



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society December 2017

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Merry Christmas

By Rev Todd Beiswenger

I'm sure you're well aware that Christmas is only a month away. Set foot in any store and you'll hear Christmas music, see Christmas decorations, and of course see things that they want to sell you for all your Christmas gift giving needs. I know that the sheer volume of things that need to get done between now and then can be overwhelming, so before all the insanity sets in let's just take a few moments to set our compass on the real meaning of Christmas.

To me, the real meaning of Christmas is “hope.” It's hope that there's going to be some positive change. Hope that the bad people will lose their grip of control, hope that people will care more about each other than money, power and fame, and hope that God's promise of a good end is still on the table.

When I look back at the past twelve months, and look at the various newsletter articles that have been written, it is my intention that they in fact point to this hope. Many of the news stories that I comment on aren't happy stories, but my goal is to show that they do reflect what the New Church teaches about the world and the people in it, and therefore the promised good end that the New Church teaches and believes in is also real. I want us to be able to believe in the hope of the Lord's first and second coming and that He really did come and make the world a better place. If we can all focus on that, gratitude for all that the Lord has done, and hope in the belief that tomorrow will be even better, you might find yourself better able to enjoy the craziness of the Christmas season.

Thanks for reading, and I hope you have a Merry Christmas!

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What Is Going On?

By Rev Todd Beiswenger

I've had a number of phone calls, emails and chats with people who are shaking their head in disbelief over the same-sex marriage vote. As one so succinctly put it, there is now “public adoration of depravity.” While I agree with the sentiment, my general feeling is more of, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” This vote has given us an answer as to whether same sex marriage will be legalized, but now there are many other questions that have to be answered. How will this affect schools? Businesses and individuals that are in the wedding industry? Churches? There are a lot of issues that now need to be dealt with and sorted out. It's going to be hard to sort them out though when we as a nation no longer have a unified belief in what is right and wrong, and for some it is a question of whether there even is a “right” and “wrong.”

The consolation for the great many of us is that at least most of the “Yes” voters were coming from a good place, and that's worth something. They were trying to be kind, compassionate and good to people who feel same sex attraction. That thought, that people

are coming from a good place, also leads me to speculate a bit on where we are as a society. If we look to the patriarchs in the Word, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I think there are some teachings that we can apply to the current state of things. Each of those people represent a state of spirituality, e.g. Abraham the highest as it is in perfect obedience, Isaac the middle as it sorts things out between the spiritual and natural, and Jacob who is in a natural but still a bit of a worldly kind of goodness.

Well, we're not in the Abraham or Isaac states, that's for sure, but I do see that there's something in the Jacob and Esau story that is interesting. Esau was born first, and he represents "the affection for natural good" (AC 3494). That particular passage goes on to state that the younger son, which in this case is Jacob, represents the affection for truth. We are also given in that passage an example to illustrate why this is the case, which is that because as children we have a disposition towards being good before we learn any teachings, our goodness actually comes first and has first priority. Truth comes into our life later, "for truth is not learned until childhood, adolescent, and adult years are reached."

Note how we are given a range of time for when truth comes into our life. It could come in childhood, or maybe as adults, but I think what it's really trying to say is that it is learnt all through those ages, yet it is still second. We were a basic, natural good first. I've heard other ministers talk about this story, and they will usually sum it up by saying that "good" comes first, but "truth" comes first in time. That is their way of saying that we have to have a desire to be good first, but in actuality in order to truly be good we have to learn what is true. So while Esau is born first, it is Jacob that gets the blessing because it is ultimately through him that we proceed on the path to regeneration.

What I see in this SSM vote is that right now we, that is Western society, are a society that is love without any wisdom. We are Esau. Note again that Esau is an affection for natural good. He's not a highly evolved spiritual being, but he is okay at doing what is right even if the love that he expresses is blind because there is no truth. He looks after his father Isaac, and is happy to hunt game to make him his favourite meal. He's not wise though by any stretch, and so he does do stupid things, such as selling his birthright for some stew. At least on the surface it seems stupid, but the birthright represents "priority," (AC 3325) and the stew itself is a chaotic mass of teachings (AC 3316). What we have in this story is a joining of teachings to goodness, that is the stew to Esau, and a change in priority from being led by good to being led by truth. This is Jacob getting the birthright, i.e. the priority. I prefer to say it as a change from being led by love to being led by wisdom.

When we look around at the world now, it is my speculation that we are currently being led by love, but love without wisdom. This isn't all bad, but it does mean that as a society we are going to make some bad choices. The Lord is going to let us follow our folly on this, and many other things, in order that we may see for ourselves that our ideas aren't actually better than His! While the Lord is patient with us, we also must be patient with others.

If this does follow the Jacob & Esau story line, then there will come a time when society actually does seek out the truth. Jacob will take the lead and through his desire for learning what is true we will have wisdom guiding the way forward. It is through his line that the 12 tribes will be born. They will have to go to Egypt to further their learning on the path to becoming wise, but this of course will eventually lead to their enslavement! So maybe we're going to have to be *really* patient to see all of this unwind! While it can feel like it's going to be an awful long time for all of this to play out, the reality is that this planet has been around for billions of years, so what's another hundred, five-hundred or even a thousand years in the grand scheme of things?

