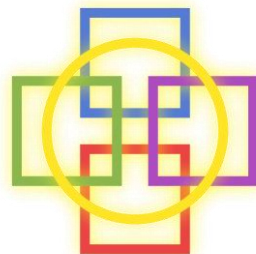




SERMON ARCHIVE 2010

Swedenborgian Community Online



2010: The Year of the Arts

January 3, 2010

READINGS

From the Bible:

Then Miriam the prophetess ... took a tambourine in her hand, and all the other women followed her with tambourines and dancing. Ex. 15:20

From Swedenborg:

Joyful feelings in the heart or interior things erupted into various activities in the body, such as singing and also dancing. Since in ancient times the glad feelings excelling all others were spiritual ones, that is, feelings springing from affections belonging to spiritual kinds of love, which were affections for goodness and truth, people were allowed, when they engaged in singing and musical harmony, to dance as well and so in dancing also to bear witness to their joy. [AC 420 and 8339].

MESSAGE

I encountered a central core of Swedenborg's theology in a dream I had five years ago. In this dream, I was again a faculty member in our previous seminary [the Swedenborg School of Religion]. I was a new faculty member, and for the first time was involved in giving the senior students a comprehensive exam on Swedenborg's theology. The first item on the exam was to pray. The students were scattered among several classrooms, and the faculty passed out written prayers to the students from various traditions. My task was to walk through the classrooms after a few minutes to see who was ready for the next part of the exam. I walked quietly, expecting to see students at their desks with bowed heads.

I was astounded at what I saw! The students were dancing and singing their prayers! Instead of taking the exam as individuals in isolation, the students in each room had formed a group. Each group had developed a different rhythm and melody and movements. All of the prayers were joyous and Spirit-filled. I was greatly uplifted as I saw these vibrant group prayers.

I suddenly realized that there never was anything else on the exam. If the students understood how to pray, then they had all they needed to know. If they realized that prayer could involve music and dancing, then they had grasped the essence of Swedenborg. Those students showed me, without words, what Swedenborg was all about.



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Love, Spirit, Life

I woke up stunned at the profound truth of my dream.

Since that dream, I have come to ponder questions such as:

What would it mean to pray with the wholistic integration of body, mind, and spirit?

How can we worship in such a wholistic way?

Can we pray and worship with and through the arts?

What is included in "the arts"?

What does Swedenborg say on these topics?

Can the arts be used to more deeply understand and live Swedenborg's theology?

This is a day for me filled with computer problems! So I must cut short what I can upload. Perhaps that is good, since I hope we can explore ways of worship that are beyond or more than words.

SOME QUOTATIONS

feel free to use these quotations for meditation, prayer, journaling -- and posting to share with others.

Wilson Van Dusen

This chapter arises out of a split I feel in my own experience, a split that runs like an earthquake fault through our entire culture. For my whole life, I have enjoyed both mysticism and art. Most of the world sees these as different realms; however, my direct experience says they are the same thing conceived under different terms. There is some religious art that links art and religion, but this is only a small overlap. Not surprisingly, we will have to dig into the experience of art to see where it connects to religion and mysticism. So, for awhile, forget we are concerned with mysticism or religion. For the moment, we are in the realm of the beautiful. [Beauty, Wonder, and the Mystical Mind, p. 67]

William Blake

I myself do nothing The Holy Spirit accomplishes all through me.

Joseph Chilton Pearce

We must accept that this creative pulse within us is God's creative pulse itself.

Mary Daly

It is the creative potential itself in human beings that is the image of God.

Children's Angels

January 10, 2010

READINGS

From the Bible:

The Escape to Egypt

13 ...an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." 14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, 15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." Mt. 2:13

From Swedenborg:

The reason angels and spirits are so intimately united to us that it seems to them as though our characteristics were their own is that there is such an intimate union within us of the spiritual and the natural worlds that they are virtually one. However, because we have separated ourselves from heaven, the Lord has provided that there should be angels and spirits with each of us and that we should be governed by the Lord through them. This is the reason there is such an intimate union. It would have been different if we had not separated ourselves, because then we could have been governed by the Lord through a general inflow from heaven without having spirits and angels assigned to us.

Heaven & Hell, 247 NCE

MESSAGE

In January of 2002, I arrived at the airport in Manchester, England. It was only months after the 9-11 attack, and I was nervous about flying. But I landed safely and could focus on the adventure that was before me: being a guest faculty member at The New Church Theological School.

I loved getting to know British Swedenborgians!

There are two parts of my stay that were special gifts.

The first was tea time. Twice a day, a bell would ring calling us to the lounge for a hot, steaming pot of tea. I still hear in a bell in my head around 10:15 AM and 3:15 PM, telling me it is time for tea!

The second gift was getting to know angel researcher, [Glennyce Eckersley](#)

She was working at the school when I arrived, and I enjoyed many cups of tea with her! She told me that people had started telling her about their personal angel



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encounters. She began writing down the stories. Then she put them in categories, and added some Swedenborgian theology about angels and their roles in our lives. Her book, *An Angel at my Shoulder*, became quite popular in the British Isles and then on the Continent. Even more people told her their angel stories, and she has written many more books. She is interviewed on radio and TV and travels about for various appearances. She spoke one time at The General Church, in Byrn Athyn, PA.

I am especially moved by angels at work in the lives of children. Swedenborg tells us that angels are with babies from the moment of birth. They surround the infant with love and protection. As children grow, new angels come to them to help them through childhood. We all have unconscious memories of the angelic love that surrounded us in our early months and years. [See Kirven, 1994, pp. 8-11].

To find stories about angels helping infants, we can start with today's scripture reading about angels telling Joseph to take the baby Jesus to Egypt.

Here is a story that Ms. Eckersley was told about another infant being saved by angels.

Lesley, a young British woman, married a Nigerian man and moved to Africa. Her husband was gone a lot, and Lesley had no family near by. So she felt very alone when she went to the the hospital to have a baby. Labor was long and complicated, and an IV had to be inserted into her arm. She lost consciousness. One of the doctors on her team was exhausted after working 48 straight hours. She went to a room, locked it, and fell asleep. Then she was shaken awake and told to go room 6, where the woman and her baby were in danger. As the doctor woke up, she realized that no one was in the room, and the door was still locked from the inside. She figured it was a dream, and went back to sleep. Again, she was shaken awake with the same message. She woke up fully, and saw a young woman, dressed in white. She raced to room 6, and found that Lesley had been given the wrong IV. She and the baby were moments from death. But she switched the IV in time, and a lovely baby girl was born. Lesley is now an artist, certain that an angel saved her life and her baby's. So this is also a story about what inspired a young woman to become an artist!



Painting is by John Flaxman, *Angels guiding a Soul to Heaven* [based on Swedenborg's wingless angels.] [Click on image to learn more about John Flaxman.](#)

Here are two of Glennyce's stories about angels in the lives of children.

Jean was a 15 year old who loved to ride her bike. One day, through no fault of her own, she was a victim of a terrible accident: a bus slammed into the side of her bike on the road. Jean felt herself being lifted a fraction of a second before the impact; She was carried about 20 feet, and gently put on the ground. Her bike was a crumpled mass of metal. She was certain it was a guardian angel who had saved her.

A 4 year old girl named Lucy ran out into a busy street, without thinking to check for traffic. She was hit by a huge truck, that ran over her twice: front and rear wheels. She was taken by stretcher to an ER, with dire expectations from her somber family. Yet, when she was examined, the doctors could not find a mark on her! Then Lucy opened her eyes and calmly asked *Where is the man in white?*

A doctor said, *I'm here*, but Lucy replied: *No, the man in the long, white shiny dress! He stroked my face, and picked me up so that the wheels couldn't touch me.* Witnesses continued to claim they saw the truck roll over her twice, and truck driver said he felt two bumps. But Lucy was absolutely fine!

I can't think of any other explanation except for angelic intervention!

Beloved Community

January 17, 2010

READINGS

From the Bible:

Micah 6

*8 He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.*

From Swedenborg:

The Doctrine of Charity (1766) Passage 210

Translated By John Whitehead in 1914

210. (I.) To will not to do evil to the neighbor is to love him. For he who loves another does not do evil to him. ...This is evident, that he who loves the neighbor does not commit these evils.

From Martin Luther King, Jr:

Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.

MESSAGE

I lived in New Hampshire for many years, and it became part of my yearly ritual to go to the State House every 3rd Monday in January to join hundreds of others in protesting that New Hampshire would not designate a Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday.

In 1983, the month of January also was marked by a stunning event in my life: I started seminary studies. I had felt a strong call to ministry, but couldn't discern what denomination God was calling me to. I hadn't been to church in years, and at that time had not heard of Swedenborg.

I took the radical step of applying for seminary study at Boston University. I was accepted, and started with that January term. The trip from rural NH to the heart of Boston was quite unsettling. I didn't know that people could drive with such abandon for the laws of the road as I experienced in Boston!

However, I did find my way through the city to the university, and managed to get my car parked in a school lot. Then I followed the map on foot to get myself to the School of Theology. As I came to the plaza in front of the building, I saw a large statue. I wondered who it was a statue of -- one of the apostles, perhaps? I walked up to it, and was startled to see that it was a statue of Martin Luther King, Jr.! I was even more amazed to learn that King had studied at the B.U. School of theology, and had obtained a doctorate there.

I instantly felt a bond with King that I hadn't experienced before. Every day of classes that semester, I walked by the King statue, and felt a kinship of studying where he had once studied.

A few years later, I learned about Swedenborg, and about the New Jerusalem. It seemed to me that Swedenborg had a theology quite similar to King's. I wondered if King could have been influenced by Swedenborg. Here are several ways that could have happened:

KING READ THOREAU

King entered Morehouse College in 1944 at the age of 15. He read Henry David Thoreau's essay "On Civil Disobedience" for the first time.

He wrote:

Here, in this courageous New Englander's refusal to pay his taxes and his choice of jail rather than support a war that would spread slavery's ...I made my first contact with the theory of nonviolent resistance. Fascinated by the idea of refusing to cooperate with an evil system, I was so deeply moved that I reread the work several times.

He later wrote:

The teachings of Thoreau came alive in our civil rights movement; indeed, they are more alive than ever before. Whether expressed in a sit-in at lunch counters, a freedom ride into Mississippi, a peaceful protest ..., these are outgrowths of Thoreau's insistence that evil must be resisted and that no moral man can patiently adjust to injustice.

Swedenborg had had a big impact on Emerson and the other Transcendentalists. Thoreau seems to have read Swedenborg, and may have absorbed some of his concept of "evil" and of "neighbor." Swedenborg said:

As much as we avoid evils as sins, so much do we love truth, because that is just how much we are we involved in what is good. On the other hand, as much as we do not avoid evils as sins, so much do we not love truth, because that is just how much we are not involved in good things. (The Doctrine of Life #21, 34)

King graduated from Morehouse College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology in 1948.

KING IN SEMINARY

King knew God's love in nature. He wrote about his time in seminary:

On the side of the campus ran a little tributary from the Delaware river. Every day I would sit on the edge of the campus by the side of the river and watch the beauties of nature. My friend, in this experience, I saw God. I saw him in birds of the air, the leaves of the tree, the movement of the rippling waves.... Sometimes I go out at night and look up at the stars ... There is God. Sometimes I watch the sun as it gets up in the morning and paints its technicolor across the eastern horizon. There is God. Sometimes I watch the moon as it walks across the sky as a queen walks across her masterly mansion. There is God. Henry Ward Beecher was right: "Nature is God's tongue."

KING READ SWEDENBORG

Only in the past couple of years have we learned that King had read Swedenborg. Morehouse College had a donation of King material that included many books King had read; with his notes in the margins. There were some Swedenborg books there. This statement of Martin Luther King, Jr. was found in the margin of one of his books

Swedenborg enables us to understand why we were created, why we are alive and what happens to us after our bodies die. Swedenborg enables us to have the best possible understanding of God's message as it exists in those Bible Books which constitute God's Word

King's theology was about the Beloved Community, but not as a future event; rather as a way of living life today.

Martin Luther King said this in his "I Have a Dream" speech: "

It's alright to talk about 'streets flowing with milk and honey,' but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here, and his children who can't eat three square meals a day. It's all right to talk about the new Jerusalem, but one day, God's preacher must talk about the New York, the new Atlanta, the new Philadelphia, the new Los Angeles, the new Memphis, Tennessee.

King's concept of the New Jerusalem is similar to Swedenborg's New Jerusalem. It is not something for us to dream about for the future; it is something for us to create now in this world.

The same is true for natural disasters, such as the one that occurred in Haiti this week. We create the New Jerusalem each time we reach out to help others in need; through our prayers and our action. Every prayer and every deed in this disaster helps us create a Beloved Community today.

Let us pray:

Haiti Cries ... and we Cry with Them
[a prayer as we search through the rubble]

by Safiyah Fosua

Earth shaking

Home breaking

Ground-moved-the-mountain-into-my-way tragedy!

Broken bodies

Broken hearts

Broken lives.

Haiti cries



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And we cry with them.

God,

Our hearts are aching as we try to imagine what the daylight brought

To our brothers and sisters in Haiti.

Heal the young eyes that have seen far too much on this day.

Heal the hearts of many who have lost friends, family and a way of life on this day.

Be with those who are missing

And those who are dying outside of the grasp of

Loving hands to hold them

Loving voices to soothe them.

Move us over here from empathy to action

From sympathy to substance

As we contemplate what can be done to help

Today

And many days

Into a forever-changed future.

Amen.



Where Are You, God?

January 24, 2010

READINGS

From the Bible:

1 Corinthians 12:12-31 (New International Version)

12The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 13For we were all baptized by[a] one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

14Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 17If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

21The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

27Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 28And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. 29Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues[b]? Do all interpret? 31But eagerly desire[c] the greater gifts.

And now I will show you the most excellent way.

Footnotes:

a. 1 Corinthians 12:13 Or with; or in

b. 1 Corinthians 12:30 Or other languages

c. 1 Corinthians 12:31 Or But you are eagerly desiring

From Swedenborg:

True Christianity, 412

A community is like a person. In fact, the people who make up the community form a single body, in a sense. They are differentiated from each other like the parts of a single body. ...Love for a community is a fuller form of love for our neighbor than love for a single individual.

MESSAGE

Where Are You, God?

Where was God during the earthquake that devastated Haiti just over a week ago?

In this season of Epiphany, we look for God to be revealed. How is God revealed to us in a devastation such as the earthquake?

Is God in the earthquake?

Last week, an American preacher said that the whole country of Haiti is “cursed” because its founders made a “pact with the devil” some 200 years ago.

Would God curse a people? We talk about natural disasters as “acts of God,” as though God wills them to happen to certain people at a particular time. We say that events are “God’s will.” Do we really mean that God wills disaster to happen?

Swedenborg tells us that God has give free will to humanity, and honors that free will. We are free to choose our actions. But God does not single out individuals or communities to suffer.

Is God in poverty?

Nearly 80 percent of Haiti’s population lives in abject poverty. How is this possible? One preacher wrote last week?

Years ago I read a book called Hunger for Justice. The author, Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, described walking through the streets of Calcutta and being overwhelmed by the poverty and suffering of there. A moral outrage started welling up inside of him. How could this happen? Jack started yelling at God. How could you allow this to happen God? As he thought more deeply about the situation he realized that in the suffering and poverty of the poor God was yelling at him and all of us, and at our institutions and governments that tolerate situations like this to occur.

Is God in our actions?

Is God in the rescue attempts? Is God in the food and water and medicine that are being delivered to the Haitian people? Is God in the rescue of orphans?

Swedenborg says that our acts of charity are the Divine in action. God's spiritual love merges with our physical wisdom, and this union is expressed through our acts of love.

God is in who we are and what we do.

God is in the healing:

Every action of love helps in the healing. Each \$1 donated; each prayer given.

Art can be used for healing as well. Here is an organization that helps children heal through art:



Funkor Child Art Centre is a part of Initiative for Rural & Sustainable Development (IRSD) a registered (Reg:RS/ICT/145,dated Islamabad 1992 Societies ACT), private non- profit , non political voluntary organization. Funkor uses the medium of arts to extend children's outlook and awareness of the concepts of environment and heritage protection, human rights, equality, tolerance and peace. Funkor is committed to promoting art among children and generating healthy and creative activities for children from a broad spectrum of society. Funkor is made up of an urdu word fun meaning art and kor a pushtu word meaning house, in other words an art house for children. Art is a luxury not many children can afford in Pakistan. Art activities are non-existent in schools for the children from the lower income group. A minority of privileged children going to private schools have art as a subject, but for the majority of children belonging to the under privileged sections of society art is a luxury they cannot afford. Art activity is a very entertaining event for children who have never experienced the joy of painting.

God is with all of those who suffer.

God is with you at this very moment.

How do you feel God at work in your life today?

Happy Birthday, Swedenborg!

January 31, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Psalm 77

For the director of music. For Jeduthun. Of Asaph. A psalm.

1 I cried out to God for help;

I cried out to God to hear me.

2 When I was in distress, I sought the Lord;

at night I stretched out untiring hands

and my soul refused to be comforted.

3 I remembered you, O God, and I groaned;

I mused, and my spirit grew faint.

Selah

4 You kept my eyes from closing;

I was too troubled to speak.

5 I thought about the former days,

the years of long ago;

6 I remembered my songs in the night.

My heart mused and my spirit inquired:

7 "Will the Lord reject forever?

Will he never show his favor again?

8 Has his unfailing love vanished forever?

Has his promise failed for all time?

9 Has God forgotten to be merciful?

Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"

Selah

10 Then I thought, "To this I will appeal:

the years of the right hand of the Most High."

11 I will remember the deeds of the LORD;

yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.

12 I will meditate on all your works

and consider all your mighty deeds.



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13 Your ways, O God, are holy.
What god is so great as our God?

14 You are the God who performs miracles;
you display your power among the peoples.

15 With your mighty arm you redeemed your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.
Selah

16 The waters saw you, O God,
the waters saw you and writhed;
the very depths were convulsed.

17 The clouds poured down water,
the skies resounded with thunder;
your arrows flashed back and forth.

18 Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind,
your lightning lit up the world;
the earth trembled and quaked.

19 Your path led through the sea,
your way through the mighty waters,
though your footprints were not seen.

20 You led your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

FROM SWEDENBORG

I have stated on occasion that love is what constitutes our life, but this does not mean love separated from wisdom, or what is good separated from what is true in the cause. This is because love by itself, or what is good by itself, is nothing. Consequently, the love that constitutes our deepest life, the life that comes from the Lord, is love and wisdom together. So too, the love that constitutes our life to the extent that we are open to it is not love by itself in the cause, though it is by itself in the result. Love is incomprehensible apart from its quality, and its quality is wisdom. That quality or wisdom can come only from its underlying reality, which is love. This is why they are a single whole; and the same holds true for what is good and what is true. Divine Providence #13 NCE



MESSAGE

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, SWEDENBORG

The late Donella Meadows was a pioneer in looking at system's theory. To explain how a system is about wholeness, she cited this Sufi teaching story:

You think that because you understand "one" that you must therefore understand "two" because one and one make two. But you forget that you must also understand "and."

In many ways, this quotation expresses the essence of Swedenborgian theology. We are all about the "ands." Swedenborg wrote about Love AND Wisdom, Good AND Truth, Human AND Divine. Neither of these can exist without the other.

Swedenborg did not focus on separating them; of choosing between one and the other. His emphasis was that the essence of existence was putting both together. They meld together into a "distinguishable oneness," in which each retains some of its uniqueness, but together they create something that neither could do alone.

Friday was Swedenborg's birthday. He would have been 322 years old! He would probably feel today that his theology was well expressed in the Sufi teaching: *You think that because you understand "one" that you must therefore understand "two" because one and one make two. But you forget that you must also understand "and."*

He would also probably find modern physics compatible with his theology.

Modern physics has established that reality involves both "particle" and "wave." The "waves" are in constant motion drawing the particles into creative relationship. Physicist Fritz Capra wrote this:

Modern physics has shown us that movement and rhythm are essential properties of matter ... that all matter is involved in a creative cosmic dance. [Fritz Capra]

I love seeing the universe as involved in a creative cosmic dance!

All of life, all of creation is about dancing together! Swedenborg wrote about dance as an ancient form of prayer from The Word:

The meaning of 'dance' as that which has regard to an affection for spiritual truth, and means the delightful feeling or gladness belonging to it, dealt with below. In ancient times not only musical instruments and singing served to bear witness to gladness of heart but also dancing. Joyful feelings in the heart or interior things erupted into various activities in the body, such as singing and also dancing. Since in ancient times the glad feelings excelling all others were spiritual ones, that is, feelings springing from affections belonging to spiritual kinds of love, which were affections for goodness and truth, people were allowed, when they engaged in singing and musical harmony, to dance as well and so in dancing also to bear witness to their joy. This explains why 'dancing' is mentioned in the Word, meaning the glad feelings that belong to affections for truth, or to faith grounded in good or charity, as in Jeremiah, Again you will adorn your timbrels, and will go forth in the dance of the merry-makers. Their life** will become like a watered garden, and they will not sorrow any more. Then will the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old together. Jer. 31:4, 12, 13.*

One of my favorite Biblical passages is in Exodus. God parts the Red Sea so that that Israelites can cross it on dry land. When they safely reach the other side:

“Then Miriam the prophetess ... took a tambourine in her hand, and all the other women followed her with tambourines and dancing.” Ex. 15:20

Swedenborg says this passage shows us that “dance” means spiritual truth and gladness of heart, and that in ancient time:

Joyful feelings in the heart or interior things erupted into various activities in the body, such as singing and also dancing. Since in ancient times the glad feelings excelling all others were spiritual ones, that is, feelings springing from affections belonging to spiritual kinds of love, which were affections for goodness and truth, people were allowed, when they engaged in singing and musical harmony, to dance as well and so in dancing also to bear witness to their joy. [AC 420 and 8339].

