

HOME *Worship*



April 2026

Friday 3rd April 2026 (Good Friday)

Revd Brian Talbot

“That the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” (Luke 24:27)

Read Matthew 27:33–37; Mark 15:22–26; Luke 23:33–34

Who killed Jesus? So many Christians over the years have blamed the Jews for crucifying Jesus, which has led to various massacres. **Some** Jews might have agitated for his execution, but it was ultimately Pilate the Roman governor, who ordered Roman soldiers to kill Jesus. They probably weren't Roman nor Italian, so we can't blame Italians! We crucify Jesus! We are the sinners, to whom Jesus is handed! Whenever we ignore, or ridicule the messages we receive from him in our head, (cf. AC 2813:2e; 9144:10; TCR 311; cf. LJ(P) 229; TCR 759:1) or the nudges we receive in our heart, we kill him. Whenever we come up with excuses, as to why we don't treat others, as we want to be treated, or don't love our enemies, we block or limit or kill his influence on us.

⁴ For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, since on their own they are crucifying again the Son of God and are holding him up to contempt.” (Hebrews 6:4–6)

Prayer: Lord Jesus the Messiah, we crucify you when we hold self-destructive thoughts, and we are so obsessed with ourselves and our needs, that we are unkind to others and ourselves. (AE 653:1; cf. 83:122:4; 655:3; AR 527:1e) We put you to death, when we deny your presence with us, and reject your ability to rescue us. (AE 328:2; 504:1; 648e) We thank you that you give us information and guidance, to help us identify our distorted thinking and allow it to be replaced by more genuine perspectives. (AE 401:15) You lift us out of the flood of confused thinking and from the pit of depression. We realise that we have to go through temptations, or face dilemmas, so that we can mortify our old selves, so that our new selves can grow. (AR 639:2–3) Amen.

HOME *Worship*



April 2026

Sunday 5th April 2026 (Easter Sunday)

Revd Brian Talbot

“Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12:24)

“He rises daily, indeed every single moment, in the minds of regenerate persons.” (Secrets of Heaven §2405:8e)

Read John 12:20–36

Our message for Easter Sunday, is that we can be crucified with Jesus and raised from the ‘death’ of selfishness, arrogance, greed, self-pity and all our other failings. (Romans 6:3–6; 2 Timothy 2:11) We are to take up our cross and follow Jesus daily. (Luke 9:23; Matthew 10:38) “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Galatians 5:24) Our Lord is used to being crucified and rising again, as he was “the Lamb that was slaughtered from the foundation of the world”. (Revelation 13:8) Our kernel of wheat has to die to release many more seeds.

Our Lord Jesus’ death and resurrection are a picture of our death and re-birth. “In all their distress he was distressed; the angel of his presence saved them”. (Isaiah 63:9) He accompanies us in our struggles with our impatience, insensitivity and so on. He identifies with our crises, our temptations, our trials, because he himself has been through his own. He fights for us, whenever demons inspire doubt and uncertainty, and attack us and incriminate us, the Lord and his angels inspire hope, patience and endurance, defend and pardon us, and remind us of what we really believe in. (AC 4162:2; 6611; 8131; 8159:3) Our Lord Jesus is not a substitute, he’s an accompanier, an identifier, an empathiser. From deep within us he seeks to show clearly the weaknesses of our current thinking, and inspire us with better perspectives. (AE 131; 730:33; AR 185) He is raising us from the dead. “While he was in the world, the Lord glorified his human manifestation, that is, made it divine, through battles and inner conflict. In a similar way within us individually, the Lord fights for us while we are undergoing inner conflict and conquers the hellish spirits who are assaulting us. Afterward he “glorifies” us, that is, makes us spiritual.” (True Christianity 599 [Rose]) Letting go of outdated ideas, allows better ones to develop. (AE 899:13e; AR 639; Life 99) Easter is about new growth, new perspectives, deeper love of everything that comes from our Lord Jesus, and above all happiness: “And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them.’” (Revelation 14:13)

With the Lord’s help, the old ‘us’ dies so that the new ‘us’, the more angelic ‘us’ becomes more conscious in our mind. We can look back on our life and see progress. We have more nuanced opinions about issues. We see people in a more hopeful and encouraging light, because we have become humbler and more sensitive.

