds the clarity that we do the truth when we live by the truth. And the fourth one adds the dimension that when we do the truth or live by the truth we are doing what is right.

The result of doing the truth, doing what is true, living by the truth and doing what is right is always something good. So we can simply say that truth leads to good. To conclude I want to take two expressions and see what they can tell us about the nature of truth.

Love your neighbour

These words are clearly a commandment and as such they are telling us something that we should do and live by and from experience we can know that this is the right way to live. Remember the words from the translations of John 3:21- *does the truth*; *does what is true*; *lives by the truth*; *do what is right*. We can perhaps see then that the words *Love your neighbour* are not just a commandment but are also an expression of something that is true or the truth.

God is Love

Now this is clearly a statement of something that we might consider as true and therefore can be called the truth. But at first sight it does not seem to be a commandment to live by or something that we can do that is right. But the true idea, the truth, that *God is Love*, has the power to completely transform our whole attitude to life and therefore we can live by this statement as the truth. Because if we believe the truth that God is Love then we can know that God loves us and that we should love others.



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We can find this clearly stated in the first Epistle of John in 1 John 4:7,8 - *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, as we look around our world we cannot fail to see so many people who face conflict – whose lives are disrupted, shattered and destroyed by the effects of war and other atrocities in all their terrible forms. We pray Lord for your peace to enter our world more fully so that people of all nationalities, races and religions may live in harmony rather than in conflict. But we are also aware Lord that inner conflict exists in the lives of many people and perhaps in someone known to us – the inner conflict that arises from anxiety, doubt, lack of self-confidence or the damage caused by bad life experiences. Such inner conflict can be even more damaging than being caught up in war because its effects are spiritual in nature.

If we are able Lord, help us to try and ease the burden of anyone we know who suffers such inner torments and conflicts and help bring them the peace that you alone can truly give.



The Hands and Face of the Word

Suggested Readings: Matthew 17:1-8; John 14:1-7; John 15:12-17; Doctrine of Sacred Scripture 55

When we read the Word it is a common experience that some parts are easy to understand, some parts are obscure and some parts don't seem to make any sense at all. As a result we might then ask – “why isn't all of it easy to understand, wouldn't it be better for us if there were no difficult or apparently nonsensical parts?” The short answer to this sort of question is no! But I need to try and explain why.

When a young child starts to learn to read they have books with just one or two words and pictures on a page. At first the written word and its shape means nothing until they begin to make a connection with something they know and understand. Gradually they are able to link the word they see with its illustration thus giving the word meaning for them. During the next stage the child is led to discover that words are made up of discrete phonemes or sounds and building up their knowledge of these phonemes enables them to begin to decode new words. Once reading ability and interest has developed to this degree the world of the written word can be dipped into with increasing confidence and understanding.

It seems to me that there is something like a parallel process in our spiritual development although it is not to do with the actual reading of the Word but rather with the growth of our understanding of what the Word teaches and the enlightenment we can receive from it. At our earliest stage of spiritual awareness, the state that starts during childhood, we delight in the simple stories of both the New and Old Testaments – about Jesus' life, the miracles, the parables, his disciples and the battles between good and evil.

If we develop further we can begin to see that there is deeper meaning within the literal text and that the Word can speak to us about whatever problems we face in life. Also we begin to appreciate that many stories and descriptions we thought of as the truth were really appearances of the truth suitable for the spiritual stage we were once at. At another stage of development we may come to see that the whole of the Word is about the Lord and his relationship with us. This progressive development of our understanding and enlightenment is not just something that takes place in this world but can continue to progress to eternity. But is all this potential development and enlightenment necessary for our salvation?

In Doctrine of Sacred Scripture 55 Swedenborg offers us this comment when he describes the hands and face of the Word: *Everything that has to do with how we live and therefore with our salvation is bare, while the rest is clothed.*



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What I think he is saying is that throughout the Word there are sentences, paragraphs and passages that are the hands and face of the Word because the power and love of what they teach shines forth so clearly that they cannot be mistaken. And these are the ones that provide for us the means of being saved from being self-focussed and selfish. The rest however is clothed and only becomes open and understandable to us as we grow in spiritual enlightenment. The Lord can speak to anyone through his Word in whatever spiritual state they may be. We should not worry that when we read the Word there are things, many things perhaps, that we do not currently understand and which may confuse us. Because, after all, we have eternity to further develop our understanding and receive greater enlightenment from the Lord.

Prayer

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Lord Jesus Christ, You have placed your children in a world where some people push and shove to be first. Because of their self-importance they clamour for recognition and will stop at nothing until they get what they want in life, even if it means hurting others in the process. But you have called us to view life from a different perspective that considers others as important as ourselves. We are to have a humble attitude that puts you first, others second, and ourselves last in everything we do. Of ourselves, Lord, we know this is impossible to do. But in your strength and power we can become what you teach us to be. May your Golden Rule guide us in all our relationships with others and in the decisions and choices we make in daily living.



