



PEACE RIVER NEW CHURCH CURRENT

NEWSLETTER OF THE DAWSON CREEK CHURCH OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

JANUARY 2012

WHAT'S THE POINT OF GOING TO CHURCH?

By Rev. Coleman Glenn

During my last two years in high school and my first year or so in college, I hardly ever went to church. It wasn't that I was opposed to church; in fact, during that time I started reading the Writings for myself and really loved what I was reading. But still, I put more value in sleeping in on a Sunday morning than getting up to go to worship. I didn't see the point of it – I could learn things on my own from reading the Writings, and if I had questions I could just talk to a minister. At some point, though, I started to feel like something was missing, and I started attending church more often. Since then I've come to a point where I love going to church; in fact, one of the hard things about being a minister is that I don't get to attend church services given by someone else as often as I'd like to.

This isn't to say I'm particularly special or a good person for liking church. It took a long time of never going for me to realize that I needed it. But because I went without it for so long, I realize now that it *is* important for me.

The Writings say a number of things about the uses of external worship. To be sure, they say that the more important thing is *internal* worship, which is love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbour. One passage says that if a person lived where he could not attend church or take Holy Supper or any of those external acts, he could still worship the Lord from internal things (*Arcana Coelestia* 1175). *But*, that passage says, this does not take away the uses of external worship. So, what are those uses?

1. Instruction

When the Writings describe church services in heaven, the primary use they focus on is *instruction*. And in the New Church, this is where we put the most

emphasis – the focal point of a church service is usually the readings from the Word and the children's talk and sermon. Although it's not the only use of worship, it may be the most important use – for people to hear the Lord's Word, and to open themselves up to being led and taught.

But can't a person learn from the Lord by reading on their own? They certainly can, and it is important for everyone to do so. But there also seems to be something important about hearing truth from the mouth of someone else. When we read on our own, we have a tendency to fall into patterns of thinking and interpreting the Word the same way we always have. We tend to focus on the parts of the Word that speak to us, and somewhat ignore other parts. We can focus too much on one particular teaching, which leads to heresies (*Arcana Coelestia* 362). Hearing the Lord's Word preached and interpreted by someone else helps get us out of our own heads, to realize that the truth is outside of ourselves.

Even the highest angels, the celestial angels, attend church services. The preachers in heaven are all from the spiritual kingdom, the middle heaven, since celestial angels do not like to speak about truth. And yet, celestial angels are much wiser than the spiritual angels who preach to them! The celestial angels have a perception of truth, so they can recognize it immediately as they hear it. So, what use do they have for sermons? *Heaven and Hell* 225 explains: "Although the angels in the celestial kingdom perceive and see truths, there are preachings there, since by means of preachings they are *enlightened in the truths that they already know*, and are *perfected by many truths that they did not know before*." There's a value for celestial angels in being "enlightened in truths that they already know" – and even they continually learn new truths.

The use of instruction is also mentioned in the Writings' explanation of what it means to "remember the Sabbath day." *Arcana Coelestia* 9349 says that the part of the commandment which says that a person should *rest* on the Sabbath day is no longer required, but may be

followed if a person chooses; but the beginning of the commandment – that a person should “remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy” is “to be altogether observed and done.” And *True Christian Religion* 301 says that when the Lord came, the Sabbath became a day of “instruction in Divine things, and thus also a day of rest from labors and of meditation on such things as relate to salvation and eternal life, as also a day of love towards the neighbor.” The main thing here, though, seems to be the instruction in Divine things. As Rev. Brad Heinrichs mentioned in an article in the New Church Canadian last year, there *are* other ways to remember the Sabbath day – you can be instructed in Divine things and meditate on the Lord without going to church – but the primary way we remember the Sabbath day seems to be by attending church services.

2. To excite internal things, and keep externals in holiness

Arcana Coelestia 1618 says, “A person, while in the world, ought not to be otherwise than in external worship also; for by external worship internal things are excited, and by means of external worship external things are kept in holiness, so that internal things can flow in.” There is more to worship than just instruction. In fact, the Writings say that “the holiest act of worship” is the taking of the Holy Supper. The essential, internal things in worship are a life of charity and love, and humility before the Lord.

But these internal things can be *excited* by external actions. For example, when we kneel down in prayer, that is an outward expression of humility and gratitude (see *Arcana Coelestia* 3118). Now, a person can kneel down without feeling any humility at all; the Writings say that external worship which expresses internal worship *looks* just the same as external worship with no internal. But there may be humility in our internals that we are not aware of at most times. Bowing down in worship gives us an opportunity to have that internal thing excited.

The other thing that can happen at the same time is that external things are kept in holiness. In New Church church services, we try very hard to create a sphere of reverence. It’s not that we think the physical church building or sanctuary or altar is holy in itself; but we honor these things because of what they *represent* – and by keeping the externals holy, we allow them to be vessels for internal things. For example, if we treated the bread and wine of the Holy Supper as only ordinary bread and wine, it would lose much of its power to inspire our internals. Keeping external things in holiness

allows us to see them as the outermost expression of something spiritual.