Swedenborg also talked about the movement or flow towards wholeness:

Spiritual Experiences-Word Explained (Odhner) n. 34

346. When many are speaking at the same time, there is a certain most beautiful harmony, a very lovely kind of wave-like movement toward oneness, because of the agreement. At such times they also possess much more force of action and speech, as I have, by the Divine mercy of God the Messiah, experienced on several occasions, together with a deep happiness. The beauty itself of the melodic progression, ending up in unity, was also shown to me in an amazing way, and it was stunning, beyond all description.

The Sacred Dance Guild believes that sacred dance is a catalyst for spiritual growth and change through the integration of mind, body, and spirit. ... as an agent of change; and as a message of peace.

Some Sufi traditions celebrate dances of peace, and the Whirling Dervishes are Sufi's who use movement as prayer.

Kathryn Mihelick, Development Director and Director of the Leaven Dance Company says: *Movement is the universal language which integrates us, speaks across cultures, and transcends the spoken word to manifest the spirit. "To move is human....to dance is divine."*

Connie Tyler, Resource Director of the dance company, says:

We have Jewish dancers, participants in Dances of Universal Peace, people who do Yoga dance, Buddhist dance, the traditional temple dances of both Northern and Southern India ...What is important is what is in the heart and the soul of the dancer, the connection to the divine.

All of this says a lot about community.

Community is about the “and.” A congregation is a community with a spirituality focus. You think because you understand yourself and you understand another person, you will understand what their relationship will be like. But a relationship involves the “and” in a constant interactive dance! When we strive to create a better world – Swedenborg’s *New Jerusalem* or Martin Luther King’s *Beloved Community* – we are in a continuous dance together towards wholeness.

I think if Swedenborg wanted us to remember one thing about him in this birthday week, it would be for us to live in the “ands” where we are constantly growing and changing – and integrating pieces into a wholeness.

To honor Swedenborg’s birthday, take some time today to enjoy the dance of the universe that is at the essence of our world!

Worship with Hildegard

February 7, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Isaiah 6:1-13

6In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. 2Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. 3And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." 4The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

5And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" 6Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. 7The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." 8Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

9And he said, "Go and say to this people: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.' 10Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed." 11Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate; 12until the Lord sends everyone far away, and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land. 13Even if a tenth part remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled." The holy seed is its stump

FROM SWEDENBORG

Divine Love and Wisdom (Rogers) n. 115

115. But how the Lord is in an angel, and an angel in the Lord, cannot be comprehended unless one knows the nature of their conjunction. It is a conjunction of the Lord with the angel, and of the angel with the Lord. Consequently it is a reciprocal conjunction.

This conjunction on the part of the angel is as follows. An angel has no other perception than that he possesses love and wisdom of himself, like any person, and thus he feels as though love and wisdom are his as qualities belonging to him. If he did not have that perception, there would be no conjunction; thus he would not have the Lord in him, and



he would not be in the Lord. Nor is it possible for the Lord to be in any angel or person unless the one in whom He is present with His love and wisdom perceives and feels that presence as something his own. Because of this the Lord is not only received, but, having been received, is retained and also loved in return. Consequently it is because of this that an angel becomes wise and remains wise.

Who could possibly want to love the Lord and the neighbor, and who could possibly want to become wise, if he did not feel and perceive what he loves, learns and incorporates as being something his own? Who would otherwise retain it in himself? If the case were not as it is, any love and wisdom flowing in would have no seat, for it would flow on through a person without affecting him. Thus the angel would not be an angel, and the person would not be a person; indeed, the angel or person would be only like something inanimate.

It can be seen from this that there must be reciprocity for conjunction to exist.

MESSAGE

Have you ever felt God "calling in the night?" What has that been like? How have you responded?

Most of us question whether we are hearing God or our imaginations. Then, when we consider that it might be God, we feel inadequate to accept the call.

Hildegard of Bingen [1098 - 1179] , at age 42, was the abbess of a convent. She had been a resident since the age of eight, when her parents gave her [their 10th child], to the convent as their "tithe" to the church. Despite her religious background, she resisted the call of God. It was a powerful call. She describes the experience:

Heaven was opened and a fiery light of exceeding brilliance came and permeated my whole brain, and infiltrated my whole heart and my whole breast, not like a burning but a warming flame, as the sun warms anything its rays touch. And immediately I knew the meaning of the exposition of the Scriptures ...

She realized that she had been having visions since she was five years old, but always dismissed them as insignificant. Even with this powerful experience of call, she tried to ignore it. She did not feel worthy to be an instrument of God. God told her to write down all that she saw and heard in her visions, but she resisted.

But although I heard and saw these things, because of doubt and low opinion of myself and because of diverse sayings of men, I refused for a long time a call to write, not out of stubbornness but out of humility, until weighed down by a scourge of god, I fell onto a bed of sickness.

Eventually she decided to follow's God's call. She started painting and writing -- music, poetry, and books. She became famous in her time, and is perhaps even better known

today. Matthew Fox has brought her works back into public prominence, and many are discovering her again today.

Like Swedenborg, she received a dramatic call in Middle Age and was given new understanding of the scripture. Because of her willingness to respond to the call, she has enriched the world of spirituality.

It is our goal during this year to explore ways of worship through the arts. This exploration must include Hildegard as one of our most important spiritual artists.

Many of her visions, or "Illuminations" were beautiful and complex paintings that contained spiritual meaning. Her music is deeply haunting. Let yourself become immersed in the experience of her illuminations and off her music.



What is your experience of worshipping with Hildegard's art?

What are your experiences of ignoring God's call? What has happened for you when you have honored it?

The Mystic in Love

February 14, 2010

READINGS

From the Bible:

1 Corinthians 13 (New International Version)

1 Corinthians 13
Love

1If I speak in the tongues[a] of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames,[b] but have not love, I gain nothing.

4Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. 11When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. 12Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

13And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Footnotes:

1 Corinthians 13:1 Or languages

1 Corinthians 13:3 Some early manuscripts body that I may boast

From Swedenborg:

424. ...earthly love is love for ourselves and love for the world, and spiritual love is love for the Lord and love for our neighbor. Love for ourselves and for the world looks downward and outward, and love for the Lord looks upward and inward. So when an

earthly love is separated from spiritual love, it cannot be raised away from our self-absorption. It remains immersed in it and even mired in it, to the extent that it loves it. If our discernment does rise up and see elements of wisdom in heaven's light, then our love drags it back down and unites it to itself in its self-absorption. There it either discards the elements of wisdom or distorts them or arranges them outside itself so that it can mouth them for the sake of reputation.

Just as an earthly love can rise up by levels and become spiritual and heavenly, it can also go down by levels and become sensory and physical. It goes down to the extent that it loves being in control with no love of service, simply for love of ourselves. This is the love that we call demonic.

Divine Love and Wisdom, NCE #424

MESSAGE

The Mystic in Love

Happy Valentine's Day!

Valentine's Day is on a Sunday this year, which means I head to my bookshelf to pull out a very worn and tattered paperback that I probably bought about 40 years ago; perhaps at a used book store. Its title intrigued me: *The Mystic in Love: a Treasury of world Mystical Poetry* edited by Shelley Gross. I believe this was my first introduction to mysticism. I was absolutely entranced by the beauty of poetry from around the world and through the ages; poetry by deep lovers of God.

Wilson Van Dusen says that a mystic is one who has a direct experience of the Divine, and this is something available to all of us. For many people, those personal encounters with the Divine have led to songs, painting, poetry, and other great mystical art. For some mystics, their encounter with God can only be expressed in the words of passionate and romantic love. Writings about "being in love with" God can be found in the Old Testament – in the Song of Solomon.

Mystics in love with God have written intense poetry from nearly all religious traditions.

Today, we will honor Valentine's Day on Sunday by experiencing some of this profound poetry from around the world and across the ages.

In the Sufi tradition, God is the "Beloved," for whom one has the deepest of feelings.

Here is a poem to the Beloved from the Sufi Rumi:

My God and My Love:

Eyes are at rest, the stars are setting.

Hushed are the movement of birds in their nests,

of monsters in the sea, and

You are the just who knows no change;

the Equity that does not swerve, the everlasting that never passes away.

The doors of kings are locked now and guarded by their henchmen, but your door is open to all who call upon You.

My Lord, each lover is now alone with his beloved.

And I am alone with Thee.

Another poem of Rumi's

*Since I have heard of the world of Love,
I've spent my life, my heart
And my eyes this way.
I used to think that love
And beloved are different.
I know they are the same.*

To Swedenborg, we could not fully experience earthly love without Divine Love being at its core. *An earthly love separated from spiritual love is opposed to spiritual love. This is because earthly love is love for ourselves and love for the world, and spiritual love is love for the Lord and love for our neighbor. ... So when an earthly love is separated from spiritual love, it cannot be raised away from self-absorption.*

Poetry about love and longing for God is also found in the Christian tradition. Many of the Christian mystics saw themselves as brides of Christ, a tradition that was adopted in the monastic tradition for both men and women. One of the best known Christian writers is St. Teresa of Avila.

MY BELOVED ONE IS MINE
*I gave myself to Love Divine,
And lo! My lot so changed is
That my Beloved One is mine
And I at last am surely His.*

One of my favorite mystics of this era is Mechtild of Magdeburg. She wrote that she heard God say to her soul:

*You are like a new bride,
whose only love has left her sleeping
I await you in the orchard of love
And pick for you the flower of sweet reunion
And make ready there your bed.*

Her soul responds:

*Ah my beloved, I am hoarse in the throat of my chastity
But the sweetness of your kindness
Has cleared my throat so that now I can sing.*

Both Christian and Sufi love mysticism express abandonment as well as joy. To love a human deeply is to feel loss when you are separated and grief if they should die. If one feels great joy when sensing God's presence, then one also feels great loss when unable to feel it. Opening our hearts to the depth of Divine Love means also opening to deep grief during those periods when we can't feel God's presence.

Here is a poem from a Sufi missing the feeling of God's love:

*The source of my grief and loneliness is deep in my breast
This is a disease no doctor can cure.*

Only union with the Friend can cure it.

St. Teresa wrote this:

Ah, my God without Thee,
Life goes sadly by,
And my yearning for Thee
Makes me long to die.

Here is another one by Rumi:

The Agony and Ecstasy of Divine Discontent:

*I long to see your face.
In the taste of Sweetness
I long to kiss your lips.
In the shadows of passion
I long for your love.*

*Oh! Supreme Lover!
Let me leave aside my worries.
The flowers are blooming
with the exultation of your Spirit.*

*By Allah!
I long to escape the prison of my ego
and lose myself
in the mountains and the desert.*

*These sad and lonely people tire me.
I long to revel in the drunken frenzy of your love
and feel the strength of Rostam in my hands.*

*I'm sick of mortal kings.
I long to see your light.
With lamps in hand
the sheiks and mullahs roam
the dark alleys of these towns
not finding what they seek.*

*You are the Essence of the Essence,
The intoxication of Love.
I long to sing your praises
but stand mute
with the agony of wishing in my heart.*

Probably my favorite mystical love poem to God is St. John of the Cross' *Dark Night of the Soul*. Because of its name, the "dark night of the soul" has come to be known as a frightening and alone time. However, John's poem is a love poem about how the darkness of the night can be the ideal time to fully encounter God.



1. *One dark night,
fired with love's urgent longings
- ah, the sheer grace! -
I went out unseen,
my house being now all stilled.*

2. *In darkness, and secure,
by the secret ladder, disguised,
- ah, the sheer grace! -
in darkness and concealment,
my house being now all stilled.*

3. *On that glad night,
in secret, for no one saw me,
nor did I look at anything,
with no other light or guide
than the one that burned in my heart.*

4. *This guided me
more surely than the light of noon
to where he was awaiting me
- him I knew so well -
there in a place where no one appeared*

5. *O guiding night!
O night more lovely than the dawn!
O night that has united
the Lover with his beloved,
transforming the beloved in her Lover.*

6. *Upon my flowering breast
which I kept wholly for him alone,
there he lay sleeping,
and I caressing him
there in a breeze from the fanning cedars.*

7. *When the breeze blew from the turret,
as I parted his hair,
it wounded my neck
with its gentle hand,
suspending all my senses.*

8. *I abandoned and forgot myself,
laying my face on my Beloved;
all things ceased; I went out from myself,
leaving my cares
forgotten among the lilies.*

For Swedenborg, the joy of feeling one with God, or the agony of feeling separate, are not particularly important in daily life. We serve God moment by moment in our lives, even when we don't feel God's presence. That is the essence of "uses."

I love this little Sufi poem:

I laugh when I hear that the fish in the sea is thirsty.

We are fish swimming in the sea of God's Divine Love for us. The fish may feel thirsty and could forget that it need only open its mouths to be nourished! Like the fish, we live in a sea of Divine Love, yet sometimes forget to open our hearts to God's Love that is all around us. We may not feel this every moment of every day. But that's what Valentine's Day is for – to remind ourselves both of our love for each other, and the intense love of God that flows into us at every moment; whether or not we are aware of it.

Happy Valentine's Day!



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"What If God Was One of Us"

February 21, 2010

READINGS

Psalm 91

1 You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,

2 will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."

3 For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence;

4 he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

5 You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day,

6 or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday.

7 A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.

8 You will only look with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.

9 Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place,

10 no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.

11 For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

12 On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.

13 You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

14 Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name.

15 When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them.

16 With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.



Luke 4:1-13

4Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. 3The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." 4Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" 5Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." 8Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" 9Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' 11and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" 12Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 13When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

From Swedenborg:

The underlying divine reality is intrinsic reality, and is also an intrinsic capacity to become manifest. Jehovah God is intrinsic reality because from eternity to eternity he is the I Am, the Absolute, and the first and only thing from which comes everything that exists and to which everything owes its existence. Because of this and nothing else he is the beginning and the End, the first and the Last, and the Alpha and the Omega. True Christianity, #21, NCE

In the Divine-Human One, reality and its manifestations are both distinguishable and united. Wherever there is reality, there is manifestation : the one does not occur without the other. In fact, reality exists through manifestation, and not apart from it." DLW, #14, NCE

MESSAGE

What If God Was One of Us

Does God communicate with you? Does God respond to your prayers, your questions, and your confusions? Some people, such as Joan of Arc, have claimed to hear God speaking to them. Was Joan insane? Is Joan a rare occurrence in human history? Or does God speak to everyone in some way?

What if God actually speaks to all of us in some way every day?

This question was explored through a television series called *Joan of Arcadia*.

It was about a sixteen -year old girl who had conversations with God, and tried to live by God's direction. The series was on CBS from September, 2003 to April,



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2005. Reruns are currently being aired by the SyFy cable channel. The episodes are available on DVD, and in segments on U-tube.

The series won some awards, including the prestigious Humanitas Prize and the People's Choice Award. It was nominated for an Emmy Award in its first season for "Best Dramatic Series".

The title of the series was a play on "Joan of Arc." Arcadia was a fictional "every town," and Joan was an ordinary U.S. teen-ager.

The series was entertaining, and also thought-provoking.

Writer and executive producer, Barbara Hall, considered a number of possible songs for the theme song. However, once she heard, *What If God Was One of Us* used as a background for the pilot episode, she knew that that HAD to be the song. She felt that that song was a summary of the entire series: that Joan is an ordinary teen, that God can appear as any of us, and that anyone we encounter could be God.

This is the first week of the Christian season of Lent. It is a time to remember the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness coming to understand his purpose and his relationship with God.

You are invited on a journey this Lent to explore *your* purpose and *your* relationship with God through a modern dramatic expression of these issues in a TV series.

Today, we're going to enjoy the first 20 minutes of the pilot episode, and ponder its implications for our own lives.

Below, is a U-Tube video of the first 10 minutes of the pilot episode. In it, we meet the primary characters in the drama, including God.

In this segment, we see Joan as an ordinary teen-ager. She thinks she hears her name being called, but she is partly asleep, and isn't sure. Then we see a scene of Joan's father at work as a chief of police.

Through the juxtaposition of Joan's growing relationship with God and her father's work with criminal justice, we are reminded that any relationship with the Divine must be grounded in the realities of the world we live in.

At the end of this segment, we see God appearing as a teen-aged boy chatting with Joan. Here is part of that conversation:

Cute Boy- Joan, I wanna talk to you.

Joan- I must be missing something, we are talking.

Cute Boy- I mean, I wanna be honest

Joan- Ok, Who are you?

Cute Boy- I saw you today.

Joan- Saw me where?

Cute Boy- Outside of your house. Look, I didn't mean to scare you

Joan- Wa-wait that was YOU?

(Cute boy shakes his head in confirmation)

Joan- That guy was an old guy

Cute Boy- Ok, this is the difficult part. I don't always look the same

Joan- W-What are you talking about? What do you want with me? Cause I gotta warn you, my Dads a cop. He's not just any cop, he is The Cop.



This conversation continues into the next segment, which sets the context of the entire series in terms of Joan's struggle to relate to God.

This segment has subtitles in another language. I'm sorry for that! There were very few U-tube videos of this scene that had any audio with them.

We'll back up a bit to the start of this crucial conversation.

Here is the transcript of this crucial conversation between Joan and God:

Joan – I intend to give my father a full description and a composite drawing of you, both before dark.

God - Maybe, he'll be too busy looking for creative ways to ground you for mouthing off in French class.

Joan - Are you spying on me?

God- I'm omniscient Joan, comes with the job.

Joan- Ok. So, you're God.

God - Yes

Joan - As in - God.

God - Right.

Joan - Old Testament, Tower of Babel, Burning bush, Ten Commandments - God

God - I come off a little friendlier in the new testament and the Koran but uh, Yeah, same God..

Joan - And, I'm supposed to believe you - because?

God - Because you have a feeling.

Joan - No, I don't. (She turns to walk away)

God - How about you believe me if I agree to over look that promise you didn't keep.

Joan - (she turns back) What promise?

God – Let's see. That you would study hard, stop talking back, clean your room, and even go to church, if I recall, if I let your brother live.

Joan - (after a very long pause) How did you know about that?

God - Omniscient! Look it up.

Joan - So - you let my brother live, and now you're here to collect?

God - No. I don't bargain. That would be cruel.

They both start walking away from school

Joan - Ok. So, Let's say you're God.

God - Thank you.

Joan - I want to ask you some questions.

God - No.

Joan - No?

God - No. As a general rule, I ask the questions.

Joan - Are you, Are you being snippy with me? God is snippy.

God - Let me explain something to you Joan. It goes like this: I don't look like this. I don't look like anything you'd recognize. You can't see me. I don't sound like this. I don't sound like anything you'd recognize. You see I'm beyond your experience. I take this form because you're comfortable with it. It makes sense to you. If I'm snippy with you it's because you understand snippy. Do ya get it?

Joan - Sort of.

God - Good, cause I'm really not snippy. I've got a great personality. You'd like me.

Joan - Uh, I'm not religious you know.

God - It's not about religion Joan. It's about fulfilling your nature.

Joan - Oh, Uh, I definitely haven't done that.

God - Exactly

Joan - Uh, um well, let's say you're God.

God - Joan, I am God! (Getting a bit tired of trying to convince her)

Joan - Ok, well let's see a miracle.

God - Ok, How bout that? (He motions to a tree)

Joan - That's a tree.

God - Lets see you make one.

After her meeting with the principal Joan is walking through the halls and sees the Cute Guy again leaning against a wall.

Joan - Hey God! Get lost, I mean it.

God - I know you think you mean it

Joan - You know, I'm going

They continue to walk

Joan - So, do you just go around, appearing to people?

God - Um, a minor correction. I'm not appearing to you. You are seeing me.

Joan - Ok fine! (pause) Is it kinda weird that I have a crush on you?

God - I'm not gonna look like this the next time.

Joan - The next time?

God - I'm gonna be dropping in on you Joan. Now and then.

Joan - Why?

God - Let's just say I need you to do some errands.

Joan - Why?

God - Do you notice how I'm not answering any of the whys? I want you to get a job, at the Skylight bookstore. It's about 3 bus stops from here. Manager's name is Sammy. Now, He's snippy. It's important you do this pretty soon. Don't ask why.

Joan - And if I say no? Am I gonna burst into flames?

God - (laughing) Where do you people get this stuff? Have I ever made any body burst into flames? Do as I ask. I'll see you around.

Joan - Wait one more thing.

God - Soon, Joan.

What was your experience watching this segment? How did you react to Joan's conversation with God?

I've watched the episode many times now -- on Utube, by DVD, and on TV rerun. I am most impacted by the quality of the relationship between Joan and God. We often relate to God with reverence, joy, fear, or even anger. Rarely, however, do we see God as light-hearted, sarcastic, and snippy.

In her conversation, Joan brings in typical stereotypes of God.

Joan - And if I say no? Am I gonna burst into flames?