Prayer: Lord Jesus our Messiah, we place our hearts in your hands, conscious of your loving Presence with us. This Easter Sunday we celebrate the process of you allowing us to die and being risen anew. You never leave us, but accompany us, what dilemmas we face, or self-doubts we experience. You purify us of out-dated ideas and limiting views of other people and situations, so that we can see our situation with fresh eyes. (AE 329:9) We are happy when we leave our old self behind, so that our new, more angelic self can thrive. Amen. of life. Amen

HOME *Worship*



April 2026

Sunday 12th April 2026

Revd Brian Talbot

Read John 20:10-18

The women held the risen Jesus' feet, (Matthew 28:9) and Jesus did not object. Jesus encourages the disbelieving disciples to touch him! "Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." (Luke 24:39) Thomas wanted to put his hand in Jesus' side and so Jesus obliged. (John 20:25, 27) Jesus doesn't tell Mary, "Do not hold on to me." My translation would be "Jesus said to her, 'Do not keep holding onto me'" (John 20:17) Jesus was encouraging Mary not to keep clinging to him.

It's interesting that Mary keeps holding Jesus' feet. This is the lowest part of him. I wonder whether it means the most grounded, or most concrete, part of our faith. We can point to times and places, when we've experienced the Lord's presence powerfully, personally, individually and intimately. It might be a church building, a special ceremony, such as a membership service, a wedding, and so on. It might be a keepsake, a memento which means a lot to us. I wonder whether our Lord is encouraging us to look forward or beyond to greater moments of intimacy with him? According to the teachings of our church, our Lord Jesus has become more Divinely Human and more humanly Divine. In other words, he can reach us individually and intimately, because he knows us so well. (He also knows the infinite number of human beings throughout the whole universe and heaven, and works with them, as though they're the only person he ministers to!) A growing faith doesn't limit how our Lord Jesus can influence us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus you are continually helping us to progress and grow as angels. We thank you for inspiring us to want to learn new explanations of the Bible and of you. We thank you for helping us develop as your servants and ministers to our family and friends. Amen.

HOME *Worship*



April 2026

Sunday 19th April 2026

Revd Brian Talbot

Read John 11:17-37, 38-44

We're taught that our Lord Jesus raised his friend Lazarus, (John 11) to symbolically portray his desire to build a church among gentiles. (Secrets of Heaven 2916:4; 9231:3) Each of us has a naïve, gullible, inexperienced, unsophisticated, uneducated, even barbarian, side of our personality, which yearns to receive instruction and guidance from the Lord. Throughout history we have seen so-called 'death cults'. People so dogmatically convinced of their beliefs, that they are willing to die for them. They have become deaf to any arguments against their beliefs. They have become closed off from non-believers, who they staunchly and unbendingly regard as threats or contagion. Possibly we can suffer from such arrogant, 'tunnel vision'. We need our Lord to soften our heart and open our mind to different possible views. We need to constantly challenge ourselves and be open to awe, wonder, room for growth and so on. We've got eternity to get the right beliefs, and even then, they will never align with our Lord's. But the Lord can raise us from the dead.

Prayer: Lord Jesus the Messiah, you are the resurrection and the life. (John 11:25) You are a "God not of the dead, but of the living." (Matthew 22:32) You raised the son of the widow of Nain. You helped Jairus' daughter come alive again. (Mark 5:41-42; Luke 8:54-55) You raised your friend Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, despite him being dead four days. (John 11) You awaken us from the sleep of ignorance, the blindness of prejudice, the deafness of arrogance, the lameness of being close-minded, the deadness of blind dogma. Amen.

