



# PEACE RIVER NEW CHURCH CURRENT

NEWSLETTER OF THE DAWSON CREEK CHURCH OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

FEBRUARY 2012

## RECEIVING GIFTS

By Rev. Coleman Glenn

“Thanks for your help. What do I owe you?”

“No need to pay me.”

“But I want to pay you!”

“No, no – we’re neighbours, that’s what neighbours do.”

“And I’m your neighbour, and I say I’m going to pay you!”

Have you ever gotten into an argument like that? Most of us have – where we want to offer something to someone else, and they want to offer something to us. I think that for most of us, when we overhear a conversation like that – two friends arguing over which of them gets to pay for dinner, for example – it brings a smile to our face. It’s a wonderful thing, actually, when everyone’s attitude is so much about giving that they’ll argue about which one gets to offer the other a gift. But of course, at some point one person does have to cave in and accept the offer of help or money or whatever else it is – usually with the unspoken thought that next time, we’ll be the ones giving rather than getting.

When people have that attitude – that they want to give more than to take – it brings about a feeling of plenty and abundance, of overflowing goodwill. When we live in communities where this kind of thing happens often, it’s a reminder that there is good in people. And it’s a picture of heaven; the book *Heaven and Hell* says, “One can see how great the delight of heaven must be from the fact that it is the delight of everyone in heaven to share his delights and blessings with others” (HH 399). That kind of world – where everyone’s primary desire is to give of themselves to others – demonstrates the way that the Lord’s words in Luke are fulfilled: “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom” (Luke 6:38).

This kind of interaction – arguing over who’s going to give something to the other – isn’t anything new. It’s been going on for thousands and thousands of years. In fact, there’s a story about this very thing in the book of Genesis, in the 23rd chapter. In the story, Abraham’s wife Sarah has died, and Abraham wants to buy a plot of land from the Hittites to bury her. He asks to speak to a man named Ephron about buying a cave and field from him as a burial plot. Abraham says he will pay full price for it. But Ephron comes out and declares that he will give it to Abraham, with no need for payment. But Abraham insists: “I will give you the silver for the field; take it of me.” Ephron, realizing that Abraham is insistent, still offers to give it to him, but tells him the value of the land: “A land of four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between me and you? And now, bury your dead.” And, now knowing the land’s value, Abraham measures out four hundred shekels and buys the land from Ephron.

It’s a wonderful story, illustrating the way that people in charity can “bargain” over something in the opposite way than we usually think – each trying to give each other the best deal, rather than to get whatever they can out of the other. But it also illustrates the importance of one side eventually being willing to accept what the other side is offering. If Ephron hadn’t eventually told Abraham the price, they could have argued forever about whether it would be a gift or a purchase! And we find the same thing in these practical exchanges we have with people – sometimes, we have to be willing to graciously accept the gift (or the payment) that’s being offered to us.

This is difficult for a lot of us, actually – in some ways it’s easier to give something to someone else than to receive it. If we receive something, we can feel like we owe the person something in return, or we can feel like they’ve somehow proved themselves to be better than us, or just that we have been given more than we deserve. It takes conscious effort to learn to receive

things graciously, as they are offered – but if no one had that willingness to receive, then no one would be able to give anything to anyone else!

Even more importantly than that, though, we need to learn to accept gifts from others because it teaches us to accept gifts from the Lord. The book *Arcana Coelestia* explains that in the story of Abraham and Ephron, Abraham represents the Lord, and Ephron is a picture of the way we can respond to Him. The Lord wants to give us something, here represented by the silver – he wants offer us redemption and salvation. When we hear that the Lord offers us salvation, our first inclination is to think of it as something we can earn – Ephron does not want to accept any payment. That refusal to accept payment, although it comes from a good motivation, also can carry the attitude that we don't need anything from anyone else. *Arcana Coelestia* 2946 explains it this way: "To not receive silver from Abraham signifies that they did not desire to be redeemed by the Lord, but by themselves. Such is the first state of all who are being reformed and made spiritual, that they do not believe that they are reformed by the Lord but by themselves, that is, they believe all of the will of good and of the thought of truth to be from themselves."