She encounters a laughing Deity:

God - (laughing) Where do you people get this stuff? Have I ever made any body burst into flames? Do as I ask. I'll see you around.

Joan - Wait-- one more thing.

God - Soon, Joan.

God departs with a modern back-wave that has a somewhat haughty and dismissive tone to it. God? We'll find God doing this throughout our time with Joan of Arcadia.

The two executive producers, Barbara Hall and James Hayman, discussed their work on the DVD. Hayman said that one of his goals in becoming part of the show was to emphasize the humor in the relationship between Joan and God.

How do you feel about humor and God? This depiction of the Lord was one reason that the series was controversial for many -- esp. fundamental Christians.

This Lent, let's enter the wilderness and explore all aspects of our connection with the Divine -- the joy, the anger, and the fear -- and even the humor!

Joan of Arcadia will be our tour guide, with Swedenborg as our technical consultant. His expert guidance will be especially important to us as we explore the meaning of our theme song: *What If God Was One of Us?* For what God is, and what we are, and what we and God are together, is at the heart of Swedenborg's writings and of the Easter story from his perspective.

How do you respond to the question: *What If God was one of us? **Is** God one of us?* Or perhaps all of us? Or are all of us God? What is the Divine-Human One? What happened on the cross when Jesus, through glorification, became one with God? Are we all one with God?

In TC 210 Swedenborg says, *Divine being is being in itself and presence in itself.* If the Divine is presence in itself, how is the Divine present in our lives, day by day?

Join the journey and the conversation through the wilderness with Joan and Swedenborg during the coming weeks, as we prepare ourselves for Easter by exploring the meaning of the Divine-Human One.

Venturing into the wilderness requires a lot of protection. We began today's worship with Psalm 91. Let's end our worship with a song based on this psalm.

Your Light Has Come

February 28, 2010

READINGS

Leviticus 24 (New International Version)

Leviticus 24

Oil and Bread Set Before the LORD

1 The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning continually. 3 Outside the curtain of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, Aaron is to tend the lamps before the LORD from evening till morning, continually. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. 4 The lamps on the pure gold lampstand before the LORD must be tended continually.

From Swedenborg:

...when we die, we simply move from one world into another. That is why in the inner meaning of the word, 'death' means 'resurrection' and a continuation of life. [HH, NCE, 44]

MESSAGE

Your Light Has Come

I walked into the room of people hesitantly, since I knew so few of them. I was new to the Swedenborgian Church, and a new student at the Swedenborg School of Religion. This was a gathering of faculty and students and people on the ordination committee.

There was one person there that I was eager to meet: Rev. Dorothea Harvey. I had heard so many stories about her years of teaching Bible at Urbana University, and her historic journey to become the first ordained Swedenborgian woman. I don't know what I had expected her to be like, but I was surprised by her genuine warmth and sense of humor. I asked her about the controversy surrounding her ordination. She said that some men told her that Swedenborg warned against women preaching, like men. With a twinkle in her eye, she said that her response had been, "I don't preach like a man. I preach like a woman."

Dorothea had a profound impact on my journey to ordained ministry. She was my ministry mentor after ordination and my peer ear for many years. We were colleagues together on the faculty of the Swedenborg School of Religion. Her death this week is the passing of an era in Swedenborgian ministry.

When someone we love dies, we often ponder the meaning of death.



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Love, Spirit, Life

Emanuel Swedenborg had many "near death experiences." He was invited into the spiritual world to see life on the other side. Most of his theological writings are based on what he saw and heard there. For Swedenborg, "life after death," was not a belief; it was an experience.

Many people in modern times have had such experiences and have written about them. Here is an excerpt of a modern near-death experience:

As I came to be in the light there was a presence of someone with me. I did not consciously know who this was, but I trusted this presence completely. I remember seeing hundreds of people welcoming me back, like they were glad to see me. I don't remember knowing any of them, and yet somehow I knew them all. I was told that I must go to meet someone who was waiting for me. As I was in the presence of this one I was to meet, the light became so bright that I thought that this light should hurt my eyes and yet it did not. From my perspective at the time, this being was the Father I had been taught about in heaven. He held out his arms, and I went to him so naturally and was held by him.

I remember feeling small and completely in awe of the beauty of this pure love I was being surrounded by. We had much conversation without saying any words.

Many years ago, I had an experienced that I think of as a "near" "near-death experience." I had gone to the ER for a blood infection that was continuing to spread, despite antibiotics. It seemed that I was alone in a small room a very long time, waiting for treatment. I felt myself floating. I seemed to be with a Presence who knew me completely and loved me totally. I didn't have to explain anything about who I was; I was known better than I knew myself. What was most profound, is that I was completely loved. Not only was I known; I was loved. There was no hint of judgment or disapproval; just pure Knowing, Loving, and Accepting.

I felt I could choose whether or not to return. There was so much more that I wanted to do; I asked to return. Just at that moment a doctor came into the room with an IV. I've been told I was not medically near death at that time. But I am convinced since that day that I know what I will experience after death. I will again be with this Being who both knows me and loves me far more deeply than I can know and love myself.

Now, when someone I know passes into the spirit world, I think of those few moments of heavenly bliss I had. I know that they are now living in that bliss. That is Dorothea's new home.

As we continue to move through Lent, we'll ponder what death means; and what resurrection means. Dorothea's passing in Lent is an occasion to be aware of how death On her last night, a children's choir from her local church came to visit her, and sang *Arise, for your Light Has Come*. She seemed to enjoy the music. At its end, he took her last breath. She knew it was time to arise; her light had come.

If you didn't know Dorothea, you can learn more about her in the obituary on the home page and in the discussion forum. Whether you knew her or not, you have friends and family who have passed into the spirit world. Sometimes, like Dorothea, they pass peacefully after a long and productive life. Other times, there is a tragic accident or illness that takes them from us without warning. Whatever the circumstances of the people you have loved who have passed into spirit, take a moment to think of them living in a place where they are completely known and completely loved.

I'm going to close with a meditation from Dorothea's book, *The Holy Center*. It is based on the Bible passage above.

Visualize the clear, golden olive oil, pure oil of love, of joy, of healing, of anointing priests and kings, giving its light in that part of life that you can see, that part which is separated only by a veil from the reality of Love itself in all its power. Rest for a moment in the joy of being in the light of Love itself. Feel the warmth and the power of that light, pouring down upon you, surrounding you with good. ...

Lord, thank you that your Love is so close to us, your Love so amazing, so real I cannot imagine, much less see it; there every moment, in all the power that makes the universe, coming in goodness unto me. Thank you, Lord. Amen. [p 34-35].

Our closing song is about how Dorothea lived her life.



Prayers and Promises

March 7, 2010

READINGS

From the



Bible:

Luke 13:1-9

13At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? 3No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. 4Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

6Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. 7So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' 8He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. 9If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

From Swedenborg:

Apocalypse Revealed (Whitehead) n. 650

650. Verse 19. And the angel sent his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vineyard of the earth, signifies the end of the present Christian church. By "sending his sickle and gathering," the like is signified as by "sending his sickle and reaping," but the latter is said of a harvest and the former of a vineyard.

That "to gather" is to take down the vine and gather the grapes, and that "to reap" signifies to cut down the harvest and gather the corn, is evident. That "a vineyard" signifies the church where the Word is, by which the Lord is known, thus here the Christian church, may appear from the following passages:

Jesus said, I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without Me ye can do nothing. If anyone abide not in Me, he is cast forth, and is as a dried branch in the fire (John 15:5-6).

Jesus likened the kingdom of the heavens to a householder, who brought laborers into his vineyard (Matt. 20:1, 8).

Of the sons who were to labor in the vineyard (Matt. 21:28).

Of the fig tree planted in the vineyard which bore no fruit (Luke 13:6-9).

Jesus spoke a parable; a man planted a vineyard, and encompassed it with a hedge, and let it out to husbandmen, that he might receive the fruits of it, but they slew the servants sent to them, and at last the son (Matt. 21:33-39; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 20:9-16).



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

I will sing a song of my beloved concerning his vineyard. My well-beloved hath a vineyard which he fenced about, and planted with a noble vine (Isa. 5:1-2 seq.).
In that day answer ye unto her, a vineyard of unmixed wine; I, Jehovah, do keep it; I will water it every moment (Isa. 27:2-3).
Many shepherds have destroyed My vineyard; they have placed it in a solitude (Jer. 12:10-11).
Jehovah cometh into judgment with the elders, for you have kindled the vineyard (Isa. 3:14).
In all vineyards there is wailing (Amos 5:17).
In the vineyards there is no singing, neither is there shouting (Isa. 16:10).

MESSAGE

Prayers and Promises

Have you ever made a promise to God? Have you promised God that you would do something in exchange for a prayer being answered? If your prayer was answered, how do you live with that promise you made? Did you expect God to punish you if you broke a promise?

I'm going to talk about two fictional characters who made promises to God.

The first is Joan of Arcadia. This was a TV series about a sixteen -year old girl who had conversations with God, and tried to live by God's direction. The series was on CBS from September, 2003 to April, 2005. Reruns are currently being aired by the SyFy cable channel. The episodes are available on DVD, and in segments on U-tube.

The title of the series was a play on "Joan of Arc." Arcadia was a fictional "every town," and Joan was an ordinary U.S. teen-ager.

In the pilot episode, God appears to her as a young man. The young man needs to convince Joan that he is God, so he reveals his knowledge of a promise she made when her brother had been injured in an auto accident.



Joan – I intend to give my father a full description and a composite drawing of you, both before dark.

God - Maybe, he'll be too busy looking for creative ways to ground you for mouthing off in French class.

Joan - Are you spying on me?

God- I'm omniscient Joan, comes with the job.

Joan- Ok. So, you're God.

God - Yes

Joan - As in - God.

God - Right.

Joan - Old Testament, Tower of Babel, Burning bush, Ten Commandments - God

God - I come off a little friendlier in the new testament and the Koran but uh, Yeah, same God..

Joan - And, I'm supposed to believe you - because?

God - Because you have a feeling.

Joan - No, I don't. (She turns to walk away)

God - How about you believe me if I agree to over look that promise you didn't keep.

Joan - (she turns back) What promise?

God - Let's see. That you would study hard, stop talking back, clean your room, and even go to church, if I recall, if I let your brother live.

Joan - (after a very long pause) How did you know about that?

God - Omniscient! Look it up.

Joan - So - you let my brother live, and now you're here to collect?

God - No. I don't bargain. That would be cruel.

God - I'm gonna be dropping in on you Joan. Now and then.

Joan - Why?

God - Let's just say I need you to do some errands.

Joan - Why?

God - Do you notice how I'm not answering any of the whys? I want you to get a job, at the Skylight bookstore. It's about 3 bus stops from here. Manager's name is Sammy. Now, He's snippy. It's important you do this pretty soon. Don't ask why.

Joan - And if I say no? Am I gonna burst into flames?

God - (laughing) Where do you people get this stuff? Have I ever made any body burst into flames? Do as I ask. I'll see you around.

Joan's first reaction is one that many of us might have, "Have you come to collect on that promise?" Joan knew she was not fulfilling the promise she had made, and was living with guilt and fear.

"God" is reassuring in saying, "I don't bargain. It would be cruel."

So, then does God punish us for disobedience? Joan asks if she will be burned in a flash if she doesn't do as God wants.

"Where do you people get this stuff?"

So in this fictional scenario, we see a God that does not accept promises as prayer barter, and does not punish disobedience.

The theme of promises to God is central to a powerful motion picture: *The End of The Affair*, based on a novel by Graham Greene.

The novel and the movie focus on Maurice Bendrix, a writer during World War II in London, and Sarah Miles, the wife of an important civil servant. Bendrix and Sarah fall in love and have a passionate affair. When a bomb blasts Bendrix's flat as he is with

Sarah, he is nearly killed. After this, Sarah breaks off the affair with no apparent explanation.

Two years later, through finding her diary, he learns that, when she thought he was dead after the bombing, she made a promise to God not to see him again if God allowed him to live again.

*I knelt down on the floor: I was mad to do such a thing: I never even had to do it as a child – my parents never believed in prayer, any more than I do. I hadn't any idea what to say. Maurice was dead. Extinct. There wasn't such a thing as a soul. Even the half-happiness I gave him was drained out of him like blood. He would never have the chance to be happy again. With anybody I thought: somebody else could have loved him and made him happier than I could, but now he won't have that chance. I knelt and put my head on the bed and wished I could believe. Dear God, I said – why dear, why dear? – make me believe. I can't believe. Make me. I said, I'm a bitch and a fake and I hate myself. I can't do anything of myself. *Make me believe.* I shut my eyes tight, and I pressed my nails into the palms of my hands until I could feel nothing but the pain, and I said, I will believe. Let him be alive, and I *will* believe. Give him a chance. Let him have his happiness. Do this and I'll believe. But that wasn't enough. It doesn't hurt to believe. So I said, I love him and I'll do anything if you'll make him alive. I said very slowly, I'll give him up for ever, only let him be alive with a chance, and I pressed and pressed and I could feel the skin break, and I said, People can love without seeing each other, can't they, they love You all their lives without seeing You, and then he came in at the door, and he was alive, and I thought now the agony of being without him starts, and I wished he was safely back dead again under the door.*

Sarah walked out of Maurice's life, and he thought that she no longer loved him.

They rekindle their love and the affair, only to find that Sarah is diagnosed with a fatal illness.

We find that she had performed a miraculous healing before her death, suggesting God working through her; not punishing her.

Maurice had quite a struggle with God after that event. He was furiously angry at the God he didn't believe in.

I thought, you've failed there, Sarah. One of your prayers at least has not been answered. I have no peace and I have no love, except for you, you. I said to her, I'm a man of hate. But I didn't feel much hatred; I had called other people hysterical, but my own words were overcharged. I could detect their insincerity. What I chiefly felt was less hate than fear. For if this God exists, I thought, and if even you – with your lusts and your adulteries and the timid lies you used to tell – can change like this, we could all be saints by leaping as you leapt, by shutting the eyes and leaping once and for all: if *you* are a saint, it's not so difficult to be a saint. It's something He can demand of any of us, leap. But I won't leap. I sat on my bed and said to God: You've taken her, but You

Today's scripture gives us some ways to understand how God works in our lives.

Jesus refers to two recent horrible events, and points out that the victims were not greater sinners than anyone else, and were not being punished. He admonishes all to work towards repentance, but not because God is a punishing God. Jesus tells the story of a fig tree that is not bearing fruit. The owner of the land wants to cut it down. But the gardener begs for another chance for the fruit tree while he gives it extra fertilizer and water.

In the same way, God is always giving us another chance at our regeneration. Swedenborg tells us that the Lord does not punish us. We ourselves choose our future home after physical death. God is pure love and wisdom flowing into us at all time.

Did God really want promises from Joan or Sarah in exchange for answering prayer? God is always striving to bring our loving prayers into reality – without our bargains. God is always working towards our regeneration; not seeking to bargain promises for prayer.

Have you made promises to God that leave you feeling guilty and fearful of punishment? Perhaps now is a good time to re-examine those and reconsider them in light of your relationship with God. God doesn't need promises from us to answer prayer. God wants us to accept the Divine promises we have been given, in eternal life and the ever-present in flow of the Divine into us at every moment.

You are the fig tree, and the Lord is there to always give you one more chance, and to nourish and nurture your growth gently and lovingly.



Angel Touches

March 14, 2010

Readings

From the Bible:

John 14 (New International Version)

John 14

Jesus Comforts His Disciples

1"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God[a]; trust also in me. 2In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4You know the way to the place where I am going."

**From Swedenborg:
Heaven and Hell**

414. Those that are in heaven are continually advancing toward the spring of life, with a greater advance toward a more joyful and happy spring the more thousands of years they live; and this to eternity, with increase according to the growth and degree of their love, charity, and faith. Women who have died old and worn out with age, if they have lived in faith in the Lord, in charity to the neighbor, and in happy marriage love with a husband, advance with the succession of years more and more into the flower of youth and early womanhood, and into a beauty that transcends every conception of any such beauty as is seen on the earth. Goodness and charity are what give this form and thus manifest their own likeness, causing the joy and beauty of charity to shine forth from every least particular of the face, and causing them to be the very forms of charity. Some who beheld this were struck with amazement. The form of charity that is seen in a living way in heaven, is such that it is charity itself that both forms and is formed; and this in such a manner that the whole angel is a charity, as it were, especially the face; and this is both clearly seen and felt. When this form is beheld it is beauty unspeakable, affecting with charity the very inmost life of the mind. In a word, to grow old in heaven is to grow young. Such forms or such beauties do those become in the other life who have lived in love to the Lord and in charity toward the neighbor. All angels are such forms in endless variety; and of these heaven is constituted



MESSAGE

Angel Touches

The rain stopped before we began dancing around the outside of the church. It was such a grey and dreary day, but the energy was bright as we held hands and danced. I don't recall any other memorial service where the participants formed a long line while dancing through, outside, and around the church to bagpipes playing "Lord of the Dance." But, then, there had never before been a memorial service for the Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey.



I was honored to be able to participate in this special service for an extraordinary person. Everything about the service had Dorothea's touch. To reach the Annisquam Village church, one had to drive through the narrow streets of this old New England coastal town. The church was just down the road from the house where Dorothea had lived; the house her father had built for his family before she was born. The service participants were a delightful blend of life-long friends, Swedenborgian Church friends, and local friends who had come to know her well in her final years when she lived on the coast.

I heard again the amazing story of Dorothea's passing into the next world. The children's choir had gone to her house to sing to her one dreary February evening. Their voices must have sounded like the singing of angels to Dorothea. Her care-takers said that they felt the presence of angels all around. As the last note of "Arise, Shine Your Light Has come" was sung; Dorothea took her final breath and was gone.

She had let go of her earthly body, and allowed the angels to guide her to heaven.

I couldn't help but think about that lovely old TV series, "Touched by an Angel." In it, one of the angels was an "angel of death" who came to transport people to their heavenly home. I think one or more such angels came for Dorothea.



Dorothea's story is extraordinary, because it is so ordinary. Angels are around for all of us every day. Dorothea was more attuned to their presence than most of us are. She was an inspiration for all of us to take the time to hear, feel, and see the angels in our lives.



Revs. Susannah Currie and Carla Friedrich were our chat guests this passed Thursday. They recounted the amazing angel story about the uncovering and restoring of the breath-taking stained glass angel windows in our denomination. Through the music and art below, give yourself an opportunity to experience the love of the angels around you.

Angels have been popular subjects in the arts for throughout history. One special place for Swedenborgians is ["In the Company of Angels."](#) These stained glass windows were put in the New Church in Cincinnati in 1902. That building had to be torn down by eminent domain, so the windows were purchased by the Swedenborgian Church at Temenos. In 2001, they were re-discovered by Rev. Suzanna Currie. With an anonymous donation, they have been beautifully restored.





Springtime Meditation with Swedenborg

March 21, 2010

READINGS

FROM BIBLE:

John 14 & 15

10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. 11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves....

20 On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.

4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

FROM SWEDENBORG

TC 8 There is an inflow from God into us. ...This inflow comes into our souls because the soul is the inmost and highest part of us. The inflow from God reaches that part first and then comes down into the things below and enlivens them, depending on our openness to what flows in.

What is meant by spiritual influx cannot be better seen than by means of the natural influxes which take place and appear in this world-as by the influx of heat from the sun into all things of the earth. H.S. 6190

MESSAGE

It is Spring! For us in the North East, this means the sun's warmth and light will become stronger. The flowers bloom; leaves appear on the trees. The sun's warmth hits your body; the light energizes you. It feels heavenly! Let's take a stroll through the barren grounds, just starting to awaken from winter's slumber, and see what Swedenborg might say about the spring. We can use Swedenborg's own words for meditations on "spring" and "sun."

To Swedenborg, the seasons, the sun, the vegetation of earth all represented God in some way. They all offer an opportunity to reflect on God, as we move towards the end of Lent

Swedenborgian Meditations on Season of Spring

... the four seasons of the year called, spring, summer, autumn and winter, the four periods of the day called morning, noon, evening and night, the four ages of man called infancy, youth, manhood and old age, and all other things which either come into existence from time or have a succession in accordance with time. In thinking of these, a man thinks from time but an angel from state. In consequence, what is in them from time with a man is, with the angels, turned into an idea of state. Spring and morning are turned into an idea of the state of love and wisdom such as they are in their first state with angels ...

How are you awakening in your life on this first day of spring?

Those who are in heaven are continually advancing towards the spring of life, with a greater advance towards a more joyful and happy spring the more thousands of years they live; and this to eternity, with increase according to the growth and degree of their love, charity, and faith.

You can live in heaven while you also live on the earth. Think of yourself growing younger inside while your body ages. How can you make this spring one of joy and happiness?

Moreover, because a life contrary to charity is to charity as winter to spring in frigid zones, these are not regenerated, but only one who is like winter compared to spring in temperate zones, and so forth.

How do your acts of charity in your life awaken you to springtime?

Take one or more of these questions – or one of your own – into meditation with this video:

Swedenborgian Meditation on The Sun

The Lord from eternity, or Jehovah, produced from Himself the sun of the spiritual world, and out of it created the universe and all of its constituents.

The sun is the source of all creation. How can it help you connect with your Creator?