HOME *Worship*



April 2026

Sunday 26th April 2026

Revd Brian Talbot

“Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine,⁶ but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.” (Exodus 19:4-5)“

Read Deuteronomy 7:1-9; Psalm 33 (especially verse 12)

Sometimes we have to pander to people's egos to keep them on the 'straight and narrow'. Our Lord did this with the Israelites. Insecure people need molly-coddling and praising continually. The Israelites needed to be cajoled. They believed they were the chosen race. They looked down on non-Jews. Swedenborg tells us that they weren't "the chosen people", even though they stubbornly and dogmatically believed that they were. (Secrets of Heaven 4290; 4292; 7051:4; 7439:2; 10430; 10535; 10632:2) Such sectarianism results in sometimes holding others in contempt. (Secrets of Heaven 3803:2) However, looking on the bright side, their obstinacy was needed in the recording of the Old Testament. It has miraculously been transmitted with very few errors. Compared to other ancient texts the vast majority of the Old Testament has been faithfully passed from generation to generation over millennia.

New Church people or Swedenborgians have a more universalist approach: "And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other." (Matthew 24:31)

The true 'elect', the genuine 'chosen people', have the Lord working in them. Angels want everything they have, to belong to others. (Heaven and Hell 268) If we see a person, no matter their religion, embody mercy, compassion, love, empathy, and other Divine virtues, they have been chosen.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, our heavenly Father, you constantly and continually supply virtues to the hearts and minds of all people, whether in this universe or in heaven. (Secrets of Heaven 2741) Your mercy, reaches out to all your children and you forgive everyone. The field of your love and your wisdom radiate outwards to all. (Secrets of Heaven 8307:1e; Divine Providence 294:6; True Christianity 308; 539) You desire "to save everyone" and by your "mighty power to draw them towards heaven, that is, towards" yourself. (Secrets of Heaven 1038:1) All your children are precious to you. This becomes a reality when we become mutual and reciprocal partners to you. Amen.

HOME *Worship*



May 2026

Sunday 3rd May 2026

Revd Jack Dunion

The Lord's Gentle Comfort

Many years ago, while bringing up my young children, I was going through some difficult times while trying to balance family life. I recall at that time watching a TV commercial. The setting was a huge football stadium packed with people. As an announcement began to ring out across the stadium, the crowd fell silent. The person who was making the announcement then said something quite unexpected, they asked, "does anyone ever feel that they are being overwhelmed with the tasks of life". For a few minutes no one reacted. They just sat there in silence, as though reflecting on what had just been said. Suddenly, a young Mother, babe in her arms, rose to her feet and raised her hand. The whole stadium again went silent. Then suddenly, another woman stood up, then a man nearby, then another and another, until the whole stadium had come to their feet. They all felt the same but were reluctant to admit it. At that moment, sitting in my own home, I wanted to stand too! Something about watching that TV commercial made me feel supported, not alone in my difficult life. I guess I know now what it was I had been missing and perhaps searching for at the time. I know now that, unknown to me, all the troubles I was going through in life at the time were only being permitted because they were helping bring me to find the Lord and His Church, where the Word is read and taught. These days, I feel supported by the Lord through my regular visits to His Word and now find near certainty in His promises.

When we feel alone and burdened, we can take heart in the Lord's promise: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem. And when ye see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb" ([Isaiah 66:13-14](#)). No matter where we are or where we go in life, the Lord is as close to us as a loving parent, always aware of our needs, feelings, and fears. His comfort goes beyond what any earthly person can provide.

The Heavenly Doctrines explain that the Lord comforts us most deeply through His Word, which provides hope and assurance in times of sadness ([Arcana Coelestia 4783](#)). Even if you cannot leave your home or participate in active life, you are precious to the Lord. Because, in heaven, those who grow old in faith, thoughtfulness, and love come continually into greater happiness and youthfulness, becoming "forms of thoughtfulness" radiant with inner beauty ([Heaven and Hell 414](#)). In your quiet moments, rest in the Lord's gentle care, and remember that every prayer, every thought of kindness, draws Him near.

Prayer: O Lord, You are our gentle Shepherd and ever-present Comforter. In moments of sorrow or uncertainty, hold us close with Your tender love. Quiet our hearts with Your peace, and assure us with the warmth of Your presence. Help us to trust in Your guiding hand and to find rest in Your promises. Thank You for Your kindness, patience, and gentle touch that soothes our souls. Amen.

