

## SUNDAY 18TH OCTOBER TRINITY 19

### Thought for the week:

### "Spirituality: what Jesus can bring to the party."

The word "**Spirituality**" is very much an "in" word at the moment, not least during this time of Lockdowns. You only have to go to any Waterstones Bookshop and see the shelves full of many different suggestions of both what "Spirituality" might be and also "how to" engage with it.

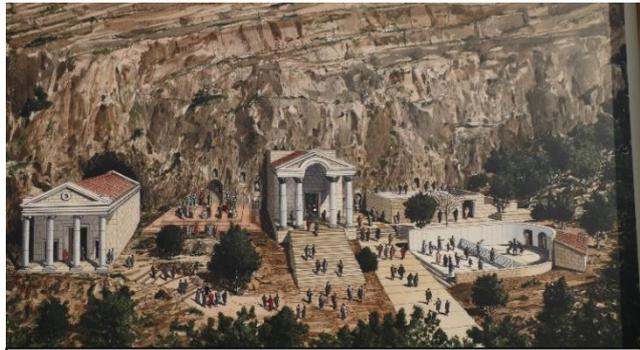


Figure 1: Banias/Paneas - otherwise known as Caesarea Philippi - where Jesus said to his disciples, "Who do you say I AM?"

The idea of the "Numinous," translated by Rudulph Otto (1932) as the "Mystery of the Other" is not new. It goes all the way back through many religions and much phylisophical thought to earliest civilisations, the Aborigines, the Maori, the Native American Indians, the native civilisations of Africa and South America, to name but a few.

In the time of Jesus there were a wide variety of cultures and ideas, some Greek, some Roman, some from pagan mythology, and in the Near East one of the key places they all came together was Banias – or "Paneas" as it was known before Philip, Herod Antipas' half-brother (governor of the northern most part of Israel at the time of Jesus) renamed it "Caesarea Philippi" – as a way of paying homage and seeking favour from the Empire in Rome. Thousands of people from all over the region would come to the Temples and worship many different statues and gods, as well as those of the Greek god Pan, (depicted by the larger of the two Temples on the left in the picture above). At its heart was the idea that, if people paid homage to the gods then they would either find favour or fortune, or both.

Originally, a large natural spring originated in the cavern behind the Pan Temple fed by the ice melting waters of the great Mount Hermon (9,200ft) that lies behind it, and which today forms part of the border between Israel and Syria. But due to an earthquake the spring was greatly reduced in flow and moved to a new location, pictured below in what is now "Banias National Park." Some of you, when you've been on trips to the Holy land will have visited here.

Why does all this matter? Well, these two pictures (The Shrine and temples of Caesarea Philippi and the Waterfall of Banias Natial Park) teach of a number of important things. The first is, that there seems to be something innate about being human that seeks to look beyond self in order to find self. Its only really been in the last two hundred years, since the Enlightenment, that we have seen the Ego rise to seeking to be means as well as goal of our exploration. Previously, people would look to the gods to provide this. And some may have indeed approached Christianity like this over the years.



Figure 2: Banias National Park - this waterfall is one of the key sources of the River Jordan

But what makes Jesus so uniquely different to pretty much all the other gods, temples, and even most religions is the seismic shift that takes place when Jesus, standing not before the waterfall but before the other Temples and gods says, both to to his disciples then, and to us today, “Who do you say that I AM?” In other words, will you allow “an earthquake” to change the source and direction of your thinking?

You see, as of yesterday, so also of today, people try to access spirituality, “the Other” by trying to achieve it, by trying to persuade it, or incant it. Hence so many books offering to help us to do just that in our bookshops.

The beauty of what Jesus offers and how He offers it is given as a clue in the framing of His question: “Who do you say that I AM?” (See the story in Matthew 16:13-20) “I AM” is the name of Yahweh, of God the Father, the living Creator of the Universe. From Him the snows melt like Mt Hermon, to produce “living water,” running free-flowing water, like a great natural waterfall in the form of Jesus, which then becomes the “Water of life,” (this is where the term comes from – from the waters of Banias) which in turn becomes the Jordan river, the river which stretches from Hermon all the way to Africa in th form of the Rift Valley, and by which we can move from slavery to freedom (if we remember the story of Moses from the Books of Exodus-Joshua) – from the person we have resigned ourselves to be to the person we long we wish we only could become.