The sun is not God. Rather, it is an emanation from the divine love and wisdom of the Divine-Human One. The same is true of warmth and light from that sun. It is obvious from actual experience that love generates warmth and wisdom generates light. When we feel love, we become warmer, and when we think from wisdom, it is like seeing things in the light... We can also see that these are correspondences, since the warmth does not occur within the love itself but as a result of it ... The light does not occur within the wisdom, but in thinking of our discernment and therefore in our speaking.

Can you picture your love flowing outside of you and providing warmth to others? Can you imagine your wisdom flowing into the world and providing light to people in darkness? As you do this, the warmth and light you give are correspondences for your love and wisdom.

Take one or more of these questions – or one of your own – into this meditation on the sun:



Palms to Prayers

March 28, 2010

READINGS

From the Bible:

Luke 19

36As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 37As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, 38saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" 39Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." 40He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Luke 22

39He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. 40When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." 41Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, 42"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." 43Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. 44In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. 45When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, 46and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial."

From Swedenborg:

6] By the disciples putting their garments on the ass and her colt, was represented that truths in the whole complex were submitted to the Lord as the Highest Judge and King; for the disciples represented the church of the Lord in respect to its truths and goods (n. 2129, 3488, 3858, 6397), and their garments represented the truths themselves (n. 4545, 4763, 5319, 5954, 6914, 6917, 9093) The like was represented by the multitude strewing their garments in the way, and also branches of trees. The reason why they strewed them in the way was that by "a way" is signified the truth whereby the man of the church is led (n. 627, 2333, 3477). The reason why they strewed branches of trees, was that trees signified the perceptions and also the knowledges of truth and good (n. 2682, 2722, 2972, 4552, 7692), consequently "the branches" denote the truths themselves. This was done also in conformity with a customary rite; for when the highest judges and kings rode in their solemn procession, the princes of the people then put their garments on the asses and mules, and the people themselves strewed their garments on the way, or in their place the branches of trees; for the judicial function in heaven is the Divine truth from the Divine good, and the regal one is the Divine truth (n. 1728, 2015, 2069, 3009, 4581, 4966, 5044, 5068, 6148). AC 9212

It is a fundamental error on the part of the Christian Church to believe that the passion on the cross was the real act of redemption. That error, together with the erroneous belief in three divine persons existing from eternity, has so corrupted the whole Christian Church that there is not a scrap of spirituality left in it.
TC #132

MESSAGE

Palms to Prayer

It can be difficult to select a theme for a Palm Sunday message. If one goes to the Common Lectionary “Texts for this Week,” one has a choice of the Liturgy of the Palms or the Liturgy of the Passion. You can focus on the joy of the journey into Jerusalem or on the pain and agony of Jesus on the cross. In our readings today, I have included one passage from each liturgy. I’d like to focus on the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane; a pivotal point that turned the week starting with palms into one ending with pain and passion.

Holy Week is a long journey through many stages. Swedenborg’s process of regeneration is a long road, with much struggle, before one reaches “union.” In many ways, Holy Week is a condensed version of that journey. When you make the decision that you want to walk a spiritual path, then you are also deciding to walk through all of the bumps and pot holes in the road.

Often, our first sense of God is a glimpse of something beautiful and peaceful calling to us. To respond to the call feels joyous and liberating. At the beginning, there is excitement about beginning a new journey. There are so many hopes and dreams that lie ahead. Following God’s will is easy on Palm Sunday; riding a donkey into a cheering crowd! It’s like romantic love early in a relationship. It’s easy to make a commitment in the midst of romance. It’s harder to maintain the commitment through the years ahead filled with conflicts and compromises. Yet, it is in working through the conflicts that a much deeper mature love can blossom many years later.

In the true movie “Erin Brockovich”, Erin was excited about starting a new job in a law office. Yet, after that decision was made, it was almost inevitable that she would hear and see things that led her deeply into exposing a corporate cover-up. It started as an easy decision and then moved through some very difficult times before the ending of resolution.

By following the road into Jerusalem, Jesus has an intense week. He attends a Passover supper with his disciples, at which one of them betrays him. He goes to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, where he is arrested and crucified.

I want to focus on the difference between the ride into Jerusalem and the time spent in prayer in the garden. It was easy to follow God’s will while palms were waving. Now it is hard, and Jesus goes into deep prayer:

“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.”

The path strewn with palms led into the Garden of Gethsemane. How many times have you prayed for God to rescue you from something you know you have to do? That part of the prayer is easy. It is very difficult to end it the way Jesus does:

“Not my will, but thine be done.”

This is the most important part of the prayer. We live in an era when many people try to “create their own reality” by focusing on the things they want, and trying to bring them into their lives. However, this is often done by focusing on what the ego wants – not on checking out God’s will.

We often pray for something specific: a new job, a satisfying relationship, good health. How often do we ask God what God’s will is for us? So often today, our prayers are telling God what we want God to do for us.

In the garden, Jesus asks for what he wants, but he emphasizes that he wants God will to be done. This is a very difficult thing to ask; for sometimes God’s will can be hard.

When the Lord was being emptied out he was in a state of progress toward union; when he was being glorified he was in a state of union itself. The church recognizes that the Lord had two states while he was in the world; one called being emptied out; the other called glorification....TC 104

...The reason why the Lord experienced these two states, the state of being emptied out and the state of being glorified is that no other method of achieving union could possibly exist. Only this method follows the divine design, and the divine design cannot be changed.

The divine design is that we arrange ourselves for receiving God and prepare ourselves as a vessel and a dwelling place where God can enter and live as if we were his own temple. ... This is the divine design we follow, and have to follow, to go from being earthly to being spiritual. The Lord had to go through the same process to make his earthly human manifestation divine. This is why he prayed to the Father. This is why he did the Father's will. This is why he attributed everything he did and said to the Father. This is why he said on the cross "My God, my God, why have abandoned me?" ...In this state God appears to be absent. TC 105

Swedenborg is using his own words to describe a spiritual process that is found in many world traditions. Our spiritual path is leading us to recognize our union with the Divine. To get to this partnership, we must be tempted and challenged to the point where our old ego dies; making room for God's complete oneness with us.

John of the Cross says that we must go through a "dark night of the soul" so that God can remove any barriers that keep us from union with the Divine.

This is what was happening for Jesus in the garden. Swedenborg tells us that in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was letting go of his old ego needs and desires. On the cross, Jesus completed the emptying of the ego, and came into union with God. Swedenborg calls this the glorification of Jesus. This is a process each of us must undergo on our soul's journey to God.

What barriers stand between you and God? Where do you need to empty yourself so that God's influx can fill you?

During this Holy Week, think of yourself as letting go of all inner barriers, so that on Easter Sunday you can be completely open to receiving God's joyful gift of love.

During this week, be open to any of the feelings that are present for you. It is a week of celebration, of fellowship, of betrayal, and of painful ego death. Our Thursday chat will be an opportunity to share the experience of Maundy Thursday.

Let yourself have all of those feelings during the week. But don't forget to come back next Sunday, when we will celebrate the glorious union with God that awaits us all.

The Resurrection Hologram

April 4, 2010

READINGS

1After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

2There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

5The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 7Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

8So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. 10Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

from Swedenborg

Suffering on the cross was the final trial the Lord underwent as the greatest prophet. It was a means of glorifying his human nature, that is, of uniting that to his Father's divine nature. It was not redemption TC 114:6

MESSAGE

THE RESURRECTION HOLOGRAM

Psychologist Carl Jung felt he had a quest to find the deep truths of existence, and his dreams led him to the ancient tradition of alchemy. Alchemy was based on the premise that ordinary lead could be transmuted into gold, if the right formula could be found.

Jung felt that alchemy was actually about changing the lead of ordinary experience into the gold of the mystical union with God.

Evelyn Underhill and other mystical scholars tell us that many alchemists were on a spiritual quest to find union with the Divine. They were trying to find an integration of matter and spirit.

Many images of the alchemists were based on Christian symbols of the Cosmic Christ – the union of human and divine. Most alchemists saw seven stages, ending in union with the divine.

Swedenborg, too, had seven stages of regeneration leading to union. This 7th stage was demonstrated by the resurrection. For Swedenborg, the resurrection was about union of humanity and divinity

Jesus spent his life living in times of “emptying”, when his human ego needed to be let go, and times of “glorification” – or union with the divine. The cross was the final emptying of his ego state when he felt abandoned by God. If you are abandoned by someone, then there are two of you – one does the abandoning of the other. When you become one, there can be no abandonment; only union.



Dr. Bob Kirven says that Swedenborg had a unique understanding of how the divine and human nature intersected. Swedenborg said that spirit and matter were both real, both different, and both the same! They are “distinguishably one.”

Swedenborg saw separate levels of reality connected by relationships called “correspondences.” All of existence begins with the pure divine, and flows downward – into the heavens, into humans on earth and the animals and plants of the earth. This pure divine keeps flowing down. If we take the very smallest possible thing that exists, even it corresponds to the divine. Everything corresponds to higher levels. That is how both matter and spirit are both real; through correspondence they are all the same.

That is how there is union between humanity and divinity. Swedenborg called it the “Divine human” or the “God-man”. And that is what Easter is all about: showing us the union between human and divine that unite us.

This is one part of Swedenborg’s concept of Easter: the union of humanity and divinity.

Another part of Swedenborg’s Easter can best be understood through the new physics concept of a hologram.

Physicist Michael Talbot wrote: “If Emanuel Swedenborg were alive today, it is likely that he would find many aspects of the new physics compatible with his own thought.” And he wrote: “perhaps the most astonishing foreshadowing of new-physics ideas in Swedenborg’s writings are the similarities between his world view and a revolutionary new way of looking at nature known as the ‘holographic paradigm.’”

In an older, Newtonian model, we might take apart things in the world to see all their different parts. But from a holographic perspective, if we take things apart and get down to the smallest elements, we find the whole existing in the every part. Or we find the divine in everything.

Every part of a hologram contains the whole. Jesus was a correspondence of God – and we all are. God was not present in Jesus as something unique in existence, but rather in all of us.

Holography shows a process over time. Jesus was in a process between two states of being. In his human state on the cross, he felt abandoned by God. But this was followed by the state of union. “After this state comes a second one, the state of being in a partnership with God. In this second state, we do basically the same things, but now we do them with God. We no longer need to attribute to God everything good that we intend and do and everything true that we think and say in the same way as we used to, because now this acknowledgment is written on our heart. It is inside everything we do and everything we say. In this same way, ... The Lord glorified his human nature [meaning that he made it divine], in the same way that he regenerates us [meaning that he makes us spiritual].”

George Dole says, “I see the holographic model as implicit in his [Swedenborg’s] Christology. In his view, it is intrinsic to the divine nature to be wholly present in every part of creation, and especially clearly in human beings.”

Dole says this helps us understand the resurrection. “It is wholly characteristic of the divine to be wholly present in every part of creation all the time.”

The Easter story is about how human and divine became one. It is about the divine being in the smallest pieces of existence. It is about God being written on our hearts. How do we live with God written on our hearts?

The first thing we notice is that God changed. The God that existed when Jesus came into the world was not the same God after human and divine became one. It's like a human commitment between two people: they are each individual people. Yet in a commitment to each other, a new entity is formed: the relationship of the two of them.

God continues to change as we change. God changes us and we change God. We all change each other. That makes everything we do everyday extremely important, for we are impacting the entire holographic universe with every thought and action.

Swedenborg says that the resurrection shows that we live in partnership with God. What is this partnership? If we ask our partner: "what is Your will for me?", our partner might respond: "what are you deepest loves? Those are my will for you."

This partnership is relational.

How seriously can we take this Easter message that human and divine are one? We are part of God and God is in us. Do we allow God to be a partner in our lives? So often, we either put god out by the sides to be ignored, or we pray for God to tell us what to do. If we really believe there is a partnership, how would our prayer life change? How would our concept of God change? How do we bring God into the smallest, everyday acts of our day?

How can prayer become a dialog between partners? There is no one answer to that question, but perhaps we are each called to find our own answer. We each must figure out what this partnership with God is all about.

Easter reminds us that the Lord's humanity and divinity are one; we are all part of the Divine human.

It also reminds us that we live in a holographic universe in which the divine is in the smallest of things. This divine is both permanent and changing. God changes as we change. Everything we do impacts everyone else.

What could be more sacred and joyful? We can never cease to exist because we are united with God. As the God-Human, we are always growing and changing. We have eternity in which to explore all that we can be in this universal hologram. Easter is a great day to begin to explore your unique eternal place in the universal hologram.

Living in a Hologram

April 11, 2010

READINGS

From the Bible

John 20:19-31

19When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 24But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

26A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." 30Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

FROM SWEDENBORG:

I have seen palaces in heaven that were so splendid as to be beyond description. Their upper stories shone as though they were made of pure gold, and their lower ones as though they were made of precious gems. Each palace seemed more splendid than the last. It was the same inside. The rooms were graced with such lovely adornments that neither words nor the arts and sciences are adequate to describe them. On the side that faced south there were parklands where everything sparkled in the same way, here and there the leaves like silver and the fruits like gold, with the flowers in their beds making virtual rainbows with their colors. On the horizon of sight there were other palaces that framed the scene. The architecture of heaven is like this, so that you might call it the very essence of the art--and small wonder, since the art itself does come to us from heaven.

Angels tell me that things like this and countless others even more perfect are presented to their view by the Lord; but that such sights actually delight their minds more than their eyes because they see correspondences in the details, and through their correspondences they see things divine. (Heaven and Hell #185)

MESSAGE

***To see the world in a grain of Sand
The universe in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the Palm of your Hand
And eternity in an Hour***



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

George Dole says that that verse by William Blake seems to reflect this statement from Swedenborg:

The Divine is the same in the greatest and the smallest things.

[DLW, 77]

Dole was thinking about this concept when he started reading Karl Pribram and David Bohm. They said that the new physics showed the universe to be a hologram. Dole wrote,

The result of all this is that I am coming to see Swedenborg's theology different than I did before. I am coming to see it composed of a central holographic concept ...

[Sorting Things Out, 77]

New physics talks about how the universe consists of both particles and waves. The particles are the solid matter of the world that we can touch. The waves are energies that can't be seen or touched. Dole sees the waves as Swedenborg's "inflow." We have inflows that come to us internally and some externally. Our conscious self is at the center – at the interference of the two waves. This is basically how one makes a hologram – a flow from a single source is divided into direct and indirect flows. They meet in an interference pattern. That means that the whole universe is in every grain of sand – and in every cell of our bodies.

What does that mean for my life and your life? Dole writes:

Perhaps the central ethical import of the Swedenborgian of the holographic model is to point to the possibility of moving beyond the need to define ourselves by excluding others, which for me gives a particular clarity to the injunction that I love my neighbor as myself.

So, what would this look like in real life? What is it like to live a life of uses, of seeing one's self as part of the wholeness of the world? I'd like to suggest Daniel Burnham as a possible example.

I'm so grateful to the Swedenborg Library for giving me an opportunity to learn much more about Burnham's incredible life and his impact on the world this past week.

Daniel was born in Henderson, N.Y. into an active Swedenborgian family. They moved to Chicago when Daniel was seven. He had hopes of going to Harvard or Yale, but failed both entrance exams. While doing assorted jobs, he discovered a passion for

architecture. He became one of the nation's greatest architects during his lifetime.



Masonic Temple Building in Chicago

Burnham was involved in designing many innovative buildings in Chicago. He also helped to plan and build in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and the Philippines.

He may be best known for the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. The fair was spectacular success, and Burnham became well-known around the world. The Parliament of World Religions was also held in conjunction with the fair, under the leadership of another Swedenborgian, Charles Bonney.

Court of Honor and Grand Basin — World's Columbian Exposition



Towards the end of his life, he was commissioned to develop a plan for Chicago. He put together a breath-taking vision of a city that was the use of its citizens. He presented his plan in 1909, and much of the plan was put into effect after his death. This past year, Chicago held a year-long centennial in honor of Burnham and his plan for Chicago.

What made Burnham such a strong example of living by a Swedenborgian holographic concept in the oneness of all things?

Burnham said that his work was inspired by Swedenborg's concept of "uses." He believed that a city or a building should exist for improving the quality of life of people. In Chicago, he saw that the property along the shore of Lake Michigan was being purchased for private enjoyment or by business for industrial gain. He believed that the

water and the land belonged to everyone. He fought tirelessly to get the shores into the hands of a commission that made it all into beautiful parks for the enjoyment of all. One can now drive for miles along Lake Shore drive with an unobstructed view of the water, and enjoy beautiful public parks. Burnham knew that many people experienced the divine in nature, and he believed that a city -- and a building -- should have a lot of open space and light. He put many parks in the cities that he designed.

Most of the work he did for cities was done without a fee.

One researcher, Dr. Kristen Schaffer has discovered that Burnham's original draft of the Chicago Plan contained a radical social agenda in addition to a physical lay-out of the city. Burnham had wanted a city filled with social services to alleviate hunger and homelessness -- and even to provide day care for the children of working parents. What happened to that part of the plan? It somehow disappeared from the final version of the Chicago Plan. It has yet to be implemented.

Burnham radically changed the lives of countless generations of people in Chicago, D.C., the Philippines, and many other places. He has given many of us an opportunity to experience the Divine in even a grain of sand along the shore of Lake Michigan.

Burnham never did well in school, and he flunked college entrance exams. Yet he found his deepest passion in life, and he followed it. He followed it in a way that allowed thousands of people to experience the divine flow in their buildings, their parks, and their cities.

Every moment of each human life is another opportunity to bring the love and wisdom of uses into the lives of others. It really is the only way of life that makes sense when you consider that I am part of you and you are part of me. By improving the life of one person, we improve life for all.



Honoring God's Earth Day

April 18, 2010

READINGS

From the Bible

"You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it. You drench its furrows and level its ridges; you soften it with showers and bless its crops. You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance. The grasslands of the desert overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness. The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing." (Psalm 65:9-13)

FROM SWEDENBORG:

Apocalypse Revealed (Rogers) n. 290

290. And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying. (5:13) This symbolizes a confession and glorification of the Lord by angels of the lowest heavens.

That it is a confession and glorification of the Lord by angels of the lowest heavens is apparent from the series, because the preceding confessions and glorifications of the Lord were made by angels of the higher and lower heavens (nos. 275ff., 286ff.). For there are three heavens, and in each countless societies, every one of which is called a heaven.

It is apparent that angels are meant by every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and in the sea, for we are told, "I heard (them) saying," and they said "Blessing and honor and glory and strength be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!"

The Divine is the largest and the smallest of things.

MESSAGE



It was May 1st, 1893: Opening day of the Columbian Exposition. It was to be the most elaborate world's fair ever, and hosted by Chicago. As the gates opened, people streamed in, taking advantage of the free admission for this day. There had been a lot of press about how far behind the building had been, and people weren't sure what to expect. There were gasps of amazement as the crowds took in the first sweeping glance of the 640 acre fair. An entire city had been created in Jackson Park! It was a city filled with the scents of flowers instead of the stench of the stock yard. The streets were clear; not filled with garbage. The buildings were aesthetically pleasing, and served useful purposes. The water was clean; the food was plentiful.

It offered a new vision of what kind of community could exist in a city. It became the start of city planning and landscaping, it was a statement about the integration of the environment and social justice. Swedenborgian Daniel Burnham was the primary architect behind the "White City." The city inspired Burnham's Plan of Chicago about 15 years later.

This past year, Chicago has had a centennial celebration of their 1909 Plan of Chicago. Many Chicagoans learned for the first time that Burnham had been raised in an active Swedenborgian home, and that he felt his religion inspired his work. He wanted the plan of Chicago to reflect Swedenborg's concept of heaven on earth: the New Jerusalem.

Researcher Dr. Kristen Schaeffer has discovered that Burnham's draft of the plan contained many ideas about the New Jerusalem that were taken out before the final version. I'm fascinated by this, and have been exploring digital versions of his drafts to try and learn more. I don't know if this section is one that Schaeffer was referring to, but I find it fascinating in terms of Burnham's Swedenborgian faith:

It is only within comparatively recent times that people have begun to realize the imperative need of organizing the forces of honesty and decency, for better physical conditions, for broader charities, for the prevention as well as the cure of evils. Slowly it is beginning to dawn on the American mind that the rights of the individual must be subordinated to the general good, that the price of civilization is provision for the health and happiness of all the people, and that the really prosperous city is one that education and morality, by inculcating high ideals, unite all the people in the common endeavor to make their city preeminent.

In this newly-awakened civic consciousness lies the hope of the regeneration of the American city. The merely animal growth will no longer suffice. Pride in mere numbers or area is seen to be unworthy. The newer ideals comprehend good order and convenience and even beauty. In short, the city is developing within itself a soul.

In such a spirit, this report is conceived.

It is also in such a spirit that we can see the deeper meaning in Earth Day. How? Look again at the Swedenborgian readings for today, and this crucial statement of Swedenborg's:

The Divine is in the largest and the smallest of things.

This gives us a complete theological understanding of Earth Day. God is not just in humans, but in all animals. God is not just in animals, but in plants. God is not just in plants, but in rocks. Everything that is in our world contains the Divine. To ignore the needs of our earth and our vegetation ignores God.

Daniel Burnham grew up with that concept embedded deep into his soul. He knew that people had to have parks in their city, because they could experience God in the parks. He knew that the shores of Lake Michigan needed to be available to all people, because those shores contained God – and God belongs to everyone.

Burnham knew that God's plan for us was not just heaven after we die, but heaven right here and now in our cities. The health and happiness of all people – and all of nature – is in that plan.