HOME *Worship*



May 2026

Sunday 10th May 2026

Revd Jack Dunion

Strengthening Faith in Trials

When we consider the end of all creation, which is that a heaven of angels be formed from the human race, this really can help to put everything into perspective. But, as people go about the relatively mundane tasks of life, how many consider that this is the case at all? Or, among those who may be unaware of the reason God created all this, how many are there who stop to think why they are here, or who created everything, or, indeed, what it is all for. Yet, it is in the moments when we do take time to stop and ponder such profound truths that we can draw closer to the Lord. And, for those who don't yet know the Lord, they may feel prompted to begin a search for something more to life than what they have previously been aware of. For many people, it can take a life crisis before they come to ponder these deeper thoughts. For others, it can come during quiet moments of solitude. We all, at some stage in our lives, experience these gentle prompts to think deeper about life. But, more often than not, it's the accumulative trials and tribulations of life, perhaps over a long time, that lead us to the point of deeper reflections.

Life's trials can feel overwhelming, but it is a great comfort and strength to us in knowing that they are also opportunities for our faith to deepen. "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD" ([Psalms 31:24](#)). Faith grows stronger, not by avoiding difficulties, but by trusting that the Lord is with us in every struggle we go through. The doctrine for the New Church teaches that the Lord alone gives us strength to face hardships, especially temptations and spiritual struggles ([Arcana Caelestia 8969](#); [The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrines 195](#)). When we look back, we can see that it was the Lord who carried us through such times, even if we felt alone at the time. We may at times in life question why our lives must be filled with mistakes and why we so often need to make such difficult choices. Later in life though, we come to see the value in these trials and realise how the Lord had to permit them, on account that we will benefit from having been through them, to eternity!

I often like to use the analogy of the relationship between parent and child to describe our relationship with the Lord. If a young baby, for example, was cutting its teeth and its parents gave it the choice whether to keep the teeth and continue with the pain, or have them taken away. Wouldn't the baby, without hesitation, have the teeth taken away? What would happen then when the baby reached its teenage years and started dating? Wouldn't they then ask their parents "why didn't you just let me go through the pain"? If we, having just a little wisdom, know to allow that pain for the sake of the child's later years, how much more would the Lord, who is infinitely wise, not allow temporary suffering in this life for the sake of our eternal and everlasting happiness? We must learn to trust that if the Lord allows something, it is indeed for the best in the longer term. Real faith is not just a belief though, but a living trust that grows as we turn to the Lord and act in love and truth ([True Christian Religion 352](#)). The Lord never lets anyone be tempted beyond their ability and always grants strength to endure and overcome ([Spiritual Experiences 2195](#)).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, in times of trial and uncertainty, strengthen our faith in You. Help us to trust Your wisdom and love, even when the path is hard to see. Fill our hearts with courage and perseverance, knowing You are always by our side. Remind us that every challenge can draw us closer to You and make our faith stronger. Thank You for being our Rock and our Refuge at all times. Amen

HOME *Worship*



May 2026

Sunday 17th May 2026

Revd Jack Dunion

The Certainty of Heaven

The question of heaven is one that has inspired hope, longing, and sometimes doubt in people throughout history. Is heaven real? Can we be truly certain of its existence? According to New Christian teachings, the certainty of heaven is not just a matter of blind belief, but can be grounded in the truths revealed in the Word and illuminated by spiritual understanding. First, the Word of God—both in its literal stories and its inner spiritual meaning—testifies again and again to the reality and nature of heaven. The Lord describes heaven as a real place: “In my Father’s house are many mansions... I go to prepare a place for you” ([John 14:2](#)). In the Lord’s Prayer, we say, “Thy kingdom come... as in heaven, so upon the earth,” affirming not only our hope for heaven, but its central place in the plan of creation. New Christian doctrine teaches that heaven is not merely a far-away future reward, but a present and living reality. Heaven is the Lord’s kingdom—a realm where love to the Lord and love towards the neighbour are the ruling loves ([Heaven and Hell 54](#)). When we live from these loves here on earth, we become conjoined to heaven even now, and after death, we simply move into its fuller expression. Heaven is not arbitrary; it is a natural and loving extension of a life turned towards goodness and truth.