Water that is free flowing, freely given. We cannot stop it. We cannot Create it. It simply is.

All we can do, but what we can do, is come and receive, as Gift. This is the core and unique difference of Christian spirituality – no matter who you are, what you’ve done, whether you have great intellect or little, whether you been here many times or not for a long time – Jesus pours Himself out for each and every person like a waterfall simply because that is His nature, that is who He is, pure love, a love which comes from the Father who stands behind Him.

And this water truly gives life, life in all its fullness, bubbling over, bursting with energy just like the fast moving waters over the stones in the foreground of the picture as the waters of Banias flow down excitedly to form the great River Jordan. So how can we access it, if its not by achievement?

By holding out our hands, both physically and metaphorically. I know when we pray we instinctively tend to bow or kneel, put our hands together, and close our eyes so as to focus and to plead perhaps to God. But in the Jewish and early Christian tradition it was more common practice to stand, open our arms wide and gaze upon the Cross. We still have a remnant of this in the Western Church through the practice of the Stigmata Prayer in the Franciscan tradition, but it is commonplace still in Eastern Orthodox Christianity. The point is, by opening our hands we may be better able to open our hearts and, by looking upwards better to be able to receive – a bit like being willing to walk under the flow of the waterfall and allow our whole self to become fully drenched by love.

Of course, we may not all be able, physically, to go to Banias. But taking this powerful image, and some of the thinking that lies behind it, we can all come to the Throne of Grace – bringing ourselves into that physical and metaphysical space not by our own efforts but by our willingness to let go and to come. The words of that old hymn come to mind:

“Just as I am, without one plea,  
But that Thy blood was shed for me  
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee  
O Lamb of God, I come! I come.”

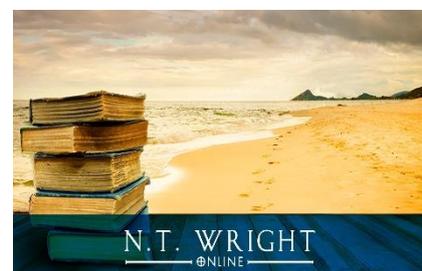
We'll be talking more about this in the Service tomorrow, and also in the Daily Blogs over the coming weeks. But isn't it a most wonderful thing that whenever we turn our heart and mind to God in Prayer His love is more willing to overflow and to fill us than we are perhaps to turn to Him in the first place. Our attitude in Prayer is, of course, is the key.

Matt Thomson.

**[Live Stream Church for Sunday: “NEW Church for a NEW Society – Two Churches as ONE” - 10.30am:](#)**

Next Sunday (Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> Oct) we will be in Banwell for the second part of our next in the “Themes of John’s Gospel” – that of Spirituality.

As we discovered previously, John’s Gospel is such an engaging account of Jesus life. Known as the “spiritual” Gospel, John had more time than the others to sit back not only to remember the events of Jesus’ life as best as he could, but also to think in greater depth about what they therefore could mean. The other themes we will be looking at over the coming weeks include:



- Beauty
- Freedom
- Truth
- and Power

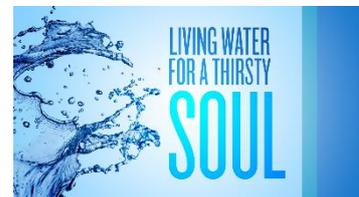
So please join us for the second part of the third of our themes next week. The service will last approximately fifty minutes to an hour

You can access the Service by joining us in church or **LIVE** via the “New Creation Facebook Page” : <https://www.facebook.com/NewCreationChurches/> or catch up later via the New Creation website: <http://www.newcreationchurches.org.uk/> or New Creation YouTube Channel : <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXn34qIXIXBeOAmO1M1KbBw/>

Matt Thomson

### **Daily Blog – What’s happening this week?**

This week we return to our “Themes in John’s Gospel” and to the theme of Spirituality. Over the next fortnight we will be looking at key expressions of God’s love through the image of “Living water” and also looking at how this image gives us an insight into how to meet with God today.