Another Swedenborgian of the past for whom the earth was sacred is Johnny Appleseed. When he distributed apple seeds to pioneers, he was giving them a piece of the Divine to plant in their soil. He also left them the writings of Swedenborg so that they could understand that the divine is in the largest and smallest of things.

This is an important week, as the world celebrates Earth Day on Thursday. Take time this week to reflect on the reality that God is within everything that exists. When we care for the earth, we honor God.

Find one useful thing you can do this week to honor the earth. Remind yourself, that in doing so, you worship the Lord.

God's Earth in Art

April 25, 2010

READINGS

BIBLE: Genesis I

27. And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. 28. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the heavens, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth.

SWEDENBORG

The Divine is the same in the greatest and the smallest things. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* n.77)

So long as man is spiritual, his dominion proceeds from the external man to the internal .. But when he becomes celestial, and does good from love, then his dominion proceeds from the internal man to the external... [*Heavenly Secrets*, #2]

The Divine fills all space of the universe w/o being bound by space. [*Divine Love and Wisdom*, #69]

MESSAGE

How was Earth Day for you this past week? If you honored the earth, then you were living the theology of Emanuel Swedenborg, who saw the Divine in all of creation.

Let's explore this concept of Swedenborg's as expressed in the paintings of artist George Inness [1825-1894].

He was born in Newburgh, New York, in 1825; the 5th of 13 children. His father was a successful grocer, who encouraged George in that direction. However, George apprenticed himself to painters and in time became known as one of the Hudson River painters. His art was exhibited at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, as an expression of a purely American art form.

He was raised in a family that included a Baptist, a Methodist, and a Universalist. He became Swedenborgian in 1860 at the age of forty. He was introduced to Swedenborgianism by a fellow painter, William Page. From then on, he attempted to convey Swedenborgian theology in his painting.

He particularly wanted to express the sacred nature of the earth.

Inness termed his work "civilized landscapes" and tried to paint an integration of humanity and nature. He saw God as ever-changing, and wanted to express this concept in his paintings.

Because of this, he never saw his painting as “finished.”

As his son wrote:

My father had the idea firmly established in his mind that a work of art from his brush always remained his property, and that he had the right to paint it over or change it at will, no matter where he found it or who had bought it, or what money he may have received for it. Wherever he found his pictures after they had left his studio he criticized, and would in most violent language declare the thing was "rot," that the sky was false or the distance out of key, and in a very matter of fact way would say "Just send it around to the studio to-morrow and I'll put it into shape.'

If the owner of the painting objected that he liked it just as it was, Inness would say,

it makes no difference what you like; I say the thing is false.... And I want you to understand, sir that I claim the right to go into any house and change a work of mine when I am not satisfied with it, and see where I can improve it. And he said, "Do you think, because you have paid money for a picture of mine, that it belongs to you?"

He also wrote: *I have changed from the time I commenced [painting] because I had never completed my art and as I do not care about being a cake I shall remain dough subject to any impression which I am satisfied comes from the region of truth.*

He saw God as the invisible force in nature: *"the paramount difficulty with the artist is to bring his intellect to submit to the fact that there is such a thing as the indefinable," ... "God is always hidden, and beauty depends upon the unseen--the visible upon the invisible.*

He wanted his paintings to show divine influx, and wrote:

"The true end of Art is not to imitate a fixed material condition, but to represent a living motion," and "The intelligence to be conveyed by it is not of an outer fact, but of an inner life." The greatness of art is not in the display of knowledge, or in material accuracy, but in the distinctness with which it conveys the impressions of a personal vital force, that acts spontaneously, without fear or hesitation.'

Wilson Van Dusen writes that all of his life he has felt people trying to separate mysticism [the direct experience of God] and art. Yet, to him, they are the same thing. He says that art and mysticism both lead us to our center. Both are a time when the earth's false dualisms fade away, and we feel the joy of being united with the Divine.

Van Dusen writes: *'Were I to have the task of training mystics, I would use the way of art appreciation as the easiest and most pleasant entrance into the field.'*

Can art be, for you, a way to connect with God?

Follow [THIS LINK](#) to a slide show of paintings by George Inness with music by Rev. Ken and Laurie Turley. See if this slide show can be, for you, a connection with the Divine.

May Day and Mother Jones

May 2, 2010

READINGS

BIBLE:

Matthew 5 (New International Version)

The Beatitudes

¹Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ²and he began to teach them saying:

³"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

⁵Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

⁷Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

⁸Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

⁹Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.

¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Salt and Light

¹³"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

¹⁴"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

SWEDENBORG

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 6819



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

6819. But not only is man in the singular the neighbor, but also man in the plural. For a society, smaller or greater, is the neighbor; our country is the neighbor; the church is the neighbor; the Lord's kingdom is the neighbor; and so above all is the Lord. All these are the neighbor who is to be benefited from charity. These also are ascending degrees of the neighbor; for a society of many is the neighbor in a higher degree than is an individual man; our country in a higher degree than a society; in a still higher degree the church; and in a still higher degree the Lord's kingdom; but in the highest degree the Lord is the neighbor. These ascending degrees are like the steps of a ladder, at the top of which is the Lord.

MESSAGE

MOTHER JONES AND MAY DAY

Happy May Day week-end! Did you know that yesterday was May Day? Did that have any particular meaning for you? It is a day that has been celebrated for a variety of reasons for many generations.

When I was a girl in Illinois, we gave May Day baskets to our friends. The idea was to put a basket of flowers and candy on someone's doorstep, ring the bell, and then run away before they could see you.

FLOWERS

This tradition probably goes back to the pagan roots of May Day. For the Druids of the British Isles, May 1 was the festival of Beltane; one of the most important festivals of the year. A common May Day custom was lighting a new fire, to encourage the return of the sun.

When Romans occupied the British Isles, they used May 1st to worship Flora, the goddess of flowers. They had a five day celebration, and gradually the rituals of the Floralia were added to those of the Beltane. And many of today's customs on May Day are similar to those combined traditions.

MAYPOLE

In the Middle Ages, every English village had a May pole. This probably originated in German paganism as a fertility rite. People would dance around a live tree. Over time, two types of pole dancing emerged: dancing in a circle around a tall pole, and holding ribbons on a smaller pole, and intertwining them into some pattern. A folk dance, the Morris Dance evolved in England and is often performed on May Day.

INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' DAY

Throughout the world, many people honor May Day as a time to honor labor and trade unions. It is called International Workers' day in many places. This is because of what happened in Chicago on May 1st, 1886. Labor unions called a strike for the eight-hour work day. After two days of striking, a fight broke out between workers and police, and the police killed two workers. So on May 4th, there was a huge protest rally at Haymarket Square; claiming the police had murdered workers. Thousands of people were there, and someone threw a bomb at the police, killing one. The police began shooting into the crowd, killing 11 more people.

Many of the wounded were afraid they would be arrested if they tried to get medical attention. A controversial trial of sorts followed, in which 8 were tried for their political beliefs. Eventually 4 anarchists were hanged. Around the world, people were outraged about the Haymarket incident.

This period in the history of Chicago was quite fascinating. We have already talked about the Swedenborgian architect Daniel Burnham who was an up and coming architect in Chicago. Seven years after Haymarket, the Chicago Worlds' Fair would open.

Burnham can be seen as an example of a person whose highest value in life was to be of use. He is an example of a Swedenborgian who fully lived his faith.

Today I want to talk about another person during this period. This was not a Swedenborgian, but she shared Burnham's passion for using one's life to make a better world. She did it in a different way.

MOTHER JONES

Mary Harris was born in Ireland in 1837. She came from a family of social agitators, and her father may have had to flee the country to escape death from the British. In any case, the family came to Canada when Mary was 4 years old.

Mary went to school in Toronto, and graduated from the normal school in 1854 at the age of 17. She taught briefly, and then moved to Chicago to be a dressmaker. She then moved to Tennessee to teach. She met and married George Jones, an activist in the Molders' Union. They traveled together, doing union organizing.

Mary and George were happy, and had 4 children. But tragedy struck in 1867, when her husband and all the children died in a yellow fever epidemic, within a week of each other. She returned alone to Chicago to again be a dressmaker. But only 3 years later, in 1871, she lost everything in the Chicago fire.

This woman lost her entire family, and then all of her possessions. Yet, instead of becoming discouraged, she considered what it was like for her to work in the homes of the rich:

"Often while sewing for lords and barons who lived in magnificent houses on the Lake Shore Drive, I would look out of the plate glass windows and see the poor, shivering wretches, jobless and hungry, walking alongside the frozen lake front.... The contrast of their condition with that of the tropical comfort of the people for whom I sewed was painful to me. My employers seemed neither to notice nor to care."

After the great fire, Mary began to attend meetings of the newly formed Knights of Labor, and her deepest passions were struck. She continued to work as a dressmaker while she did volunteer organizing. She traveled around the country, living in tents with the workers. There is a story that during a strike, a miner had his head bashed in. She held his head as he died, and he called out to her as "mother." After that, she became Mother Jones.

When asked about where she lived, she said:

"My address is like my shoes. It travels with me. I abide where there is a fight against wrong."

The May Day riots became so important to her, that she arbitrarily changed her birth day to Mary 1st. And to add to her "grandmotherly" image, she added 7 years to the date she was born.

Mother Jones' welcomed African American workers and involved women and children in strikes. She staged parades with children carrying signs that read, "We Want to Go to School and Not to the Mines."

She would say to people: "I'm not a humanitarian. I'm a hell-raiser!" Once a preacher criticized Mary for holding a union meeting in "a house of God." She said:

"Oh, that isn't God's house. That is the coal company's house. ... God almighty never comes around to a place like this."

Although Mary was raised Catholic, she felt the organized church had abandoned the revolutionary values of Jesus; a position similar to Swedenborg's. She often spoke of Jesus as an organizer of the poor, saying he chose to die rather than betray the poor.

In 1903, to dramatize the need to abolish child labor, she led a caravan of striking children from the textile mills of Kensington, Pennsylvania, to President Theodore Roosevelt's home in Long Island, New York. They carried banners saying "We want time to play!" and "We want to go to school!" The president refused to meet with them, but the "Children's Crusade" caught the public's attention. She is quoted as saying:

"The employment of children is doing more to fill prisons, insane asylums, almshouses, reformatories, slums, and gin shops than all the efforts of reformers are doing to improve society."

She was a rousing and inspirational speaker. She often said: "Rise up and strike ... strike until the last one of you drop into your graves. We are going to stand together and never surrender. Boys, always remember you ain't got a damn thing if you ain't got a union!"

She died in 1930, shortly after the celebration of her 100th birthday.

A radical magazine called "Mother Jones" was started in the 1970's and named after her. Pete Seeger believed that the folk song, "She'll be Comin' around the mountain" was about the travels of Mother Jones. Gene Autry recorded a song by an unknown author about the death of Mother Jones in 1930.

What can we learn from this remarkable life?

She fully lived the passion in her heart.

She wasn't afraid to stand up for what she knew was right

She never got discouraged – even in her early days when she lost her entire family and then all of her meager possessions.

Like Daniel Burnham, her life is an example of one who lived to be useful to others. We don't know if Mother Jones had even heard of Swedenborg. But we can see in her life, a shining life shaped by efforts to put Love and Wisdom to practical uses in life.

Most of us are not nationally-known figures fighting every day for justice. But we all have lives that can have the same impact as hers; we just don't know how much we are shaping our world. Swedenborg tells us that everything is connected to everything else. If you do something out of love for another person or an animal, or the environment; you have an impact on the whole. Mother Jones, later in life, could look back over her many years and see the powerful impact she had on society. Most of us don't

know what impact we're having on the world. The smallest gesture of kindness could have a ripple effect on the holographic wholeness of the universe.

So how will you honor the rest of this May Day week-end? Perhaps you can take time this afternoon to relax. As you sit back, reflect on all the ways that Divine Love and Wisdom were alive in Mother Jones. She found the strength to persevere, even after losing her husband, all of her children, and then all of her possessions. She lived for her deepest passions. Because of efforts like hers, we can take for granted the 8 hour work day. The things we do today – no matter how small they seem – have the power to make life better for others; even future generations. Let her inspire you to never get discouraged, no matter the obstacles ... to reflect on your uses in life ... and then perhaps to dance around a may pole, or give flowers and candy to a friend. And rejoice at the return of the sun to our hemisphere.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Mother God: in the Arts

May 9, 2010

Readings

BIBLE:

Judges 5:7 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 7) The peasantry prospered in Israel, they grew fat on plunder, because you arose, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel.

{read commentary on this passage from [The African American Lectionary](#).}

SWEDENBORG:

It must be kept in mind that a Divine-heavenly sphere of love continually goes forth from the Lord toward all who embrace the doctrine of his church, who are obedient to the Lord, as children are to their father and mother in the world, who devote themselves to the Lord, and who wish to be fed, that is, instructed by the Lord. From this heavenly sphere a natural sphere arises, which is one of love towards infants and children. This is a most universal sphere, affecting not only humans, but also birds and beasts and even serpents; nor animate things only, but also things inanimate. But that the Lord might operate upon these even as upon spiritual things, He created a sun to be in the natural world like a father, the earth being like a mother. For the sun is like a common father and the earth like a common mother from the marriage of which all the vegetation that adorns the surface of the earth is produced. From the influx of the heavenly sphere into the natural world, come the marvelous developments of vegetation from seed to fruit, and again to new seed. It is from this also that many kinds of plants turn, as it were, their faces to the sun during the day, and turn them away when the sun sets. It is from this also that there are flowers that open at the rising of the sun and close at his setting. It is from this also that the song-birds sing sweetly at the early dawn, and likewise after they have been fed by their mother earth. Thus do all these honor their father and mother. They all bear testimony that in the natural world the Lord provides through the sun and the earth all necessities both for animate and inanimate things. (True Religion #308)

Message

Mother God: in the Arts

Happy Mothers' Day! What does this day mean for you? Perhaps it is a time to honor all the ways you have been motherly to others. Or perhaps today you celebrate those who have mothered you. This can be a sad day, missing mothers who have passed on, or grieving mothering you never got. Do you ever think about divine mothering on Mother's



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Day? For many people, the divine is sometimes a nurturing, mothering God. Today, we'll look at some people who image God as a Mother --primarily through painting, poetry, and music. Enjoy this time to experience divine love in whatever way is best for you today.

IDEAS ABOUT GOD AS MOTHER

Elizabeth Johnson

Honor your Father and your Mother

Elizabeth Johnson

An article about Elizabeth Johnson says: *Johnson has been fascinated by how believers view God. "This might sound a little archaic," she told Fordham Online, "but I take my cue from Thomas Aquinas-the study of God and all things in the light of God. That articulates for me what theology is about."*

A sister in the Congregation of St. Joseph who hails from Brooklyn, Johnson has been president of both the Catholic Theological Society of America and the American Theological Society. Winner of the U.S. Catholic Award in 1994, she served as a member of the national Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue, a consultant to the Catholic bishops' Committee on Women in Church and Society, a theologian on the Vatican-sponsored dialogue between science and religion, and on the Vatican-sponsored study of Christ and the world religions.

She says that "stale images of God aren't working for today's seekers. ... New ones are emerging from the experience of all God's people -- male and female."

Her ground-breaking book *She Who Is*, written in 1995, has become a classic. She wrote this about her title:

In the end this exploration points toward God with the coinage SHE WHO IS, a divine title signifying the creative, relational power of a being who enlivens, suffers with, sustains, and enfolds the universe. SHE WHO IS points to holy mystery beyond all imagining who creates women as well as men to be imago Dei, the grammar of God's self-utterance and participates in her liberating care for this conflictual world and all its cares. [p. 13]

She looks to a new society that sounds much like Swedenborg's New Jerusalem:

The goal toward which this theological effort passionately journeys is transformation into new community. Feminist liberation theology hopes so to change unjust structures of distorted symbol systems, that a new community in church and society becomes possible, a liberating community of all women and men characterized by mutuality with each other and harmony with the earth. [p. 31].

SWEDENBORG

Although Swedenborg doesn't say a lot directly about the characteristics of God, he is clear that

God is 'the essential person.' DLW 11.... *"It is because God is a person that all angels and spirits are perfectly formed people."*

We all have within us the potential for the union of opposites. *"When the good and the true are united in an angel or in one of us, they are not two entities but one, since the good then follows from the true and true from the good. This union is like the one that occurs when we think what we intend and intend what we think. Then our thought and our intention form a unity; the thought forms or presents in a form what our volition intends, and our volition gives it its appeal."* HH 372

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 725

That by "male and female" are signified truths and goods, is evident from what has been said and shown before, namely, that "man" and "male" signify truth, and "wife" and "female" good. But "male and female" are predicated of things of the understanding, and "man and wife" of things of the will, for the reason that marriage is represented by man and wife, and not so much by male and female. For truth can never of itself enter into marriage with good, but good can with truth; because there is no truth which is not produced from good and thus coupled with good. If you withdraw good from truth, nothing whatever remains but words.

Swedenborg wrote a lot about the union of opposites, including that of male and female. Both qualities exist in all of us, and need to work in harmony.

Since we are made in the image of God, it makes sense that God also contains good and truth, female and male; as humans do.

It therefore seems a fitting exploration for Mother's Day to consider ways in which we can experience both female and male qualities in God.

IMAGES OF GOD AS MOTHER

Give yourself some special meditative time to experience God in a way that is meaningful for you. You have several choices. Below, is a relaxing video of music and pictures. You can just watch this video and listen to the music. Or you can play the music, and view the following images of the feminine divine by Sister Doris Klein. If you prefer to read poetry, follow [THIS LINK](#) to read poetry about God as mother.

SISTER DORIS KLEIN, CSA:

Doris Klein is a Sister of St. Agnes in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She has kindly given us permission to use her watercolors of "The Feminine Images of God" in our worship today.

REST IN MY WINGS

In this painting the earth tones and enfolding wing shapes give rest and security to a figure gently held in the light of God. The womb-like, maternal form reflects the Biblical

image of God who longs to gather us under Her wings.



RAHAMIN

Rahamin is the Hebrew word for compassion. The root word, *raham*, means womb. The healing mauve tones encircle darkness, in which a face is held in the compassionate and merciful hands of God. The face of God is hidden and unseen. The painful cry from within seems to echo the words of the psalmist, "When will I see the face of God?" A large tear flows from God's face to soften the darkness and mirrors a compassionate God whose tears mix with ours.



RUAH

Ruah is a feminine Hebrew word meaning breath, wind, inspiration or spirit. This image portrays God as an older, wise woman who breathes spirit and life into a figure gently supported in her



hands.

MANTLE OF LIGHT

The image of white light represents the presence and energy of God, who enfolds the figure in Her mantled arms. In this unconditionally loving embrace, we rest as a child in the arms of her/his mother.



THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD

In this painting the inner child, the genuine, real self in each of us, knows oneness with God. Delightfully unhindered she runs freely, leaping into the Presence of God. There, at one with the Divine, she is most authentic, expressive and creative - truly the image and likeness of God.

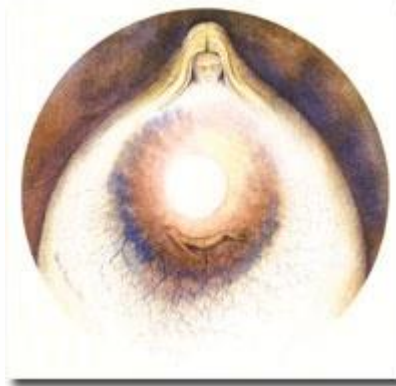


THE PLACE OF SPLENDOR

In her poem, "[The Place of Splendor](#)," Jessica Powers reflects on the journey to the Sacred. She writes:

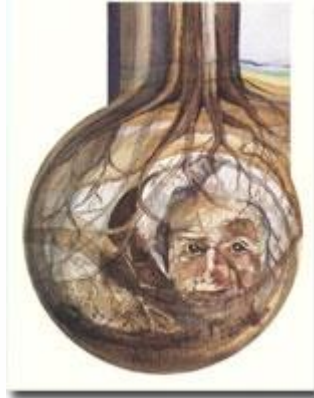
*The smothered roar
of the eternities, their vast unrest
and infinite peace are deep
in your own breast...*

*Child, have none told you?
God is in your soul.*



ROOTED IN WISDOM: SOPHIA

This painting is a reflection on the Wisdom face of God rooted deep within each of us.



GARMENTS OF GOD

In her poem, "[Garments of God](#)," Jessica Powers pictures God as sitting on a chair of darkness and each of us at God's feet. She writes:

*"I have this potent prayer through good or ill:
Here in the dark I clutch the garments of God."*



Poetry About God

You may wish to explore some poetry about God. Some of it is about God's feminine qualities, and some of it is by women about how they experience God. [CLICK ON THIS LINK.](#)

How do you relate to God? You might find that your concepts of God are not static, but rather fluid, and changing as you need. Sometimes, God may be a person; at times male and at other times female. Other days, God might be the wind, or the ocean. Or God might be the small child who smiles at you when you pass in the street. God can sometimes be the beating of your heart, or the warm love that surrounds you when you have made someone else happy.

Swedenborg encouraged us to open our hearts to the experience of God's inflowing love. As we do this, we find that God is many different things; God is whatever we need God to be today, in this moment.

How is God for you in this moment?

In our closing song, consider the many ways you can experience the Divine.