Swedenborg teaches that the whole of heaven is composed of those who have let the Lord’s love and wisdom shape their hearts and minds. He writes, “To be in heaven is to be in the Lord and the Lord in them,” and this is something anyone can receive, because the Lord’s mercy and invitation are universal ([Heaven and Hell 420](#)). After death, everyone awakens as a person, with memory, affection, and individuality. Our inner loves draw us naturally toward the company of angels who love what we love. We can be certain of heaven because the Lord Himself promises it; because the deep yearnings for love, meaning, and belonging within us point to it; and because the ongoing experience of the church—here and in heaven—bears witness to the Lord’s continual leading of the human race to its true spiritual home.....Let us take comfort and inspiration from this certainty. The reality of heaven invites us to live now with purpose, kindness, and faith, assured that we are, even now, on a journey that leads us toward the Lord and into the company of angels forever.

Prayer: Merciful Lord, we thank You for the promise of heaven and the assurance of eternal life with You. Fill our hearts with hope and confidence, knowing that Your heavenly kingdom awaits all who love and follow You. Help us to live each day with faith in Your promise, and to find comfort in the certainty of Your eternal embrace. Guide us to share this hope with others, trusting in Your loving care forever. Amen.

HOME *Worship*



May 2026

Sunday 24th May 2026

Revd Jack Dunion

God's Presence with the Lonely

As the parent of grown up children, I seem to be seeing them less than I ever did. This is of course is what we work towards as parents. We wish our children (they are always our children!) every success. When they don't need us so much then it means we have been successful in our duty to raise and nurture them until they are ready to become independent adults. This then allows them to begin making free and reasoned choices, which, in turn, allows them to receive the Lord's life of love and truth, and make it their own. Of course, we will always be there for them if and when they need us. I remember one day I went to visit my Mum and noticed that she had a large family sized box of Cornflakes in her cupboard. As myself and my siblings had all left home, and my Mum lived on her own, I enquired as to why she needed a family sized box of Cornflakes. Her reply was "just in case one of you needs to stay here at some point". Bless her heart, she was always on standby.

Perhaps there is an irony here, in that when our children are very young we often seek Solitude. Then, when they grow up and fly the nest, we can at times feel rather lonely without them, especially if we are on our own. Even in our loneliest hours though, the Lord is still present. Scripture tells us, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" ([Psalms 23:4](#)). The Lord's promise is not just for the able and active, but for all, including the lonely and housebound. The Writings add that the Lord is present with every person, providing life and guidance according to how much we open our hearts to Him. He is as close as the sun's warmth is to every plant—the more we receive Him, the more we feel His presence ([True Christian Religion 766](#); [Arcana Coelestia 2706](#)). Even if you are physically alone, you are spiritually surrounded by the Lord's love and angelic care. You can trust that the Lord's Divine Providence ensures that every event, joyful or sad, can lead to your deeper good. ([Arcana Coelestia 6303](#)).

Prayer: Loving Lord, You see and understand every heart. Be near to those who feel lonely, letting them sense Your gentle presence beside them. Fill their hearts with Your love and comfort, and remind them they are never truly alone, for You are always with them. Help us all to reach out with kindness and companionship, reflecting Your care in the world. Thank You for being our constant friend and guide. Amen