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Sunday 30th

Preparing the Way

Suggested Readings: Isaiah 9:2; Isaiah 40:3-5; 57:14; 62:10,11, Malachi 3:1

Isaiah presents a vivid picture of the coming of the Lord and the preparations that need to be made before this coming can take place and the enormous changes that result. This is not just some minor adjustment to the landscape but a major upheaval. Isaiah is not talking about the physical world but about major upheavals that need to take place in the spiritual world of our hearts and minds – changes that can only come about when we reflect on the errors we make in our daily lives and decide to change for the better.

Make straight in the desert a highway for our God

We can be in a desert when we have lost sight of the truth that should lead us in life. And when we have lost sight of the truth, any real goodness disappears as well which is why we are in a desert. Instead of following true principles that can lead us straight towards a more heavenly way of living we wander about on our own, lost in our self-focussed approach to life. Our highway out of the desert needs to be straight.

Every valley shall be lifted up

Valleys generally picture a lowly inner state of life in which we take a natural approach to living out our faith – simple straightforward obedience to what Jesus teaches. But valleys can also picture our humility – a state where we put our trust in the Lord and recognise that he is the source of everything good and true in our lives. True humility actually causes us to be spiritually lifted up and exalted.

Every mountain and hill be made low

In the golden age, worship of the Lord took place on hills and mountains since hills represented spiritual good that comes from loving the neighbour and mountains represented celestial good that comes from loving the Lord. But of ourselves we tend to have our personal landscape of love completely upside down. At the top, on our mountain peaks, is our love for ourselves to the exclusion of others. On the hills of our landscape of love is our focus on all the things the world can offer us. And beneath these comes our care for our neighbour and love for the Lord. These types of mountains and hills need to be made low!

Uneven ground shall become level; Rough places a plain

The Authorised Version reads: *the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain*. When we read of the crooked being made straight we can recognise this as evil being turned into good. And rough places being made a plain refer to falsity being turned into truth. But evil cannot be actually turned into good no more than falsity can be actually turned into truth. But if the evil and the falsity spring from ignorance rather than deliberate intent then these can change as ignorance is dispelled. And the coming of the Lord can achieve this.



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Remove every obstruction from my people's way; Build up the highway; clear it of stones

Given that stones and rocks have the positive symbolism of truths that should act as a foundation to our way of living we can see that here Isaiah is using them in the opposite sense to point out that false ideas about how life should be lived act as obstructions that prevent the Lord coming into our lives and thus prevent us from living and following his way. All these false ideas need to be swept away and the highway built up on truly good foundations.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ help us to celebrate Advent in a way which will bring praise to you, an increase of concern, care, help and service to others and well-being to ourselves. We thank you for clothing and the shelter of homes, for food and drink. Help us to open our hearts and lives to others, to open our purses and wallets to others, to open our homes to others. Help us to share with others what we have first received from you. We pray for those who are parted from loved ones by time and distance and circumstance. In thought and memory, in prayer and worship, help them to feel closer to one another. We pray for those for whom this is a time of sad memories. Please help those who are bereaved and grieve. Comfort them with the knowledge and the strength that their loved ones are safe in your keeping. And through all the Advent season may we share with one another the true peace that you alone can give.



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

7th DECEMBER 2025 HOME WORSHIP TREVOR MILLAR

WAITING FOR THE LORD

Much of our lives is spent in waiting for something, or someone, to arrive. As a child I waited eagerly for my comics to come The Dandy on Tuesday and The Beano on Thursday. Bonfire Night on November 5th was a huge event, back in the day, with massive preparations: sticks had to be collected for the bonfire and a few fireworks bought with pocket money for several weeks beforehand.

For today's children Halloween is more important, but preparations still need to be made. But The crowning event was Christmas!

For Christians, particularly those who have to juggle job and family commitments, the combined workload can seem overwhelming.

However the spiritual significance of the season of Advent, from the Latin word *adventus*-which means coming or arrival, which begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day should not be forgotten. The four red candles in the Advent wreath represent Hope, Peace, Love and Joy, with the central white candle being lit on Christmas Day itself.

What should we be waiting for? John chapter 1, verses 1-14 reminds us of what the birth of Jesus involved: nothing less than the incarnation of the Divine in human form. Verse 14 reads "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (NIV). In Jesus we saw the invisible face of the hitherto invisible God.

Firstly we see the Divine embodied in the Lord's incarnation on earth. We learn about the Lord in The Bible, the teachings of our church and from various other sources including the writings of mystics, and observation of the natural world. Science, art, music and literature can also bring us closer to the Divine. We can sometimes see the Lord acting in and through other people; and other people may recognise the Lord, acting through his angels, in us.

This should not be surprising since we are all potential angels, angel seeds if you like.

Try to keep the hope, peace love and joy alive in us this Christmas, whatever problems may surround us. It is a time for seeing what is good in the world and in others. "The more we love our neighbour, the more of the Lord's life we receive." Emanuel Swedenborg -Secrets of Heaven section 2253.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus as we welcome the celebration of your birth on earth, we ask that you be born again in our hearts. Amen



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

14th DECEMBER 2025 HOME WORSHIP TREVOR MILLAR

THE LORD'S SECOND COMING

The second coming of the Lord has been the hope of Christians for the past two thousand years. Even today millions are expecting Jesus to return trailing clouds of glory as he comes back to the earth. The Ascension of Jesus into heaven is recorded in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 24 v 50-53.