3. Being gifted with states of holiness.

The passage quoted above, *Arcana Coelestia* 3118, goes on to say, “And besides, in this way a person is imbued with knowledges, and is prepared for receiving celestial things, and is *also gifted with states of holiness, although he is unaware of this*. And these states of holiness are preserved for him by the Lord for the use of eternal life, for in the other life all the states of his life return.” We already talked about the use of gaining knowledge; but this final use is that a person is given states of holiness, which return in the other life. It’s important to notice that these states of holiness are often given to a person *although he is unaware of it*. I wonder if this is what I was feeling lacking after years of not attending church. Even though as a child I often found church to be dull and boring, there were states of holiness being stored up in me completely without my awareness. Now, this isn’t to make an excuse for dull or boring sermons; but there are things happening when we worship the Lord that we don’t even realize are going on. Those states of holiness – of reverence and humility – return in the other world, and we need them there to give us strength to fight against the evil states of our lives, which also return. This is a final use of going to church, even though we may not see its value for years or decades or a lifetime afterwards.

The Writings are very clear that it is harmful for one person to try to compel another person to worship by threats and punishments. But it is *not* harmful for a person to compel himself. There are lots of reason a person wouldn’t come to church on any given Sunday, some good, others not; but only each individual person can know, if he’s being honest with himself, what is holding him back. If it’s something bad – for example, the lazy desire to sleep till noon in my case as a college student – it is useful for the person to fight that thing. Sometimes it really is necessary to compel ourselves to worship. But ideally, external worship will not be a chore; it may take work to get there (both for the minister preparing the service and for the person attending), but ideally, worshipping the Lord becomes something we *want* to do, that we thirst for, that gives us great joy. The Sabbath is there not for the Lord’s sake, but for the sake of man, so that the Lord can bless us. We can hope to reach the state described in Psalm 122: “I am glad when they say to me, ‘Let us go to the house of Jehovah.’”

ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of the Dawson Creek Church of the New Jerusalem will take place on **Sunday, January 22, immediately following the church service.** Rev. Brad Heinrichs will attend as a guest. **Consider this your official notification.** We hope you all can make it!

DONATION CHEQUES

Just a reminder: when you are making a donation to the Dawson Creek church, make the cheque out to “The General Church of the New Jerusalem.” Making it out to “Church of the New Jerusalem” usually works OK, but making it out to “The New Church” or even “The Dawson Creek New Church” can lead to problems at the bank, since we’re registered as The General Church of the New Jerusalem. Thanks!

LUNCHESES AFTER CHURCH

In the November newsletter, I mentioned that we would try having lunches only after the first and third Sundays in the month, and that on other Sundays we would have snacks and coffee. After receiving more feedback, and noticing that very few people stick around if all that we have is coffee and snacks, I’ve decided (in consultation with pastor’s council) that **we’ll go back to the way it was before, where anyone is welcome to bring food for lunch on any Sunday.**

The reasons we tried to change it were to make it easier on people who didn’t feel comfortable staying for lunch if they hadn’t brought anything, and to free people up to visit in town if they didn’t want to stick around for lunch. With this in mind, I think it would be nice if we could make a special effort to have the potluck lunch on the **first Sunday of every month** be the biggest one, and the others to feel more “optional” (although they’re all optional, of course). Also, everyone should feel free to attend any lunch even if they haven’t brought any food, and should always feel free not to stay for it.

LADIES GROUP RAFFLE & MEETING

The Ladies Group is selling raffle tickets! If you’d like to buy tickets please contact Rachel Myatt; if you’d like to donate a prize, please contact Bev Bourbeau. The

draw will take place after church on Sunday, February 12.

Also, the Ladies Group is hoping to hold a meeting in the near future, probably sometime in February. Stay tuned for details.

READING GROUP

Beginning on Thursday, January 26, we will be starting a reading group, reading together through a book of the Writings (or part of a book of the Writings). We’ll meet every other Thursday at participants’ homes; the meetings will last about an hour. **If this sounds like something you might be interested in (no need for a commitment), please contact me (Rev. Coleman Glenn),** and we’ll talk about the exact time and location for our first meeting – it will probably be sometime in the morning or afternoon rather than the evening. We’ll be reading at an easy pace, and making it accessible for people who have never read the Writings before.

NEW YEAR’S DAY

A reminder: **there will be no church services on Sunday, January 1st, since Rev. Coleman Glenn will be away.**

THE DAWSON CREEK CHURCH OF THE NEW JERUSAEM

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Worship Sundays at 11 a.m.

For information on services in Grande Prairie & Debolt, please contact Mrs. Lavina Scott at (780) 957-3625.

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.

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CHURCH CALENDAR

JANUARY 2012

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 <i>New Year's Day</i> NO CHURCH SERVICES	2	3	4	5	6	7
Rev. Coleman Glenn away until Friday, January 6						
8 11 a.m. Traditional Service 4:30 p.m. Worship and Class (Grande Prairie)	9	10	11	12	13	14 7:30 p.m. Doctrinal Class at Rev. Coleman Glenn's home (1717 102 Ave., Unit 5)
15 11 a.m. Traditional Service	16	17	18	19	20	21
22 11 a.m. Traditional Service 12 p.m. Annual Meeting 4:30 p.m. Worship and Holy Supper (Debolt)	23	24	25	26	27 7:30 p.m. Doctrinal Class (Silver Valley)	28
29 <i>Swedenborg's Birthday</i> 11 a.m. Traditional Service with Holy Supper 12:30 p.m. Pastor's Council Meeting	30	31	Note: All events take place at the Dawson Creek Church of the New Jerusalem unless noted otherwise.			