It's actually an important state for a person to be in at the beginning, because at first we think that if we can't earn our salvation, the only solution is to sit idly by and wait for the Lord to flow directly into us. We can't help but start out with some of that feeling of merit, that when we follow the Lord's commandments, we're earning something.

But we can't stay there. Eventually, Ephron has to come around to willingly accept Abraham's money. And we need to reach a place where we accept that salvation is a gift from the Lord, that we do not earn it. It can be difficult, but eventually we realize that we are being offered something that is far more valuable than anything we deserve.

Now this does not mean we don't need to do anything to receive that offer from the Lord. Think of the image of an overflowing cup. The Lord offers more joy and blessing than we could possibly accept, enough water of life to overflow any vessel. That is constantly pouring out from Him. But to receive that, we need to hold the cup out, and hold it upright. That's what we're doing when we worship Him, when we shun evils as sins against Him, when we do what we can to bring our lives into alignment with His commandments. But all of that is simply making our lives into a vessel, a cup that can

receive His blessings – we are not *earning* something, we're preparing ourselves to receive something greater than we deserve.

Even more than that, as we continue to look to the Lord, we realize that it's not really even us holding that cup upright: the Lord's hand is holding our hand, keeping it steady, keeping that cup open to him. Even that ability to live in a way that receives His love comes from Him. The more deeply we come to know Him, the more we realize that everything we have is a gift from Him. All we can do is gratefully accept that – and do whatever we can to pass it on to others. When we reach that point, where we realize that everything good in our lives is a gift that we did not earn, we gain a new sense of the meaning of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm: "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

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## UPCOMING TRAVEL FOR REV. COLEMAN GLENN

I have a lot of travel coming up in the next few months. This month, I travel to Oak Arbor, Michigan, for joint clergy meetings between the Canadian clergy and the Midwestern U.S. clergy; that goes from February 22<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>; I plan to be back in time to lead worship on Sunday the 26<sup>th</sup>. In March, I am on staff for a New Church young adult weekend in Pennsylvania. And in April, I'll be travelling to Toronto for the General Church in Canada's annual meeting. Also, at some point – probably in April or May after the worst of winter is over – I'd like to find time to go visit some of our members in the west who don't live close to Dawson Creek or Grande Prairie. If you'd like a visit, please contact me via email or phone.

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## HEAVEN AND HELL READING GROUP

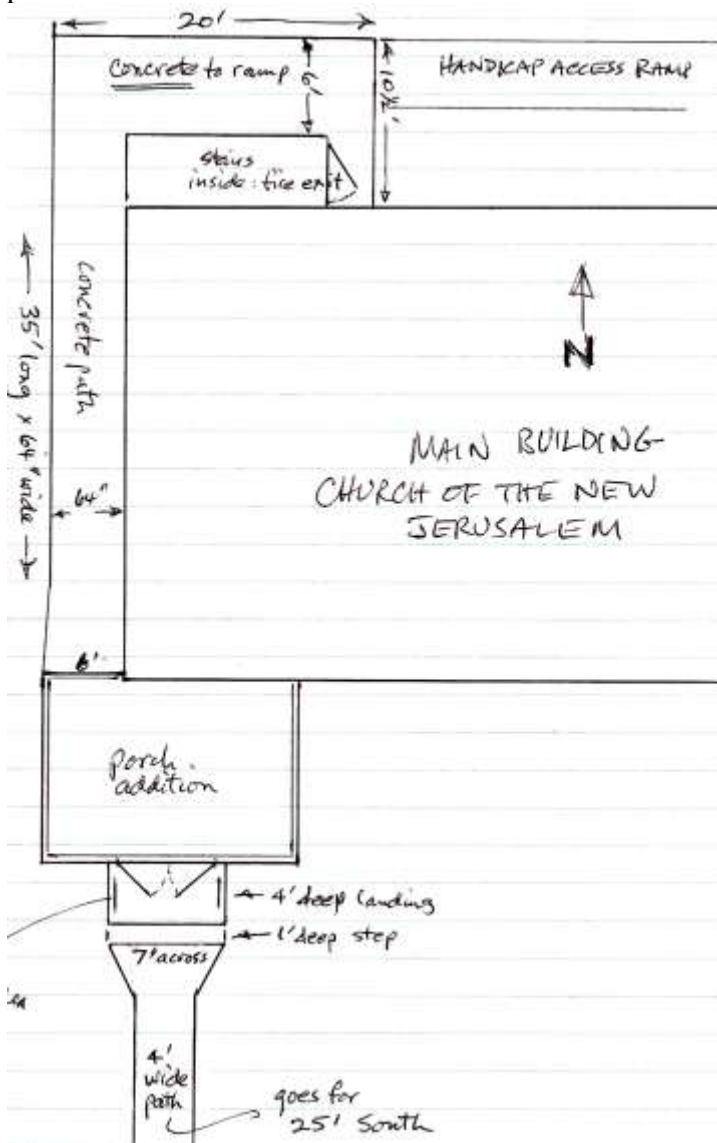
We've started a new reading group. On Thursday mornings at 10:00 a.m., we'll be meeting to discuss readings from *Heaven and Hell*. The chapters in *Heaven and Hell* stand on their own very well, so anyone is welcome to come to whatever meetings they're able to make, even if you've missed some. If you'd like to know what chapters we'll be reading for any given