If you would like to follow the Daily Blog as part of your journey of faith, you can access via the “New Creation Facebook Page” :

<https://www.facebook.com/NewCreationChurches/>, via the New Creation website: <http://www.newcreationchurches.org.uk/> or New Creation YouTube Channel :

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### **Thank you: A very big thank you to everyone who kindly spent so much time trying to make our Joint Harvest Celebration a festival to remember...**

Thank you for all the gifts that people brought for the Foodbank and Somewhere to Go. Thank you to the Flower Ladies in both Churches who decorated the Churches so beautifully for the occasion. Thank you to the technology Team who worked so hard in the lead up and on the day to try and make everything work both between the two Churches and Online all at the same time. Thank you to Howard for sharing his thoughts and what God was saying to him on his heart not least through his wonderful poem. And thank you to our singers and to our musicians in both Churches for all that they kindly came to bring. May God be glorified in all these things and in all those who kindly pause and see life through lens of Gift and Thanksgiving.



Matt Thomson

### Annual Church Meetings:

We held the Annual Church Meeting for Banwell on Friday evening – thank you to everyone who attended online and physically.



### **Congresbury's Annual Meeting will be on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> Oct at 7.30pm**

If you are able to join us online Kirsty has kindly provided the following Zoom link details below.

#### **Congresbury APCM**

Wednesday 21st October 2020 at 7:30 PM

Please log on to zoom at 7:20pm for a 7:30pm start

To Join the Zoom Meeting please click on the following link and, when prompted, enter the passcode.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85023159350?pwd=a3RuRGk3TGFrYlVnQko5aFpzTk9aUT09>

Meeting ID: 850 2315 9350

Passcode: 796275

If you would prefer to join us physically in person we are able to accept people on the same basis as we do for worship – 2 metres apart, Test and Trace, and please wear your Facemask (this is the information we currently have and may need to change to reflect current guidelines).

The Annual Meeting looks at all the organisation of the life of the Church over the last twelve months and also as we look to the future, including where we are up to with our finances. As we look to the future, we will also be looking at whether to sign up to being an “Inclusive Church.” (please see Main Article: “Thought for the Week” from last week.)

### Annual All Souls' Day Service - a Time of Remembering:

Each year we remember those how have gone before us, and particularly this year, it has an added poignancy both for those who have sadly lost loved ones during this time of the pandemic and also for those who have felt the loss of loved ones during this time from years past more acutely because of the Lockdown and isolation.



We are going to be holding two All Souls' Day Services over the coming weeks:

**For Banwell on the Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> October at 4.00pm**

**For Congresbury on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> November also at 4.00pm**

Anyone is very welcome to join us online as Kirsty and the Technology Team will be Livestreaming both services. (As to how to do this Please see Kirsty's instructions below) PLEASE ALSO have a candle available to light at home as part of the service.

We also have space for a small number of people to attend physically, based on the usual Worship Guidelines for both Churches. But, PLEASE you will need to let us know, in advance that this is you wish. You can do so via email, phone, or by dropping us a line (see details below).

If you would like your loved one's name read out as part of the service, please can you let us know again by email, phone, or by dropping us a line. Due to the service being online as well this year, we can only read out those names we have been given permission to read so WE NEED YOU to get in touch and let us know – doing so complies then with GDPR rules.

To get in touch re names, and/or wishing to attend in person, please contact:

- for email – Lisa Stannard at [lisa.stannard@newcreationchurches.org.uk](mailto:lisa.stannard@newcreationchurches.org.uk)
- for phone – Congresbury Church Office (for both Banwell and Congresbury) on 01934 833126. PLEASE include the names you wish to have remembered, and leave ALSO YOUR name and phone number, and also which Church you are wishing to attend, so we can get back to you.
- For written replies – Congresbury Church Office (for Banwell and Congresbury), Station Road, Congresbury, North Somerset BS49 5DX. Again, PLEASE include the names you wish to have remembered, and leave ALSO YOUR name and phone number, and also which Church you are wishing to attend, so we can get back to you.

**To join us online:**

You can access the Services by watching LIVE via the “New Creation Facebook Page” : <https://www.facebook.com/NewCreationChurches/> or catch up later via the New Creation website: <http://www.newcreationchurches.org.uk/> or New Creation YouTube Channel : <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXn34qIXIXBeOAmO1M1KbBw/>

Please pass these details on to anyone you feel being part of such a service may be helpful.

Thank you.

Matt Thomson.

**Please continue to pray for Bishop Peter Hancock and for his family:**

Our thoughts and prayers remain with Bishop Peter and his family as he continues his treatment for Leukaemia, and with Bishop Ruth, Howard and their family as she takes on the role in his stead.