HOME *Worship*



May 2026

Sunday 31st May 2026

Revd Jack Dunion

The Sure Hope of Eternal Life

The Word promises us there is life after death, a life more real and beautiful than we could even imagine. The Lord says He will “wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away” (Revelation 21:4). Heaven is not a distant dream, but a reality for all who love the Lord and live by His teachings. The Heavenly Doctrines reveal that we do not fade away after death, but pass into a world where we retain everything that makes us human. We see, hear, speak, and act; we recognize one another and continue in love and thoughtfulness. Death is not the extinction of life, but its continuation (True Christian Religion 792). The kind of life we have in heaven depends simply on the love and faith we cultivated here (The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Teachings 227). Every day then spent loving God and our neighbour is preparing us for heaven. Even for those who cannot do what they once could, the Lord offers a simple, powerful call: trust and pray. “I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.... Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust” (Psalms 40:1, 4). When we pray sincerely, the Lord hears us. Our prayers are important, and our trust in the Lord is the foundation of our spiritual strength. Worship and prayer are most potent when they arise from a life of repentance and a sincere desire to do good. The Lord gives us the means and strength to resist evil and grow in goodness. Even if our prayers seem small, in the Lord’s eyes they shine with hope and love (Brief Summary of New Church Doctrine 52). The Lord’s presence fills even the quietest room and the loneliest heart. As we pray and trust, the Lord renews our spirit, granting peace no matter what our circumstances are (Psalms 31:24).

Prayer: Eternal Lord, we thank You for the sure hope of everlasting life that You have promised. When we face doubts or fears, fill us with trust in Your Word and confidence in Your unfailing love. Help us to look beyond this world to the joy and peace of life with You forever. May this hope strengthen us each day and inspire us to share Your love with others. Amen.

HOME *Worship*



June 2026

Sunday 7th June 2026

Rev'd Clifford Curry

"Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights"

Read Jonah Chapters 1&2

The story of Jonah, one of the minor prophets, is one of the better known bible stories. It is vivid and dramatic with the prophet being swallowed by what was mistranslated in the King James bible as a whale. This has led to questioning, as a whale's throat is too small to swallow a man! The words used in the Hebrew and Greek both mean any great fish or sea creature. We are told the Lord, the creator of all things "provided" or "prepared" this great fish. Swedenborg writes in his Spiritual diary that this miracle really happened.

The importance of the spiritual significance of this story is highlighted when the Lord is asked by the Pharisees for a miraculous sign, and He replies "a wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given except the sign of the prophet Jonah." Mt 12v39. He then goes on to link Jonah's three days in the belly of the fish to his own death and resurrection. A time of struggle, trial and temptation.

It would seem that like Jonah, who deliberately disobeyed and ran away from the Lord's command to go to Ninevah and preach against it, we need to reflect on the ways we respond to what we know in our hearts the Lord is prompting us to do. Things perhaps for other people that we don't want to do. We might not get on with someone we could help - we might even actively dislike or distrust them just as Jonah disliked the Ninevites. We might think we have better things to do, or not enough time, or simply turn our back on what in our heart of hearts we know we should do, just like Jonah did.

Jonah takes a ship for Tarshish, the opposite direction to Ninevah, goes down below and falls asleep. This represents a selfish unspiritual state, that leads to the opposite of peace of mind. As Isaiah writes "there is no peace says the Lord for the wicked" 48v22. So in the resulting storm, when the sailors cast lots to find out who is the cause of the storm, the lot falls on Jonah, he asks to be thrown overboard. In the same way we need to reject the uncaring selfish attitude he chose to follow, in the symbolism in the story by jumping off the ship - the attitude of mind - that is taking us the wrong way!

The great fish represents an affection for learning truth and this the Lord provides to enable us to recognise the depth of the change of direction that is needed. Jonah's prayer (in chapter two) reminds us that real change is difficult and challenging, but ends proclaiming a wonderful truth - "Salvation comes from the Lord" Jon 2v9. Our Lord and Saviour, is the God of second chances. Back on dry land, after three days of struggle, when the Lord calls him a second time Jonah grasps the opportunity to respond to the call, and sets out to preach to the Ninevites that God is also giving them a second chance to repent of their wicked ways.

Prayer: Lord Jesus our God and Saviour, we thank you for the guidance we find in your Holy Word and the freedom you give us to make our own choices. Help us to learn from Jonah's disobedience, that we might hear and respond to your call, by choosing to love others even those we find hard to like, to offer them a second chance. Amen.