As I stated before, all of this is just my speculation, but I make it with an underlying assumption and belief that the Lord's second coming has happened, and through it we as a society are embarking on the path of being reborn. Again, think of Esau as that child-like state of goodness, something that has recently been born. We also believe that in order for a new church on earth to be established that the old one has to die off. I think we are very plainly seeing that now. What that leaves us with is the death of the old and the birth of the new. Personally I feel that it has to be something like that, otherwise the whole belief in the second coming starts to look questionable. How else can you reconcile what is going on with the world with the belief that we are on a path to the New Jerusalem? If you've got any better theories, I'd be happy to hear them. In the meantime, stay firm in the Lord and remember that no matter how crazy things may seem, the Lord Jesus Christ reigns.

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Christmas Reading Program

Every year Rev Mark Pendleton at the Glenview New Church puts together a daily reading program for the Christmas season. Rev Howard Thompson reformats them for international paper size and use, and passes them along to us. So thanks to them for their work in producing these, which are now posted on the home page of our website. If you want a hard copy just let me know and I'll mail one to you.

This year's Christmas readings are gathered around the theme of trust, confidence, and strength in the Lord. This theme appears in the book of Psalms where we read, "Blessed are those whose strength is in You.... They go from strength to strength." (Psalm 84:5-6)

The qualities of trust, confidence, and strength in the Lord are evident throughout the Christmas story. We see them, for example, in Zacharias and Elizabeth, who were righteous before God, and who walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. We see them in Mary's response to Gabriel when she said, "Let it be to me according to your word;" also in Joseph who was a just man, who did as the angel commanded him, and who took Mary to be his wife. We see them in the shepherds, who went to see the great wonder that had come to pass. We see them in the man Simeon, who waited patiently for the Consolation of Israel, and in Anna the prophetess, who served God with fasting and prayers, and who also spoke of the Lord to all in Jerusalem who sought redemption. And finally, we see these qualities in the wise men, who followed a star with determination, who fell down and worshipped the infant Lord, and who followed

divine guidance—refusing to return to evil king Herod, and departing for their own country another way.

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Post-Church Picnic & Tennis

We've got our very own tennis court on the church property, and yet we hardly use it. Let's change that -- starting with a post-church picnic & tennis afternoon on **Sunday, December 3rd!** We can pop our lunches into the old church fridge to keep cool before the 10am worship service, then head down to the court for a hit afterward. Water & watermelon will be provided, the rest is up to you. Help us launch this fun tradition!

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Church Gardens

...Do you remember our adopt-a-garden initiative? That didn't really take root (ha ha!) but now we have a special announcement to make: we have a dedicated gardener tending the church gardens! Kerry Lockhart and her trusty side-kick, Mike, are long-standing members of our church family, whom we don't see often enough now that they've retired (semi-retired!) up the coast. Kerry will be down once every fortnight or so to give the gardens some much-needed TLC. Thanks so much for your contribution to this worthy cause, Kerry and Mike!

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Family Christmas Movie Night

It's time for another fun movie night, for the whole family. We're targeting the weekend of **December 16th**, however we aren't sure whether to watch an old favourite in Baringa or venture out together and see the new release, The Star, in the cinemas. (If we can get reasonably-priced tickets, it might be a fun excursion!) Please let us know, if you would enjoy participating in a movie that weekend, whether you would prefer to stay in or go out. Kindly email Jenn at jenn@beiswenger.net. Everyone would be welcome to join us! The final decision will be announced on our Facebook page and in weekly updates; stay tuned!

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Christmas Carol Worship Service

We'll add to the Christmas spirit with a special daytime worship service (instead of a pageant), this year. **On Sunday, December 17th** we'll have our service at the usual **10am** time: it will be a family-style service, with advent readings from the Word and special Christmas hymns throughout the service. Helping make this service extra special we will have **Daniel Coates** who has agreed to play some of the Christmas music for us. This will be a nice one to bring a friend to. Please join us!

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Christmas Food Drive

The folks at Hurstville New Church do a great job of supporting the needy in our wider community through donations to our various food drives throughout the year. Well done, friends!! Once again, this Christmas, we will have a food drive to support the **Kogarah Storehouse**. It's a great way to give very practical help to families in the local area who are struggling. Here's a list of items that they're looking for: Long life milk, canned tuna, breakfast cereal, toothpaste, tooth brushes, soap, rice, pasta sauce and canned vegetables. Thank You! *Donations will be accepted up to and including Christmas Day.*

Roseville Carols by Candlelight

Every year **Julian** runs a Carols by Candlelight service at Roseville, which is something that a number of us from Hurstville have attended. Of course there's carolling to be done, but it's also a good opportunity to catch up with our friends on the north shore.

However, I also want to make the point that this is going to be the **grand finale** for Julian's hosting of these services. His planned replacement, and my good friend Howard Thompson, is a good man, but let's just say that when it comes to music he's no Julian! There will be a void in that space at this time next year, so I encourage you to make the trip for this fun family service. *Date 17th December and starting time at Roseville is 7.30 pm.*

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2018 Events

We've come up with a full calendar of events for Hurstville New Church, for next year! There will be a variety of social events, including another post-church picnic & tennis afternoon, movie nights for kids and grown-ups, a bush walk in the National Park and even a pastor's pancake breakfast fundraiser! Stay tuned for your copy of the calendar. And, as always, if you have any suggestions, pop them into the box in the church foyer or send an email to todd@beiswenger.net or jenn@beiswenger.net!

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Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Sam Johnson** (1st), **Gai Kennedy** (2nd), **Beryl Laidley** (14th), **Ken Horner** (16th), **Patricia Walsh** (19th), **Kristen Johnson** (29th)

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