Stalking the Gaps

May 16, 2010

Readings

From the Bible:

Luke 24:44-53

44Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." 45Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, 47and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48You are witnesses of these things. 49And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

50Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. 51While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. 52And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; 53and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Acts 1

To the Ends of the World

1-5Dear Theophilus, in the first volume of this book I wrote on everything that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he said good-bye to the apostles, the ones he had chosen through the Holy Spirit, and was taken up to heaven. After his death, he presented himself alive to them in many different settings over a period of forty days. In face-to-face meetings, he talked to them about things concerning the kingdom of God. As they met and ate meals together, he told them that they were on no account to leave Jerusalem but "must wait for what the Father promised: the promise you heard from me. John baptized in water; you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit. And soon."

6When they were together for the last time they asked, "Master, are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel now? Is this the time?"

7-8He told them, "You don't get to know the time. Timing is the Father's business. What you'll get is the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world."

9-11These were his last words. As they watched, he was taken up and disappeared in a cloud. They stood there, staring into the empty sky. Suddenly two men appeared—in white robes! They said, "You Galileans!—why do you just stand here looking up at an empty sky? This very Jesus who was taken up from among you to heaven will come as certainly—and mysteriously—as he left."



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From Swedenborg:

True Christian Religion (Dick) n. 777

777. That the Lord is the Word is clearly evident from these words in John,

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... and the Word was made flesh." John i. 1, 14.

The Word in this passage is Divine Truth, because Christians have Divine Truth from no other source than the Word. This is the fountain whence all Churches taking their name from Christ draw living waters in their fullness, although as in a cloud which overshadows its natural sense, but in glory and power which belong to its spiritual and to its celestial sense. It has been shown in the chapter on the Sacred Scripture, and in the chapter on the Decalogue or Catechism, that there are three senses in the Word, the natural, the spiritual and the celestial, one within the other. It is clear, therefore, that the Word in John means Divine Truth. John also bears witness to the same in his First Epistle:

"We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know the truth (A.V., Him that is true); and we are in the truth (A.V., Him that is true), even in His Son Jesus Christ." v. 20.

It is for this reason that the Lord so often said, "Amen I say unto you"; for Amen in Hebrew means truth; and that He is the Amen may be seen in Rev. iii. 14; and the Truth in John xiv. 8. When the learned of to day are asked what they understand by the Word in John i. 1, they reply that they understand the Word in its pre-eminence; and what is the Word in its pre-eminence but Divine Truth? From these considerations it is evident that the Lord will now appear in the Word.

The reason why He will not appear in person is that, since His ascension into heaven, He is in His glorified Human; and in this He cannot appear to any man unless the eyes of his spirit are first opened. This cannot be done in the case of any one who is in evils and in the falsities that arise from them; thus not in the case of the goats whom He sets on His left hand. Therefore, when He showed Himself to His disciples, He first opened their eyes, for it is written,

"And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him: and He vanished out of their sight." Luke xxiv. 31.

It was the same with the women at the sepulchre after the resurrection; for then they saw angels sitting in the sepulchre, talking with them; and yet no one can see angels with the material eyes. It is evident from the account of His Transfiguration before Peter, James and John that the apostles before the Lord's resurrection did not see Him in His glorified Human with their bodily eyes, but while they were in the spirit; for it is written,

"They were heavy with sleep." Luke ix. 32.

After waking from this state of the spirit what has been seen appears like the vision of a dream. It is vain, therefore, to suppose that the Lord will appear in the clouds of heaven in person: He will appear in the Word, which is from Him, and is thus Himself.

Message

STALKING THE GAPS

Happy Ascension Sunday! “What??” Many of you are saying, “What is Ascension Sunday??” I’m going to tell you that from the Christian tradition and from Swedenborgian traditions – then provide some ways to experience the concepts in our own lives.

CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Ascension is a feast day in the Christian calendar; the day that Jesus bodily ascended into heaven. It is the 40th day after Easter, which is a Thursday [this year, May 13th]. However, it is often celebrated on the next Sunday.

It is not certain where this event took place. Luke says it was Bethany, whereas Acts says it was Mount Olivet [the Mount of Olives.] This spot is now called the Mount of Ascension. The Chapel of the Ascension is located here, and is considered sacred by both Christians and Muslims.



"Ascension" in art

The Mount of Olives



SWEDENBORGIAN THEOLOGY

For Swedenborg, the Ascension of Jesus was the completion of the process of glorification that took place with the crucifixion and resurrection.

The Divine descended into human form on the earth, and then glorified the human. Then, at the ascension, the human reached up and glorified the divine.

*"As regards the Lord's life itself, it was a continual advance of the Human to the Divine, even to absolute union."** "He ascended continuously to glorification, that is, to union."*** By the glorification, then, is meant not only the union of the Divine with the Human essence but also the full union of the Human with the Divine essence. This was the second major part of the glorification, and it is important to note that this was done by the Human essence from its own power.*****

* Lord 35:8

** AC 2523

*** AC 2033

**** AC 2004

The 2nd Coming, from Swedenborg's perspective, will be discussed further on New church Day in June.

MEANING FOR OUR LIVES

In the Acts version, an important point is made:

As they watched, he was taken up and disappeared in a cloud. They stood there, staring into the empty sky. Suddenly two men appeared—in white robes! They said, "You Galileans!—why do you just stand here looking up at an empty sky? This very Jesus who was taken up from among you to heaven will come as certainly—and mysteriously—as he left.

The disciples are reminded not to look at empty sky!

Swedenborg says something similar:

True Christian Religion 768

Since His ascension into heaven [the Lord] is in the glorified Human; and in this He cannot appear to any man unless He first open the eyes of his spirit. . . . It is a vain thing to believe that the Lord is to appear in the clouds of heaven in Person; but He is to appear in the Word, which is from Him, thus is Himself.

So we are not to keep looking into the clouds; but rather to open our spiritual eyes and to find the Lord in the Word. And within us and within the world.

Or as Ann Dillard wrote in "A Pilgrim at Tinker Creek":

Thomas Merton wrote, "There is always a temptation to diddle around in the contemplative life, making itsy-bitsy statues."



She goes on to say:

There is always an enormous temptation in all of life to diddle around making itsy-bitsy friends and meals and journeys for itsy-bitsy years on end.

It is so self-conscious, so apparently moral, simply to step aside from the gaps where the creeks and winds pour down, saying, I never merited this grace, quite rightly, and then to sulk along the rest of your days on the edge of rage.

I won't have it.

The world is wilder than that in all directions, more dangerous and bitter, more extravagant and bright.

We are making hay when we should be making whoopee; we are raising tomatoes when we should be raising Cain, or Lazarus.

Ezekiel excoriates false prophets as those who have "not gone up into the gaps."

The gaps are the thing. The gaps are the spirit's one home, the altitudes and latitudes so dazzlingly spare and clean that the spirit can discover itself for the first time like a once-blind man unbound.

The gaps are the clefts in the rock where you cower to see the back parts of God; they are the fissures between mountains and cells the wind lances through, the icy narrowing fiords splitting the cliffs of mystery.

Go up into the gaps. If you can find them; they shift and vanish too.

Stalk the gaps. Squeak into a gap in the soil, turn, and unlock -- more than a maple -- a universe. This is how you spend the afternoon, and tomorrow morning, and tomorrow afternoon. Spend the afternoon. You can't take it with you.

Read this again:

The gaps are the thing. The gaps are the spirit's one home, the altitudes and

latitudes so dazzlingly spare and clean that the spirit can discover itself for the first time like a once-blind man unbound.

The gaps are the clefts in the rock where you cower to see the back parts of God; they are the fissures between mountains and cells the wind lances through, the icy narrowing fiords splitting the cliffs of mystery.

Go up into the gaps. If you can find them; they shift and vanish too.

The gaps. The spaces between. Quantum physics tells us that the world is not full of solid objects with discrete boundaries. There are wide spaces within everything that looks solid – the spaces where the waves of existence flow. Physicist Karl Pribram says: “We make images of objects, but at another level of analysis, quantum physics tells us that the universe is composed of wave forms that interact to form particles – or vice versa.”

George Dole tells us that influx is a wave phenomenon. Influx is God’s love, flowing into us as waves.

Fritjof Capra said it in a colorful way:

Modern physics thus pictures matter not at all as passive and inert but as being in a continuous dancing and vibrating motion, whose rhythmic patterns are determined by the molecular, atomic, and nuclear configurations. We have come to realize that there are no static structures. There is stability, but this stability is one of dynamic balance, and the further we penetrate into matter the more we need to understand its dynamic nature to understand its patterns.

Margaret Wheatley wrote:

One of the differences between new science and Newtonianism is a focus on holism rather than parts. Systems are understood as whole systems, and attention is given to ‘relationships within those networks’. Donella Meadows, an ecologist and author, quotes an ancient Sufi teaching that captures this shift in focus:

“You think [that] because you understand ‘one’ you must understand ‘two’, because one and one makes two. But you must also understand ‘and’.”



I walk into the woods, and I see trees and flowers and animals. I am a distinct entity, separate from them. But, what if I look at the world around me not as filled with distinct entities, but rather “continuous dancing and vibrating motion?”

[Photo by Susan Wood-Ashton]

God is in the gaps. All of the dancing, vibrating waves of existence are in the gaps. The gaps are the “and” between “one” and “one” – the energy between “me” and “you.” That place where God lives.

The Winds of Change

May 23, 2010

READINGS

From the Bible:

Acts 2:1-21 (New International Version)

Acts 2

The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost

¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues^[a] as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? ⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" ¹²Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

¹³Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."^[b]

Peter Addresses the Crowd

¹⁴Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷" In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

¹⁹I will show wonders in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,



blood and fire and billows of smoke.

²⁰The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

²¹And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.^[c]

Footnotes:

- a. Acts 2:4 Or languages; also in verse 11
- b. Acts 2:13 Or sweet wine
- c. Acts 2:21 Joel 2:28-32

FROM SWEDENBORG:

Spiritual Experiences (Buss) n. 481

481. CONCERNING THE SPEECH OF SPIRITS. THAT SPIRITS RECOGNIZE EACH OTHER AND TEST THEIR QUALITY IN VARIOUS WAYS SO AS TO BE ABLE TO FORM CONSOCIATIONS WITH THEM

You will see above [nos. 207, 424, etc.], that human souls suppose themselves to be men furnished with a body. Indeed they suppose that they are clothed with garments, so that it is with difficulty that they can be plucked away from their phantasy. They also mutually converse with one another, just as in this world, for speech is only a series and composition of ideas which, with man in the body, falls into words such as those of his idiom. The pure ideas of spirits are what fall into the words with man, wherefore they all speak his language, even among themselves; it is his tongue, whether he knows this or does not know it, or whether [he speaks] in another [tongue], as it is known that the Apostles could speak in every tongue, which was from spirits [Acts ii 13]. Moreover, there is also given a communication of ideas as of words; indeed, by means of ideas alone combined together they can express more within a minute than can be expressed by the words of man in whole hours, as I know from very much experience. Meanwhile, it is evident that souls converse amongst themselves, and this in like manner as do men in this world, and I have indeed heard that in like manner they can also preach, and one teach the other.

MESSAGE

The Winds of Change

Ah, Spring in Maine! I love watching the flower bulbs push their way through the soil to the fresh air and sunshine. Yet it is also a season to endure rain, wind, mud and cold. This year we have had many cold, windy days when a bowl of popcorn and a TV show are particularly appealing.

I have enjoyed catching up with reruns of one of my all-time favorite TV series: *Joan of*

Arcadia. Joan is a high school student in the fictional town of Arcadia. ["Joan of Arcadia" -- a word play on "Joan of Arc."] This Joan, like the earlier one, hears God clearly. In fact, for this modern Joan, God shows up in her life regularly as an ordinary human being. Sometimes God is a handsome teen-aged boy. Other times, God is a grandmotherly woman, or an impish little girl. God is "one of us", as the theme song reminds us.

I watched an episode this week that seems to have been the start of the 2nd season. Joan struggled through a school year in which God kept appearing to her and giving her assignments to perform. Generally, the assignments made no sense, but when she follows through with them, she finds that she has helped someone in a mysterious way that she could not have anticipated. As we return to the new school year, we find that Joan has spent her summer at a psychiatric camp to help her "get beyond" her need to see God. She now has a psychiatrist, who tells her that she is fine just as she is; she doesn't need need to imagine visits from God to feel complete. So, Joan is determined to ignore the people and messages that appear in her life.

Joan prepares to go to a wild teen-aged party with no adult chaperones. Of course, God shows up with a warning. God-as-handsome-male teenager shows up to say, "Keep your eyes open." Joan ignores the advice, and pays no attention to a good friend guzzling a bottle of hard liquor. The friend passes out and is rushed to the hospital. Joan is overcome with guilt that she hadn't stopped her friend from drinking so much. Joan's God always appears to her as the type of person she most needs at a given point in time. The guilt-ridden Joan encounters God-as-grandmother, who holds Joan close to comfort her. Joan with the fear that her friend will die; then with relief when learning that she will live. She realizes that these messages from God are not the imagination of a neurotic unconscious self. They are real gems of wisdom that allow Joan to be of help to others. She realizes that such messages can be a burden, and sobs with her fear of getting a message wrong, and hurting someone rather than helping. There are no good words to alleviate such a fear. A hug is the most reassuring response.

God always sends Joan exactly the type of messenger she needs, with the message that is just right for that moment. For us, too, God appears with whatever image, words, or language we need in a given moment. This reality is celebrated today in many Christian churches as "Pentecost."

It has been 50 days since the Passover. This is the 7th Sunday of Easter; sometimes called *Whitsunday* or *White Sunday*. It is honored as the day that the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples. Swedenborgian Christians usually put more emphasis on June 19th -- New Church Day. However, this a good day to remember how God's spirit flows into us, helping us to become more deeply spiritual, in whatever language we can best understand.

Swedenborg's view of Holy Spirit is different from most mainline Christianity. Swedenborg rejects the traditional concept of "trinity" because God is one essence ... not three. The Lord is the one Divine being, who has three aspects:

When one enters heaven – the 3rd day after death, one is taught “that the Holy Spirit is not a separate God: the Word uses the phrase to mean the divine action that radiates from the one omnipresent God. [TC, #138].

He points out that *The Holy Spirit is the divine truth and also the divine action and effect that radiate from the one God, in whom the Divine Trinity exists: the Lord God the Savior.*

He goes on to clarify that The Holy Spirit was not in existence before the glorification. However, in John 20:22, when Jesus appears to the disciples after the resurrection, “He breathed on his disciples and said “receive the Holy Spirit.” [TC, 140]. He then says that this is “because breathing on someone is an outward representation of divine inspiration.”

In a number of places, Swedenborg talks of “wind” as a correspondence for spirit in general.

John 3:8, and consequently, the spirits present with me at this day, many and most of the times have come with a wind, which stroked my face, indeed even moved the flame of the candle, papers, (the wind was cold,) and this very often when I was raising my right arm. This surprised me, and I do not yet know the reason for it. [SE 479].

We often think of "wind" as blowing us new awareness for new directions. "Wind" can be like God's constant inflow of Love; sometimes coming into us like a gentle breeze; sometimes like a rushing wind. At Pentecost, Spirit came as a rushing wind. Yet it is, amazingly, a wind that speaks to each of us in our own language. Swedenborg wrote in Spiritual Diary [#1305]:

"The ideas of spirits fall into the words of every language, so that if it were granted spirits of the same idea or speech to inflow into diverse persons of dissimilar language, then all those persons would perceive him to speak in their own language or their own idiom, although the spirit spoke in one way only."

Enjoy some time out-of-doors this week, if you can. Take the time to listen for Spirit's messages in the breezes and winds -- or in the birds or the sunshine. Let God's message flow into you in whatever way you can best hear it in a given moment.

The Grandmothers Council

May 30, 2010

READINGS

From the Bible:

23Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. 24He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

25"All this I have spoken while still with you. 26But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. 27Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

FROM SWEDENBORG:

True Christian Religion (Rose) n. 304
sRef Micah@4 @4 S0' 304

Heavenly peace is peace in relation to the hells - a peace because evils and falsities will not rise up from there and break in. Heavenly peace can be compared in many ways to earthly peace. For example, it can be compared to the peace after wars when all are living in safety from their enemies, protected in their own city, in their house, with their own land and garden. It is as the prophet says, who speaks of heavenly peace in earthly language:

They will each sit under their own vine and their own fig tree; no one will frighten them. (Micah 4:4; Isaiah 65:21, 22, 23)

Heavenly peace can be compared to rest and recreation for the mind after working extremely hard, or to a mother's consolation after giving birth, when her instinctive parental love unveils its pleasures. It can be compared to the serenity after storms, black clouds, and thunder; or to the spring that follows a severe winter, with the uplifting effect of seedlings in the fields and blossoms in the gardens, meadows, and woods; or to the state of mind felt by survivors of storms or hostilities at sea who reach port and set their feet on longed-for solid ground.

MESSAGE

GRANDMOTHERS' COUNCIL

ECOFEMINISM

When I was in seminary in the early 1980's, my studies focused on the political implications of Feminist-Liberation Theology. I wondered if my interests in ecology were just a hobby on the side. I knew in my heart that the environment and feminism were related, but wasn't sure how. In the ensuing years, the ecology movement became increasingly radicalized,-and then "eco-feminism" became a movement.

Carolyn Merchant wrote in 1990:

Radical feminism developed in the late 1960's and 1970's with the second wave of feminism. The radical form of ecofeminism is a response to the perception that women and nature have been mutually associated and devalued in Western culture and that both can be elevated and liberated through direct political action.[i]

Rosemary Reuther wrote that ecofeminism recognizes that

Domination of and control over Mother Earth is very much like domination and control over women. [ii]

Many eco-feminists come from a religious perspective. Some the modern groups include: North American Christian ecofeminism, North American womanist Christian theology, neopagan Wiccan ecofeminism, Native American ecofeminism, and Third World ecofeminism.

GRANDMOTHER'S COUNCIL

A modern examples of grass-roots ecofeminism is the [Grandmother's Council](#):

On October 11, 2004, 13 Indigenous Grandmothers from all over the world—... arrived at Tibet House's Menla Mountain Retreat ...in upstate New York. ...the grandmothers agreed to form a global alliance; to work together to serve both their common goals and their specific local concerns.



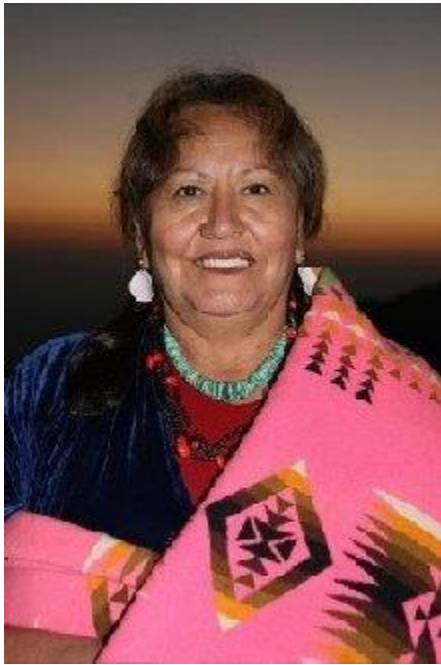
In their mission statement, they wrote:

We are the International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers. We have united as one. Ours is an alliance of prayer, education and healing for our Mother Earth, all Her inhabitants, all the children and for the next seven generations to come.

..We ... believe that our ancestral ways of prayer, peacemaking and healing are vitally needed today

...We join with all those who honor the Creator, and to all who work and pray for our children, for world peace, and for the healing of our Mother Earth.

ONE GRANDMOTHER



Margaret Behan — Red Spider Woman -- says:

If we want to see changes first of all we need to be in peace inside ourselves, and then we need to be patient with the ones that have not yet arrived in that place of peace.

She is the fourth generation of the Sand Creek Massacre. Margaret is a Cheyenne traditional dancer. She has served as a dance leader in Oklahoma and in powwows across the U.S

She is also a sculptress, accomplished and published author, poet and playwright. She has presented workshops and retreats for women, adult children of alcoholics and co-dependents.

SWEDENBORGIAN THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Many feminists today are seeing in quantum physics a world-view comp[ati]ble with feminist principles of non-hierarchy and non-dualism. These holistic concepts were part of Swedenborg's theology back in the 1700's.

Physicist Michael Talbot wrote:

If Emanuel Swedenborg were alive today, it is very likely that he would consider many of the findings of the 'new physics' compatible with his own thought.

What are some of the ideas he might agree with? Here's one by Fritjof Capra:

The conception of the universe as an interconnected web of relations is one of the two major themes that recur throughout modern physics. The other theme is the realization that the cosmic web is intrinsically dynamic ...

Modern physics thus pictures matter not at all as passive and inert but as being in a continuous dancing and vibration motion ...

Swedenborg saw dancing as a way of expressing the Divine nature:

In ancient times not only musical instruments and singing served to bear witness to gladness of heart but also dancing. Joyful feelings in the heart or interior things erupted into various activities in the body, such as singing and also dancing. Since in ancient times the glad feelings excelling all others were spiritual ones, that is, feelings springing from affections belonging to spiritual kinds of love, which were affections for goodness and truth, people were allowed, when they engaged in singing and musical harmony, to dance, as well and so in dancing also to bear witness to their joy. This explains why 'dancing' is mentioned in the Word, meaning the glad feelings that belong to affections for truth, or to faith grounded in good or charity, as in Jeremiah,

Our Grandmother demonstrates this aspect of the universal physics: she is a traditional dancer. She brings the vibration and energy of dance to the healing of the earth.