HOME *Worship*



June 2026

Sunday 14th June 2026

Revd Clifford Curry

**“I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God,
slow to anger and abounding in love” Jonah 4v2.**

Read Jonah Chapters 3&4

After the truly frightening and sobering experience in the belly of the fish you would think Jonah would have learned his lesson. On one level this certainly seems to be the case, because he has become obedient and goes to preach in Ninevah the great capital city of Assyria, that represents our reasoning faculty. It now becomes clear that whilst he obeys the Lord's call he has not really changed his attitude towards the Ninevites. He wants to see them punished and 'get what was coming to them'. Jonah's preaching, warning of the fate Ninevah will suffer unless they repent and change their ways is an outstanding success. But this gives him no pleasure - quite the opposite - he feels cheated of the satisfaction of seeing the people punished.

Having delivered the Lord's message, Jonah waits to see what will happen as he sits in his shelter east of the city. He is angry and frustrated. He wanted these people he didn't like to suffer the consequences of their evil and violent ways and now it isn't going to happen! Jonah is proud and arrogant as he feels superior to these gentile foreigners. Jonah's obedience is only skin deep. He doesn't care about these people so his heart he hasn't really changed at all. This is the kind of attitude that has a tendency to say about the person we dislike and may have done wrong, 'they don't deserve to be forgiven. Perhaps they may disagree with me and my pride asserts 'they should know better'. I keep my distance rather than be friendly, sheltered by my sense of superiority like Johah sheltering under the vine (sometimes translated as a 'gourd').

Jonah's negative attitude towards the Ninevites was very deep seated and it is there to remind us that unloving and unhelpful feelings can get far too deeply ingrained in our hearts. They shelter under a growing, arrogant sense of superiority, indifferent to the weaknesses and misunderstandings that create problems in other people's lives, which they may be ignorant of. We always need to remember the truth that frustrated Jonah that "the Lord is a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love" towards everyone. Indeed the gospels remind us that even as He suffered on the cross, cruelly and unjustly condemned, His cry was "Father forgive them for they know not what they do".

Any sense that we are better than others is false and is like the worm that destroyed the vine. We need to admit that so often 'there but for the grace of God...', to show a little honest humility, and be ready to love others as we want to be loved "warts and all", remembering that Jesus said "love one another as I have loved you.

Prayer: Lord Jesus help us to turn away from the arrogance that looks down on others and too readily finds fault and criticises their behaviour. Teach us the humility to recognise and admit to our own mistakes and failings that we might more readily learn to love and accept those we find hard to appreciate. Amen

HOME *Worship*



June 2026

Sunday 21st June 2026

Revd Clifford Curry

“A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah”. Matt.12v39

Read Matthew 12 v 38-50

It seems quite amazing that a miraculous sign was almost being demanded of the Lord by the Pharisees and teachers of the law, when it is quite clear that many miracles had already happened in the Lord's healing ministry, including feeding of the 5000, and turning water into wine. How much more did they want? To everyone's amazement the Lord had just healed a demon possessed man (12v22ff) but the Pharisees claim this is of the Devil! They were calling good, evil. No wonder Jesus called them wicked.

Today many still doubt Jesus rose from the dead on that first Easter Day, and question the miracles that he is working in human hearts and minds now, turning lives around, just as Jonah's rebellious life was turned around. Yet the profound effect His life has had individually and collectively is hard to overstate, but today's Pharisees still refuse to be convinced. A miracle may amaze, but a sign refers to something that convinces the understanding to believe.

Here Jesus draws a parallel between Jonah taken for three days into the depths of the sea, with his own death and resurrection on the third day. Swedenborg tells us that Jonah's prayer whilst in the fish is a prophecy “concerning the Lord's combats with the hells and concerning his most grievous temptations at that time.” We all face our own times of struggle and have trials and temptation, but in this chapter, which the Lord himself points us to, shows that He knows and fully understands the depths of darkness and despair – the feeling of being “banished from his sight”, the sensation of drowning in the tangles of our difficulties, like “seaweed wrapped around our head”.