week, please contact Rev. Coleman Glenn; and feel free to drop by even if you haven't had a chance to do that week's reading. There are several copies of *Heaven and Hell* available for purchase or borrowing; please talk to Rev. Coleman Glenn if you're interested.

This reading group will be geared toward all levels of experience with reading the Writings, so feel free to come whether you've never read any before, or whether you've read them all!

## WORK WEEKEND

One of the top priorities brought up at the annual meeting in January was the need to have sidewalks put in at the church. Here's a rough sketch of the plan:



Right now, we need to do two things:

First of all, we need a committee to help organize the installation of the sidewalks. This doesn't mean that they would need to do the work themselves, but they would look into what needs to be done, how much it will cost, and how much we can do ourselves. **Please contact Rev. Coleman Glenn if you're willing to be on the committee.**

Secondly, although some of the work may be done by professionals, there will almost certainly be work that anyone can help out with. **We are hoping to have a work weekend some time near the end of May or beginning of June.** I realize that especially for those on the farm it's hard to predict what life will be like at that time of year, **but please let me (Rev. Coleman Glenn) know if there are weekends that you know now will work better or worse for you.** Hopefully I'll hear back from enough people this month to set a firm date by the time the next newsletter is sent out.

## LADIES GROUP RAFFLE DRAW AND MEETING

The draw for the Ladies Group raffle will take place after church on Sunday, February 12 – all outstanding raffle tickets need to be in by then.

The Ladies Group will be having a meeting sometime in the next month or so; check the next issue of this newsletter for an exact date and time.

### THE DAWSON CREEK CHURCH OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

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Worship Sundays at 11 a.m.

**If you have news or other information for this publication, or if you have any pastoral concerns, please call the pastor, Coleman Glenn, at (250) 782-0710 or (cell) (250) 467-2313, or e-mail [pastor@dawsoncreeknewchurch.ca](mailto:pastor@dawsoncreeknewchurch.ca).**

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Dawson Creek, BC V1G 5A9

# CHURCH CALENDAR

## FEBRUARY 2012

~ February 2012 ~						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2 10 a.m. <i>Heaven and Hell</i> reading group (location TBD)	3	4
5 11 a.m. Family Service	6	7	8	9 10 a.m. <i>Heaven and Hell</i> reading group (location TBD)	10	11
12 11 a.m. Traditional Service 4:30 p.m. Worship and Class (Grande Prairie)	13	14 Valentines Day	15	16 10 a.m. <i>Heaven and Hell</i> reading group (location TBD)	17	18 7:30 p.m. Doctrinal Class
19 11 a.m. Traditional Service	20 Family Day	21	22	23	24	25
Rev. Coleman Glenn away at clergy meetings until Saturday						
26 11 a.m. Traditional Service 4:30 p.m. Worship & Holy Supper (Debolt)	27	28	29	<b>Note:</b> All events take place at the Dawson Creek Church of the New Jerusalem unless noted otherwise.		