On this Memorial Day week-end, we remember those who died in the defense of our country. Let's also remember the work of the Grandmother's Council, who strive to create a peaceful world that no longer needs war. We can dance our inner, vibrational harmony on oneness—and know that we are standing with warriors of peace to recognize the intrinsic wholeness of our lives on this earth.

[i] Carlyn Merchant, "Eco-feminism and Feminist Theory," in *Reweaving the World*, 101.

[ii] *Gaia & God: an Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* by Rosemary Radford Reuther,

Meeting Jesus at the Well

June 6, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE WORD:

John 4:7-26 (The Message)

7-8A woman, a Samaritan, came to draw water. Jesus said, "Would you give me a drink of water?" (His disciples had gone to the village to buy food for lunch.)

9The Samaritan woman, taken aback, asked, "How come you, a Jew, are asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (Jews in those days wouldn't be caught dead talking to Samaritans.)

10Jesus answered, "If you knew the generosity of God and who I am, you would be asking me for a drink, and I would give you fresh, living water."

11-12The woman said, "Sir, you don't even have a bucket to draw with, and this well is deep. So how are you going to get this 'living water'? Are you a better man than our ancestor Jacob, who dug this well and drank from it, he and his sons and livestock, and passed it down to us?"

13-14 Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst – not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life."

15The woman said, "Sir, give me this water so I won't ever get thirsty, won't ever have to come back to this well again!"

16He said, "Go call your husband and then come back."

17-18"I have no husband," she said.

"That's nicely put: 'I have no husband.' You've had five husbands, and the man you're living with now isn't even your husband. You spoke the truth there, sure enough."

19-20"Oh, so you're a prophet! Well, tell me this: Our ancestors worshiped God at this mountain, but you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place for worship, right?"

21-23"Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you Samaritans will worship the Father neither here at this mountain nor there in Jerusalem. You worship guessing in the dark; we Jews worship in the clear light of day. God's way of salvation is made available through the Jews. But the time is coming – in has, in fact, come – when what you're called will not matter and where you go to worship will not matter.

23-24 "It's who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That's the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before him in their worship. God is sheer being itself – Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration."

25The woman said, "I don't know about that. I do know that the Messiah is coming. When he arrives, we'll get the whole story."

26"I am he," said Jesus. "You don't have to wait any longer or look any further."



FROM SWEDENBORG

Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but he who drinks from the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water leaping up into eternal life. John 4:7-14. "Drinking" clearly stands for being given instruction in goods and truths, and the acceptance of the truth. AC 3069

Here it is evident that the water which the Lord gives, does not mean water, but Divine Truth, for it is said from the water which the woman of Samaria came to draw, that a man thirsts again, but not so from the water which the Lord gives. That there is life in that truth, is meant by that water becoming in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life. That there is life in truths when the Lord gives them, may be seen in this article above. The reason why the Lord said these things to the woman of Samaria, when He sat at the well of Jacob, was, that by the Samaritans the Lord meant the Gentiles, who would receive Divine truths from Him; and by the woman of Samaria, the church from them; and by Jacob's well He meant Divine Truth from Himself, or the Word. AE 483

MESSAGE

Meeting Jesus at the Well

Imagine that you are engaging in a routine activity of your daily life – say stopping at your favorite coffee place on the way to work. You go inside, and stand at the end of a line. The stranger next to you starts talking to you – and knows your deepest secrets that you have told no one. But this person isn't judgmental about any part of your life; he is loving and accepting of all that you are, while also encouraging you to keep growing.

What would that experience be like? How would it change your life?

The Samaritan woman in the Gospel of John had such an encounter with Jesus at the village well. I'm going to slightly re-write and modernize the story:

A woman walks up to her village well around noon time, and she struggles to pull up a bucket of water. Jesus walks up to the well, saying: *Excuse me, M'am. Could I trouble you for a drink of water?*

The woman is shocked. *No way! You're a Samaritan and I'm a Jew – I can't believe that you want water from me.*



Jesus responds, *If you knew who I am you would ask ME for water; Living Water.*



The woman gives a derisive laugh, *Ha! You don't even have a bucket to dip in the water!*

Jesus responds, *My water is living water. In about 1700 years, a guy named Emanuel Swedenborg will point out that when I say "water" I really mean "Divine Truth."*

The woman snickers. *Yeah? So just how do I go about getting this "Divine Truth" from you?*

The prophet has a gentle response: *It is meant to be shared. Invite your life partner to come join us!*

Nope. Won't happen. I don't have a life partner.

You are right about that! There is a guy trying to date you, but he hasn't told you that he is married.

What! Charlie is married! I figured he was too good to be true.

The prophet continues softly, *You were also married four times, and each of those men beat you physically and controlled you economically and socially. It took a lot of courage to leave them.*

The woman is amazed. *You know everything about me! Yet you don't judge me.*

God understands all of the hardships of your life: a father who beat you, a mother who abandoned you. Husbands who have controlled you with violence. You live in dire poverty, with barely enough food to eat each day. God is with you in all that you suffer, and working with all the people of the earth to create a just world.

The woman is impressed. *You sound like my kind of savior! Perhaps you can answer a question for me. Where is the best place to worship? In the temple? In a mosque? On a mountain?*

It doesn't matter where you worship. God doesn't have a religion. God created many religions so that each person could find their right path to the Divine. It's who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That's the kind of people [God] is looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves ... in their worship. God is sheer being itself – Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration.

The woman realizes that Jesus has hit on the deepest pain inside of her. *I can't worship God with my true self. I am ashamed of my true self.*

God knows you have come to feel that way because of the many oppressive forces in the world. God is the Energy that can bring you healing and give you the courage to tell your story and to create a better world. In about 2,000 years a Buddhist nun named Pemi Chodron will say:

We might think that knowing ourselves is a very ego-centered thing, but by beginning to look clearly and honestly at ourselves, we begin to dissolve the walls that separate us from others. ...

According to the teachings of vajrayana, or tantric, Buddhism, our wisdom and our confusion are so interwoven that it doesn't work to just throw things out. By trying to get rid of negativity, by trying to eradicate it, by putting it into a column labeled bad, we are throwing away our wisdom as well, because everything in us is creative energy-particularly our strong emotions. They are filled with life-force.

The woman still doesn't quite get it. "But isn't God ashamed of me?"

Of course not! You and God are one. In about 1200 years a Sufi poet named Rumi will write:

We are as the flute, and the music in us is from thee;
We are as the mountain and the echo in us is from thee.

The woman is thoughtful. You know everything about me; you know all of my secrets and the things I'm ashamed of. Yet still you respect me and encourage me to grow.

I am merely reflecting God's love for you. God's pure love is flowing into you every moment; sustaining and healing you. God knows you completely and loves you totally.

Wow! I've got to get back to the village and let the other women know about God!

Good move! Stop living a life of secret shame. Instead, reach out to the people around you and make friends. Support them and let them support you. Together, you can heal the shame and fear inside each of you, and take Love and Wisdom into the world. Though your uses of good works, you can transform the world. This guy Swedenborg will explain more about that in another 1700 years or so

Now, make this story about you. Imagine chatting with Jesus at Starbucks – or wherever you like to hang out! What would Jesus tell you about your life? How would he support you in loving yourself more? How would it feel to be in the presence of One who knows you totally and loves you completely? How will that encounter change your life?



Susanna and the Elders

June 13, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE:

Daniel 13 (Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition)

1Now there was a man that dwelt in Babylon, and his name was Joakim:

2And he took a wife whose name was Susanna, the daughter of Helcias, a very beautiful woman, and one that feared God.

3For her parents being just, had instructed their daughter according to the law of Moses.

4Now Joakim was very rich, and had an orchard near his house: and the Jews resorted to him, because he was the most honourable of them all.

5And there were two of the ancients of the people appointed judges that year, of whom the Lord said: Iniquity came out from Babylon from the ancient judges, that seemed to govern the people.

6These men frequented the house of Joakim, and all that had any matters of judgment came to them.

7And when the people departed away at noon, Susanna went in, and walked in her husband's orchard.

8And the old men saw her going in every day, and walking: and they were inflamed with lust towards her:

9And they perverted their own mind and turned away their eyes that they might not look unto heaven, nor remember just judgments.

10So they were both wounded with the love of her, yet they did not make known their grief one to the other:

11For they were ashamed to declare to one another their lust, being desirous to have to do with her.

12And they watched carefully every day to see her. And one said to the other:

13Let us now go home, for it is dinner time. So going out they departed one from another.

14And turning back again, they came both to the same place: and asking one another the cause, they acknowledged their lust; and then they agreed upon a time, when they might find her alone.

15And it fell out, as they watched a fit day, she went in on a time, as yesterday and the day before, with two maids only, and was desirous to wash herself in the orchard: for it was hot weather.

16And there was nobody there, but the two old men that had hid themselves and were beholding her.

17So she said to the maids: Bring me oil, and washing balls, and shut the doors of the orchard, that I may wash me.

18And they did as she bade them: and they shut the doors of the orchard, and went out by a back door to fetch what she had commanded them, and they knew not that the elders were hid within.

19Now when the maids were gone forth, the two elders arose, and ran to her, and said:

20Behold the doors of the orchard are shut, and nobody seeth us, and we are in love with thee: wherefore consent to us, and lie with us.

21But if thou wilt not, we will bear witness against thee, that a young man was with thee, and therefore thou didst send away thy maids from thee.

22Susanna sighed, and said: I am straitened on every side: for if I do this thing, it is death to me: and if I do it not, I shall not escape your hands.

23But it is better for me to fall into your hands without doing it, than to sin in the sight of the Lord.
24With that Susanna cried out with a loud voice: and the elders also cried out against her.
25And one of them ran to the door of the orchard, and opened it.
26So when the servants of the house heard the cry in the orchard, they rushed in by the back door to see what was the matter.
27But after the old men had spoken, the servants were greatly ashamed: for never had there been any such word said of Susanna. And on the next day,
28When the people were come to Joakim her husband, the two elders also came full of wicked device against Susanna, to put her to death.
29And they said before the people: Send to Susanna daughter of Helcias the wife of Joakim. And presently they sent.
30And she came with her parents, and children, and all her kindred.
31Now Susanna was exceeding delicate, and beautiful to behold.
32But those wicked men commanded that her face should be uncovered, (for she was covered,) that so at least they might be satisfied with her beauty.
33Therefore her friends and all her acquaintance wept.
34But the two elders rising up in the midst of the people, laid their hands upon her head.
35And she weeping looked up to heaven, for her heart had confidence in the Lord.
36And the elders said: As we walked in the orchard alone, this woman came in with two maids, and shut the doors of the orchard, and sent away the maids from her.
37Then a young man that was there hid came to her, and lay with her.
38But we that were in a corner of the orchard, seeing this wickedness, ran up to them, and we saw them lie together.
39And him indeed we could not take, because he was stronger than us, and opening the doors he leaped out:
40But having taken this woman, we asked who the young man was, but she would not tell us: of this thing we are witnesses.
41The multitude believed them as being the elders and the judges of the people, and they condemned her to death.
42Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and said: O eternal God, who knowest hidden things, who knowest all things before they come to pass,
43Thou knowest that they have borne false witness against me: and behold I must die, whereas I have done none of these things, which these men have maliciously forged against me.
44And the Lord heard her voice.
45And when she was led to be put to death, the Lord raised up the holy spirit of a young boy, whose name was Daniel.
46And he cried out with a loud voice I am clear from the blood of this woman.
47Then all the people turning themselves towards him, said: What meaneth this word that thou hast spoken?
48But he standing in the midst of them, said: Are ye so foolish, ye children of Israel, that without examination or knowledge of the truth, you have condemned a daughter of Israel?
49Return to judgment, for they have borne false witness against her.
50So all the people turned again in haste, and the old men said to him: Come, and sit thou down among us, and shew it as: seeing God hath given thee the honour of old age.



51And Daniel said to the people: Separate these two far from one another, and I will examine them.

52So when they were put asunder one from the other, he called one of them, and said to him: O thou that art grown old in evil days, now are thy sins come out, which thou hast committed before:

53In judging unjust judgments, oppressing the innocent, and letting the guilty to go free, whereas the Lord saith: I The innocent and the just thou shalt not kill.

54Now then, if thou sawest her, tell me under what tree thou sawest them conversing together. He said: Under a mastic tree.

55And Daniel said: Well hast thou lied against thy own head: for behold the angel of God having received the sentence of him, shall cut thee in two.

56And having put him aside, he commanded that the other should come, and he said to him: O thou seed of Chanaan, and not of Juda, beauty hath deceived thee, and lust hath perverted thy heart:

57Thus did you do to the daughters of Israel, and they for fear conversed with you: but a daughter of Juda would not abide your wickedness.

58Now therefore tell me, under what tree didst thou take them conversing together., And he answered: Under a holm tree.

59And Daniel said to him: Well hast thou also lied against thy own head: for the angel of the Lord waiteth with a sword to cut thee in two, and to destroy you.

60With that all the assembly cried out with a loud voice, and they blessed God, who saveth them that trust in him.

61And they rose up against the two elders, (for Daniel had convicted them of false witness by their own mouth,) and they did to them as they had maliciously dealt against their neighbour,

62To fulfil the law of Moses: and they put them to death, and innocent blood was saved in that day.

63But Helcias and his wife praised God, for their daughter Susanna, with Joakim her husband, and all her kindred, because there was no dishonesty found in her.

64And Daniel became great in the sight of the people from that day, and thenceforward.

65And king Astyages was gathered to his fathers, and Cyrus the Persian received his kingdom.

FROM SWEDENBORG

Divine Providence (Dick and Pulsford) n. 10

10. V. THE GOOD OF LOVE IS NOT GOOD EXCEPT SO FAR AS IT IS UNITED TO THE TRUTH OF WISDOM; AND THE TRUTH OF WISDOM IS NOT TRUTH EXCEPT SO FAR AS IT IS UNITED TO THE GOOD OF LOVE.

Good and truth derive this from their origin. Good has its origin in the Lord, and likewise truth; for the Lord is God itself and Truth itself and these two in Him are one. For this reason good in the angels of heaven and in men on earth is good in itself only so far as it has been united to truth; and truth is truth in itself only so far as it has been united to good. It is well known that every good and every truth is from the Lord. Hence, as good makes one with truth and truth with good, it follows that for good to be good in itself and for truth to be truth in itself, they must make one in the recipient; that is, in an angel of heaven and a man on earth.

MESSAGE

Susanna and the Elders

The Story of Susanna:

I first heard the story of Susanna and the Elders when in I was in a training program from the [Faith-Trust Institute](#). In most Protestant Bibles, the book of Daniel has only 12 chapters, so the story of Susanna is not included.

In seminary, I was surprised to learn how often women who were victims of domestic violence were not supported by their churches.

Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune, founder of the FaithTrust Institute says:

Christianity was misused for centuries to somehow justify the abuse of wives and children by husbands and fathers. This assertion is easily documented. But does it tell the whole story? No.

Christianity can serve as a valuable resource in a variety of ways to those suffering domestic violence.

It is easy to justify or refrain from challenging the abuse of women and children through the misuse or misinterpretation of texts and doctrines. But if the agenda is to provide safety for women and children, and to hold an abuser accountable, this also is accomplished easily through the use of texts and doctrines. ...

One important function the church can serve is to tell the truth about women's experiences of abuse, to give a voice where there has been silence. ...

Think about the biblical passages that Phyllis Trible calls the "texts of terror" (the rape of Dinah or of Tamar, the rape and murder of the concubine in Judges 19, etc.). When preachers mention these, it can be seen—though the stories are vivid and painful—that our ancestors in the faith not only knew the experiences so many have today but also spoke about them in the context of faith.

Stories like Susanna's can remind us that violence towards women in their homes and families has taken place for centuries. Truth can be a powerful weapon for ending the violence. In this story, Susanna tells the truth of her story, even knowing that she might be killed for it. When Daniel, a young man, asks for an investigation of truth, he is able to show the Truth that Susanna spoke.

Telling our stories is a powerful way to help truth prevail.

THE STORY IN ART:

Susanna' story has been depicted in paintings throughout history. The video below tells Susanna's story through paintings:

THE STORY IN MUSIC:

If you would like to experience the story musically, you might enjoy Handel's Overture to his *Oratoria la Susanna*.

SWEDENBORG AND TRUTH:

Susanna's story demonstrates the power of truth in the telling of our stories. To Swedenborg, Truth was part of the Divine. He wrote often about the essential role that Good and Truth play in our spiritual lives. In *Divine Providence #8*, he writes:

Now I need to say something more specific about the unity or union that is called that the marriage of goodness and truth.

This marriage is in the Lord himself ...It is from the Lord ... they both emanate from the Lord as the sun -- "

and in 318:5b

Once we have justified what is false, we cannot see what is true; but once we have justified what is true, we can see what is false. Everything false is in the darkness and everything true is in the light.

Susanna had been give two options by evil men: either she could consent to have sexual relations with them [which would result in her being condemned to death by her husband], or they would accuse of her of having an affair [which would result in her being condemned to death by her husband.] But Susanna saw a third option: standing tall in the presence of the Truth. Sadly, she was not believed. However, a brave young man chose to stand up with her and demand the truth:

Are ye so foolish, ye children of Israel, that without examination or knowledge of the truth, you have condemned a daughter of Israel?

They realized that, of course, they wanted the truth. When Daniel led them into an investigation, the truth was revealed.

It is not easy to tell the truth, especially when you are in a powerless position. It is risky to stand up for the truth with a powerless person. But we are reminded by this story that God lives in the Truth, and when we invite Truth into our lives, we are also inviting the Light of the Divine.

Living From the Heart

June 20, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

John 14

Jesus Comforts His Disciples

¹"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God^[a]; trust also in me. ²In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴You know the way to the place where I am going."

FROM SWEDENBORG

True Christianity, #772

That this second coming of the Lord does not take place for the purpose of destroying the visible heaven and habitable earth, has been shown in the preceding section. That it is not for the purpose of destroying anything, but to build up, consequently not to condemn but to save those who since His first coming have believed in Him and also those who may hereafter believe in Him, is evident from these words of the Lord.

MESSAGE

Living From Our Hearts

One of the cable stations recently had a marathon of the *Left Behind* movies. Are you familiar with them? They are a gripping and dramatic fictional presentation of the "second coming", when Christ will return to the earth. They present a particular theology in which Jesus returns to set up his kingdom in two stages. The first is that Jesus will "rapture" his believers—take them out of the world—before seven years of tribulations. After that, Jesus returns with his believers to set up a new world.

As these events unfold in the novels and movies of the *Left Behind* series of books, we see people suddenly disappearing from the world because they are true believers. Those who remain face extremely harsh circumstances on the earth.

These ideas of the second coming are not new. The authors have been influenced by the preaching of Irishman William Nelson Darby, an Anglican priest in the early 1800's, who came to believe in the idea of "rapture."

This concept, however, is a very different perspective from that of Emanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg's view of the "Second Coming" is celebrated on June 19th, New Church Day. When Swedenborg completed *True Christianity*, he wrote:

TC#791

Note: After this work was finished the Lord called together his twelve disciples who followed him in the world; and the next day he sent them all forth throughout the whole spiritual world to preach the gospel that the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns, whose kingdom shall be for ages and ages This took place on the nineteenth day of June, 1770 ...

The second coming of Jesus has occurred, and is occurring, and will continue to occur! The “2nd coming” is taking place in our hearts, and from our hearts we can take it into the world. We can take into the world a new concept of community, the New Jerusalem. It is not something that we await for a future event; it is something we are creating ourselves every day by how we live our lives.

Steve Koke wrote:

For Swedenborg, the central meaning of the Christian millennium, the Second Coming of the Lord, was a coming of new light and consciousness through an awareness of the multiple levels of meaning in the Word and therefore, in the human soul that it covertly models.. and The millennium in which the saved shall reign with God for a thousand years was for Swedenborg not a thousand-year period, but a state of conjunction with God.

Being "New Church," means helping to create heaven on earth; a world where all religious paths are accepted-- not by their beliefs, but for how people live their lives.

So how do we create this heaven on earth?

Swedenborgian psychologist and mystic Wilson Van Dusen talks about “pristine awareness” which he says is *“like a mirror that you can pick up and turn all ways to see all things. The mirror merely reflects, as pristine awareness reflects the eternal. ...in pristine awareness you feel meaningful engagement ... ‘you cannot meet pristine awareness until you are open to being influenced and rearranged.*

Van Dusen looks to Buddhism to find some stories to illustrate his point:

“A student is in a hurry for satori [enlightenment]. He says he will do thus and so, and the master says then it will take five years. The student promises much more effort and the master says then it will take ten years! Effort lengthens the process and it makes it harder.

A student asked ‘Where is the Buddha nature?’ The master answered simply ‘The tree in the courtyard.’ .. The answer to the question, ‘where is the Buddha nature is ‘nearby, in sight. It is the life you .. you are overlooking as you ask the question.

Perhaps what is most important is simply that love be present in our lives, and acting on hatred. We can't actually strive to do life right. The more we "try" in the usual sense of the word, the more stuck we will feel. We need to let go of whatever stands in our way.