However the same Luke, when describing the Ascension in Acts chapter 1 v 1-11, makes an interesting addition to his Gospel account in verses 10 and 11. "They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. Men of Galilee they said "Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.""

One can see how the idea of a literal physical return has arisen. Not everyone agrees with that interpretation.

Two dissenting writers are Emanuel Swedenborg, and Eckhart Tolle. I don't have specific references for these quotes.

"The Lord's Coming will not be his literal appearance in the world, but his presence in every individual." - Emanuel Swedenborg, and "The 'Second Coming' of Christ is a transformation of human conscious, a shift from Time to Presence, from Thinking to Pure Consciousness, not the arrival of some man or woman." - Eckhart Tolle

So where do we look for the Lord, today? Perhaps, like the writer of Psalm 121 "I lift up my eyes to the hills - where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip - he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you - the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm - he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and for evermore."

The Lord's presence is everywhere. We may not always be aware of this. However there is a difference between our human awareness of that presence, and the Lord actually being beside us. We never walk alone!

In the book of Revelation chapter 21 verse 2 John writes "I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." What a glorious vision of the Lord and his church. The descent of the New Jerusalem is continuing and is growing in the world and our hearts. Let our hearts be filled with joy this Christmas.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ we ask you to make us aware of your presence in our lives: give us the confidence to live each day in peace and hope. Amen



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

21st DECEMBER 2025 HOME WORSHIP TREVOR MILLAR

THE LORD IN THE NEIGHBOUR

I recently came across a quote from a Catholic source, which totally took the wind out of my sails given my love and reverence for the Lord's Holy Supper. It claimed that if you cannot find Christ in the face of the beggar at the church door, you will not find him at the altar rail.

What is referred to as "the social gospel" can often be overlooked by even devoted followers of the Lord.

Consider the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew chapter 25 verses 31-46. Can you imagine the horror on the faces of the goats when they were disowned for not caring about the physical needs of the Lord? Their lack of understanding is clearly shown in verses 44-45.

"Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you? He will reply "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these you did not do for me." We are asked to help others in need, not to judge whether or not they are worthy of such help.

There is a temptation for people of strong religious feeling, especially those of a devotional or contemplative nature like myself to become so heavenly minded as to be of no earthly use. The other extreme, as is often admitted by Quakers in their social action, to so busy themselves that prayer can be neglected. The ideal is perhaps a balance between prayer and action.

Faith and works are both necessary. Read the letter of James chapter 2 verses 14-26. Verse 26 makes it perfectly clear "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."

If the Lord is in me and loves me, he is also in other people and loves them too. Think about that for a moment.

In the parable of the good Samaritan, Luke chapter 10 verses 25-37, Jesus confirms the two great commandments (verse 27) - "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and all your mind"; and, "Love your neighbour as yourself."

The good news here is that we are only asked to love our neighbours; we are not required to actually like them!

Perhaps we should consider how we love ourselves. If we can learn to accept that God loves us unconditionally, as he finds us, then who are we to despise ourselves? First we have to learn to love the good that the Lord gives us and to accept that we are loved by Him. Then we can learn to see the good in our neighbour.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus help us to see your face in the eyes of our neighbours. Let us recognise your love as it shines through the eyes of animals. Reveal your nature in the beauty of flowers, the promise of the rainbow and the laughter of children. Amen



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

28th DECEMBER 2025 HOME WORSHIP TREVOR MILLAR

THE LORD IN US

Who exactly are we, you and I? It is so easy to define ourselves by, and hide behind, our various roles. We are parents, children, siblings, employees and volunteers. We may also define ourselves in different ways according to race, gender etc. But who is the individual being behind these identities?

Are we no more than our thoughts and activities?

The relatively quiet period between Christmas and New Year, when many people take a holiday from work, is a good opportunity for quiet reflection.

We have a few days grace before being distracted by advertisements for summer holidays. Hopefully we can all find some down time when we can relax and just be ourselves.

As for new year resolutions, perhaps we could resolve to do a little less next year. More "me" time, less rushing about - not easy in this digital age.

Start each day with gratitude. Many people can only dream of what we have, however much it may fall short of our own desires. Count your blessings!

in his prayer for his disciples in John chapter 17 verses 6-19, Jesus prays, in verse 13, that the disciples "may have the full measure of my joy within them." The knowledge that the Lord can work within us and through us should be a source of great joy. Let us remind ourselves of that joy.

Chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel is jam packed with joy. Read it now. Three parables about something being lost and then found. We have the story of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son.

Now look at Psalm 100: "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness: come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever: his faithfulness continues through all generations."

The Lord called disciples to follow him during his earthly ministry, and he calls us to follow him today. Look at Matthew's account in chapter 9 v35 -38.

Jesus said to his disciples "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few." (verse 37). Let the Lord's joy bubble out through us into the world around us. As Mother Theresa of Calcutta said - "God does not require great things of us, but small things done with great love."

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ help us to be your workers in your earthly harvest field. Amen