AC 840 “So long as temptation continues, the man supposes the Lord to be absent..... sometimes he is reduced to despair, and can scarcely believe there is any God. Yet the Lord is then more closely present than he can ever believe. But when temptation ceases, the man receives consolation, and then first believes the Lord to be present.”

Things are not always the way they seem and the teaching that the Lord is closest to us in the times when we doubt and struggle is one example of the way things can mistakenly appear to us. The reality is, that He is always present, there to enable us to overcome those things that tempt us to doubt and deny, even to outright disobedience like Jonah. This promise, is something The Word gives us to hold onto when we feel dragged down into the depths, for life is seldom all smooth sailing!

We read in John 16v33 when before his betrayal, Jesus is preparing his followers for what is ahead, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” and reassuring us of his ongoing spiritual presence in Matt 28v20 “I am with you always.”

Prayer: Lord Jesus we thank you for the giving us the gift of the sign of Jonah. For what it teaches us of your love for us, your persistence and patience in leading our living into the ways of love and truth. Help us to trust your providence, so we learn from the hard times and the consequences of our wrong choices, as well as rejoicing in the happy times. Amen.

HOME *Worship*



June 2026

Sunday 28th June 2026

Revd Clifford Curry

“When he saw the wind he was afraid and beginning to sink cried out, “Lord save me”

Read Psalm 69 v 1-3 and Matt 14 v 22-36

It was not only Jonah who had to learn from the consequences of the choices he made, but in today's story, overconfident Peter's choice leads to an experience he would never forget. Conditions on the Sea of Galilee can change very rapidly just as in Christchurch harbour. A rain squall can double the wind force in a couple of minutes, or on Lake Windemere the wind can unexpectedly get funnelled between two hills and give a small boat an unpleasant surprise.

The Lord has sent the disciples ahead in the boat and the wind gets up. Passages like Psalm 69 and Jonah Chap3 set these events in a wider context of a spiritual challenge to our faith (which Peter represents) of coping with the tempest and contrary winds of doubt and fear. The old saying claims “it is always darkest before the dawn” and the fourth watch of the night (3am to 6am) is just this time. Tragic events in the news and tumult in people's lives both inwardly and outwardly challenges us all to rise above the anger and fear of life's stormy seas, just as the Lord came to the struggling disciples walking on the waves. Today we need to rise above the recriminations and the “stormy seas” so that faith in a better future is possible and we truly believe that love is stronger than hate, stronger than fear, and a better future is attainable and peace achievable.

Yet this is hard. Peter had to learn the hard way that he couldn't walk on the waves in his own strength, and we as individuals, communities and nations need to learn our need of the Lord's strength; to rescue us from being overwhelmed by emotions like anger, fear and suspicion to name but a few. I suggest the need for a spiritual revival that turns away from short term self-interest to the Lord, and the eternal values he teaches is writ large for all to see. We need saving from the divisive storms in people's attitudes, the injustices in society's norms, and the power hungry in political institutions.

The church exists to serve the Prince of Peace. We need His saving power to overcome the storms, to create compassionate and constructive community, to build positive attitudes and foster pro-active actions. Individually it is about reaching out to the Lord that he might empower us to play our part and make a difference. To go the second mile to love our enemies, to give expecting nothing in return, to pray “Thy Kingdom come” and mean it, by seeking to be part of the answer to our prayer.

Like Peter, who represents faith, we all need to learn to ASK – to learn we can't ‘rise above it’ on our own or walk on stormy waters without help. Learn to place far more trust in the Lord and far less in ourselves – this was the lesson Peter learnt the hard and scary way as he started to sink. The Lord's arm is not shortened that it cannot save today any more than it did that day on Galilee. “You of little faith” he says to the Peter in all of us “why did you doubt?” As Peter and Jesus climb into the boat, all becomes peace. Amen.

Prayer: Lord Jesus our Prince of peace help us to remember your caring presence is with us when life becomes stressful and difficult, with our inner emotions unsettled and stormy. Help us to humbly admit our need of your saving power, so that we reach out to you with trust and hope to enabling us find the peace we need to cope rather than being overwhelmed by waves of worry and fear.