This is an emphasis on living now – in the moment. Heaven is not a future event; it is something to create every moment of life.

Shalem Institute writes about "contemplation" and says:

Stated simply, the classical tradition understands contemplation as a loving quality of presence in which one is open to things just as they are in the present moment.

Where does action fit into this?

In this understanding, contemplation is in no way opposed to action. In fact, our sense is that truly effective, responsive action in the world needs to be undergirded and informed by contemplative awareness.

Also, although silence and solitude play a role in the contemplative life, contemplation does not mean withdrawing from the world. On the contrary, it is a responsive, participative presence in and with God,

oneself, one's neighbors, and all creation.

So, if we ask "what do we do on a daily basis?" we're asking the wrong question. Perhaps it's about BEING every day. Being in relationship with the Divine and with the entire web of existence. And allowing the "being-ness" to guide us into the world to live out who we are. That's what the New Church is all about. It's not waiting for a future coming of Jesus or a heaven of the after-life. It's about being present with Love day by day, so that we are creating heaven in the world each moment of each day.



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Mary and Martha Walk Together

June 27, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Luke 10

At the Home of Martha and Mary

38As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

41"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42but only one thing is needed.[f] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

FROM SWEDENBORG

True Christian Religion (1770) Passage 600

Translated By John C. Ager in 1952

600. A regenerated internal man without a regenerated external also, may be likened to a bird flying in the air with no resting place on dry land except in a marsh, where it is attacked by serpents and frogs, so that it flies away and dies. It may be likened also to a swan swimming in mid-ocean, which cannot reach the shore and make her nest, so that the eggs she lays sink in the water, where they are eaten by fishes. It may be likened also to a soldier on a wall which is pulled down under him, so that he falls headlong and dies amid the ruins. Again it may be likened to a beautiful tree transplanted into filthy soil where troops of worms eat up its roots, so that it withers and dies. It may also be likened to a house without a foundation, or to a column without a pedestal. Such is the internal man when it alone is reformed and not the external also; for it then has no means of determining itself to doing good.

MESSAGE

Mary and Martha Walk Together

Teresa of Avila was in her 50's, and in poor health, when she felt she needed to leave the security of her convent to travel about Spain. She saw corruption in the convent, and felt called to reform the order and start new convents. She wrote:

This [the uniting of the will with God] is a great favor for those whom the Lord grants it; the active and contemplative lives are joined. The faculties all serve the Lord together; the will is occupied in its work and contemplation without knowing how; the other two faculties serve in the work of Martha. Thus Martha and Mary walk together.

She was a great mystic with a deep contemplative life. In her fifties, she realized that action in the world was part of contemplation. She found the story of Jesus visiting Martha and Mary to

be one filled with meaning for her.

In the Luke story, [above] is Jesus taking sides? Is he advocating contemplation over action? Is he trying to separate them? Or to unite them?

In Teresa's mind, it was about putting the two together:

Believe me, Martha and Mary must join together in order to show hospitality to the Lord and have Him always present and not host Him badly by failing to give him something to eat. How would Mary, always seated at his feet, provide him with food if her sister did not help her? His food is that in every way possible we draw souls that they may be saved and praise him always.

So why does Jesus seem to favor the role of Mary over Martha?
Teresa has an answer for that:

The answer is that she had already performed the task of Martha, pleasing the Lord by washing his feet and drying them and drying them with her hair. ... and the years that she subsequently lived in His absence must have been a terrible torment. You see she wasn't always in the delight of contemplation at the feet of the Lord.

In her book, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*, Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza looks at the Mary and Martha story. She argues that many women identify with the role of Martha, who is doing tasks often assigned to women. She suggests that some secretly resent Jesus for being critical of Martha, while others blame themselves for not being good enough "Martha's." Contemporary interpretations tend to view the text as putting love of God over social activism. This way of viewing the text pits Mary and Martha against each other as "good woman" – "bad woman," creating a dualism out of the roles of the women.

Swedenborg writes of the importance of attending to one's externals, as well as internals. Today's reading [above] is one place where he makes this point. He also says this:

TC 406-7

Man is born not for the sake of himself, but for the sake of others; that is he is born not to live for himself alone, but for others; otherwise there could be no cohesive society nor any good therein ... to love the neighbor is not alone to wish well and do good to a relative, a friend, or a good man, but also to a stranger, an enemy, a bad man. But charity is to be exercised toward the latter in one way and toward the former in another.

Teresa's years in the convent had been deeply contemplative, and she needed to balance the inner focus with an external one. For many people in today's culture, it's common to become so absorbed in the work of the world, that we lost our inner contemplative selves. I was talking

recently with a man who said that he was going to take the first vacation he had had in years. I asked him how he would spend his vacation time, and he showed me a list of all the chores he planned to do on his house. I asked him when he would actually have time for rest and renewal. He admitted that he never had quiet, restful time in his life.

As we move into the summer season in the Northern hemisphere, this is a good time to consider to ponder our own lives. Do you have a balance between quiet and action -- between "being" and "doing"? Is your summer filled with long "to-do" lists that provide no time for relaxation?

To connect with the inner contemplative self, we need times of letting go of all "doing," -- just allowing ourselves to "be." It's true that a meal must be prepared, but we also need time to just sit at the feet of Jesus and listen.

At the close of today's service, you'll find a quiet meditative video. Feel free to relax into this tape, and give yourself some quiet moments to listen to your heart.



Revolutionary Theologies

July 4, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Psalm 145

1 I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.

2 Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever.

3 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable.

4 One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.

5 On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.

6 The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness.

7 They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness, and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

8 The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

9 The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

FROM SWEDENBORG

Spiritual Experiences (Buss) n. 3786

3786. THAT ONE IS LESS FREE IN PROPORTION AS HE THINKS HIMSELF FREE.

It was perceived and noted from former experience that spirits, while they speak or think through another, infuse largely their cupidities and persuasions into the other spirit, from whence he supposes that he speaks and thinks from himself; for whoever acts from cupidity and persuasion, he thinks he does it from himself and in freedom. From experience also [it was evident] that spirits speaking through another consider that other through whom they speak as nothing. Hence it appears that he who supposes that he thinks and speaks from himself, and is thus in entire freedom, is then in fact in the deepest bondage, and in the eyes of other spirits is as nothing, scarcely even a slave, for they can use him as a mere lifeless instrument. But still spirits are indignant and angry that this should be said, being willing indeed to be deemed by others viler than slaves, provided that they are their own masters in their own eyes wherefore he is in a much better state who perceives that others induce upon him thoughts and discourse.

MESSAGE

Revolutionary Theology

On July 4th 1970, I was visiting London. I saw an ad for “1776: A New Musical from the Colonies.” I was intrigued, and had to see it! It was the account of the events leading up to the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th. I was amazed at how



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entertaining these debates became when depicted as a musical comedy. I laughed throughout the production, and loved that I was watching it with a British audience. As I chatted with some Brits afterwards, they joked about how much tea had been wasted at the Boston Tea Party!

In addition to being entertained, I was also deeply moved. These men were brought to life. We could see the human beings who debated and struggled with the concept of a revolution. After Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration, there was intense debate that changed many words. Jefferson consented to the changes until one man wanted to remove the word "tyrant" in reference to King George. Jefferson finally said "no;" he would not accept the change. The King was a tyrant. John Adams, the central figure of the play, said with dry humor: "Look, this is a revolution. We're going to offend *somebody*."

I wanted to see the movie version this week-end as I pondered the events we were celebrating. I downloaded the movie 1776 and watched it yesterday. Again, I was deeply moved as I had been 40 years ago watching the play in London.

I was struck by how God works through human beings. The concept of independence for the United States is now a sacred concept. In 1776, the issues were confusing and muddled. Decisions were often made by personal egos. Men wrestled with the reality of young men dying on the battlefield, and the deeply contentious question of slavery in the midst of a fight for freedom.

The representatives got irritated with each other in the heat and discouraged by the letters arriving from George Washington about the deplorable conditions on the battlefield. Here is a video clip from U Tube of a short segment. A letter has just arrived from George Washington. After hearing it, John Adams sings about the loneliness of his position in "Is Anybody there? Does Anybody Care?" The words to the song are below.

[Lyrics to "Is Anybody There"]

Adams:

Is anybody there?

Does anybody care?

Does anybody see what I see?

They want to me to quit; they say

John, give up the fight

Still to England I say

Good night, forever, good night!

For I have crossed the Rubicon

Let the bridge be burned behind me

Come what may, come what may



Commitment!

*The croakers all say we'll rue the day
There'll be hell to pay in fiery purgatory
Through all the gloom, through all the gloom
I see the rays of ravishing light and glory!*

*Is anybody there? Does anybody care?
Does anybody see what I see?*

*I see fireworks! I see the pageant and
Pomp and parade
I hear the bells ringing out
I hear the cannons roar
I see Americans - all Americans
Free forever more*

*How quiet, how quiet the chamber is
How silent, how silent the chamber is*

*Is anybody there? Does anybody care?
Does anybody see what I see?]*

Swedenborg tells us that God gives free will to humanity. Without it, we could not learn from our experiences. The decision for independence was filled with people wrestling with their free will. Is independence worth a terrible death for so many? Can freedom be real if some are enslaved? Does a representative to a congress vote the wishes of the people or his/her own perspective?

In 2010, it is easy to take for granted the decisions made in 1776 to become an independent nation. But human beings wrestled with every aspect of the debate back then. The war could have ended very differently if France and other nations hadn't come to join us in the battle. John Adams and the others could have written into history as traitors to the king instead of patriots in a new nation. History could see the Declaration of Independence as a foolish mistake instead of a courageous act.

Our struggles in the present are filled with fear and uncertainty, just as the decisions were in 1776. We don't know the consequences of our free will decisions. We make our choices with a mixture of courage and fear; lofty ideals and ego desires. It is our connection with the Divine that brings meaning to the chaotic events in the present moment. The signers of the Declaration had the same uncertainty, fear, and ego desires that we struggle with today. We have the same kind of vision and ideals that guided them in 1776.

If you live in the United States, this will be a day of parades, barbeques, and fireworks. Wherever you are, bring God into your day and allow the Divine to guide you through the confusing issues in human life.

Getting to Heaven

July 11, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Matthew 11:29-30

29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

FROM SWEDENBORG

H&H 528

There are some who believe that to live the life that leads to heaven, which is called the spiritual life, is difficult, because they have been told that man must renounce the world, must divest himself of the lusts called the lusts of the body and the flesh, and must live spiritually; and they understand this to mean that they must discard worldly things, which consist chiefly in riches and honors; that they must walk continually in pious meditation on God, salvation, and eternal life; and must spend their life in prayers and in reading the Word and pious books. Such is their idea of renouncing the world, and living in the spirit and not in the flesh. But that this is not at all true it has been given me to know by much experience and from conversation with the angels. I have learned, in fact, that those who renounce the world and live in the spirit in this manner acquire a sorrowful life that is not receptive of heavenly joy, since every one's life continues the same after death. On the contrary, to receive the life of heaven a man must needs live in the world and engage in its business and employments, and by means of a moral and civil life there receive the spiritual life. In no other way can the spiritual life be formed in man, or his spirit prepared for heaven; for to live an internal life and not at the same time an external life is like dwelling in a house that has no foundation, that gradually sinks or becomes cracked and rent asunder, or totters till it falls.

MESSAGE

Getting to Heaven

It is easier than we think to go to heaven.

An 85 year old couple, having been married almost 60 years, died in a car crash. They had been in good health the last ten years, mainly due to her interest in health food and exercise. When they reached the pearly gates, St. Peter took them to their mansion, which was decked out with a beautiful kitchen and master bath suite and Jacuzzi. As they "oohed and aahed" the old man asked Peter how much all this was going to cost. "It's free," Peter replied, "this is Heaven." Next they went out back to survey the championship golf course that the home backed up to. They would have golfing privileges everyday and each week the course changed to a new one representing the great golf courses on earth. The old man asked, "what are the green fees?"

Peter's reply, "This is heaven, you play for free." Next they went to the club house and saw the lavish buffet lunch with the cuisines of the world laid out. "How much to eat?" asked the old man. "Don't you understand yet? This is heaven, it is free!" Peter replied with some exasperation. "Well, where are the low fat and low cholesterol tables?" the old man asked timidly. Peter lectured, "That's the best part...you can eat as much as you like of whatever you like and you never get fat and you never get sick. This is

Heaven." With that the old man went into a fit of anger, throwing down his hat and stomping on it, and shrieking wildly. Peter and his wife both tried to calm him down, asking him what was wrong. The old man looked at his wife and said, "This is all your fault. If it weren't for your blasted bran muffins, I could have been here ten years ago!"

Jesus said: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

I want you to imagine that you lived in a world in which the god that had created you had given up on you. Imagine your own heavenly God, so upset with you that he wanted nothing to do with you. We can so often have this picture in our lives. Our false ideas about God can take away our enjoyment. The life we need to live that would be pleasing to God is often seen as a very hard and very joyless thing. God is often seen as angry or stern and a ruling taskmaster. Not a very joyful imagine of God. Often the life we think we need to live is without material goods or natural enjoyments.

We need to strive to do everything we can to follow God's way in our lives, and the path to being close to God is actually not about misery and suffering.

1. One reason going to heaven is actually easy is because heaven is what God has created us for.

One of the most important things that you can do is to keep reminding yourself that God loves you. And loves you so much that God wants you to be happy.

Some religions teach that only a set number of people are predestined to heaven and another set predestined to hell. Actually all people are predestined to heaven. This doesn't mean we will all end up there because we have freedom, free will, so we could and are able to choose hell.

Remember that every moment of every day, the Lord's goal is for us to go to heaven. This is really important because we can sometimes live as if we need to convince God to love us. God is not angrily looking down on us and waiting for us to make a mistake or for us to give him an excuse to send you to hell, as if that is what he wants. The reality is that God is constantly flowing into your being with love and truth to help you to live a good and heavenly life.

We are the ones that turn and twist this heavenly goodness into its opposite when we block out God by focusing on self centered wants, desires and power. We can go through times in our lives acting as if we are salmon fighting upstream to get to heaven, when the exact opposite is true. The current in the stream of life of the Lord's love is always wanting to lead us towards heaven.

An old man, Herman, was driving down the freeway, when his cell phone rang. Answering, he heard his wife's voice urgently warning him, "Herman, I just heard on the news that there's a car going the wrong way on Highway 401. Please be careful!" "Darn!," said Herman, "It's not just one car. It's hundreds of them!"

2. We are supposed to live an enjoyable life.

People believe that we have to give up material things and worldly pleasures in order to go to heaven. Sometimes people really do have this concept that a joyless and austere life is the way to heaven.

Everything that God created, God created for us to enjoy. If we live a life that deprives ourselves of the world, then we are closing ourselves off from heavenly joy.

We just need to keep pleasures in their proper place as we go about our daily lives. We should not let anything become more important to us than loving God's ways, loving and helping others and focusing on

spiritual things. We don't need to reject this world, we just need to keep all that the world has to offer in its proper place below our love for God and each other.

3. God's will helps us and leads us through all our spiritual temptations and in fact makes them as easy as possible to conquer, because God is always with us ready and ready to fight for us.

Life is difficult, but it is easy to resist any temptation in our life if we do it right away; if we let go of the temptation before it becomes a habit or ingrained within us. If we don't do this right away then it becomes harder and harder to resist along the way.

H&H 533 That it is not so difficult to live the life of heaven as some believe can now be seen from this, that when any thing presents itself to a man that he knows to be dishonest and unjust, but to which his mind is borne, it is simply necessary for him to think that it ought not to be done because it is opposed to the Divine precepts. If a man accustoms himself so to think, and from so doing establishes a habit of so thinking, he is gradually conjoined to heaven; ... This is meant by the Lord's words, My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Matt. xi. 30). But it must be understood that the difficulty of so thinking and of resisting evils increases so far as man from his will does evils, for in the same measure he becomes accustomed to them until he no longer sees them, and at length loves them and from the delight of his love excuses them, and confirms them by every kind of fallacy, and declares them to be allowable and good. This is the fate of those who in early youth plunge into evils without restraint, and also reject Divine things from the heart.

The more something is ingrained in us, the more painful the struggle will be to see it, to let it go, and to let God transform it. But the good news is that God is always with us ready to fight for us, we just have to be willing.

God tells us to rejoice and be glad. Let us remember how joyful life is when we follow God's leading. Heaven is what we are created for. We are expected to go to heaven. It is easier than we think to go to and to be in heaven!

Marian's Robe!

July 18, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Exodus 28 (New International Version)

Exodus 28

The Priestly Garments

¹ "Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so they may serve me as priests. ² Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron, to give him dignity and honor. ³ Tell all the skilled men to whom I have given wisdom in such matters that they are to make garments for Aaron, for his consecration, so he may serve me as priest. ...

³⁹ "Weave the tunic of fine linen and make the turban of fine linen. The sash is to be the work of an embroiderer. ⁴⁰ Make tunics, sashes and headbands for Aaron's sons, to give them dignity and honor. ⁴¹ After you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve me as priests.

FROM SWEDENBORG

Arcana Coelestia (Elliott) n. 9814

sRef Ex@28 @2 S0' 9814. 'And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother' means a representative sign of the spiritual kingdom lying adjacent to the celestial kingdom. This is clear from the meaning of 'garments' in general as truths, and more particularly as truths clothing good, dealt with in 5954, 9212, 9216. The meaning of 'garments' as truths owes its origin to things in heaven, where angels appear dressed in clothes in keeping with the truths they have that spring from good, 165, 5248, 5954, 9212; and from this it may be recognized that Aaron's garments represented the Lord's spiritual kingdom lying adjacent to His celestial kingdom. For Aaron represented the Lord in respect of the Divine Celestial, 9810, and therefore the garments he wore represented the Divine Spiritual adjacent to the celestial kingdom like clothing next to the body, the Divine Spiritual being Divine Truth emanating from the Lord's Divine Good. It presents itself in heaven as light, indeed it is the light which illuminates both the outward and the inward powers of sight that angels possess. Modifications of this light - which are determined by the subjects, that is, the angels, that receive it - produce different visible phenomena, such as clouds, rainbows, and various colours and brightnesses; they also produce shining garments about the angels. From all this it may be recognized that the Lord's spiritual kingdom was represented by Aaron's holy garments. For there are two kingdoms into which the heavens are divided, the celestial kingdom and the spiritual kingdom, regarding which, see 9277. Those in the celestial kingdom appear naked, but those in the spiritual kingdom appear in clothing. From this it is again clear that Divine Truth, or the Divine Spiritual, which appears as light, is that which serves to clothe.

MESSAGE

Marian's Robe

I didn't think I had heard her correctly. "We need to shop for *what?*"

"Fabric." Marian Kirvin, the school librarian, was being patient with me as I tried to grasp what she was saying.

"So, why do we need to shop for fabric? I'm really busy finishing the semester and getting ready to graduate."

"It's for your ordination. For a robe. It's my gift to you. You buy the fabric and pattern, and I'll sew the robe. I offer this gift to all the women getting ordained. You can't buy an ordination robe in women's sizes; they're just made for men."

I was overwhelmed. "Marian, what an incredible gift! Yes, all the robes I've seen are way too big for me; I wasn't sure what I would do." With my 5'2", 110 lb frame, I purchased all my clothes in petite sizes. I had been calling liturgical stores in the Boston area, only to find that all their robes were much too large for me. I gave her a big hug. Her husband, Bob, was on the faculty and was my advisor. They were two of the sweetest people I had ever known!

During the next few weeks, I spent a lot of time in the school's living room for Marian's fittings. Sometimes other women students would drop by to see how it was going. Mary Kay Klein, the school's President came by to chat at times, as did faculty member Dorothea Harvey.

Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey had been the first Swedenborgian woman ever ordained. That was in 1975; fifteen years previous, as these events were taking place in 1990.

I loved hearing Dorothea talk about that Convention of 1975. She said that some male ministers came up to her and said they couldn't support her ordination because they cared about her, and didn't want her to go crazy. Swedenborg had [written in his spiritual diary](#) that women who preach like men do, go crazy. Dorothea responded, "I have no intention of preaching like men do. I will preach like a woman!"

Since then, about a dozen women had been ordained by Convention.

During out fitting sessions, I shared stories of my journey towards ordination. Before discovering the Swedenborgian Church, I had been an Episcopalian. While a student at the Episcopal Divinity School, I had applied to become a postulant in the ordination process. The first step was a psychiatric evaluation. I was given the name of a

psychiatrist in Boston, and made an appointment. As a social worker, I felt confident in understanding psychiatric principles.

I was surprised, however, that so many of his questions were about my marriage – especially why my husband and I didn't have any children. Neither of us felt drawn to parenthood, and we had made the decision not to have children. The psychiatrist, however, seemed concerned about how I could be happy without having children.

A few weeks later, I was called into the Bishop's office, and told that the psychiatrist had concluded that I was not fit for ordination. My desire to be a minister was a sublimation of my real desire, to be a mother. I was stunned! When I went back to the school and shared this experience with other women students, one said to me: "I had that same psychiatrist for my evaluation. I had children, but he said I was unfit because I had young children, and would be neglecting them if I went to seminary." Another woman said, "Oh, I was also sent to that psychiatrist. My children were grown and had moved away. The psychiatrist said I was unfit for ministry because I was suffering from 'empty nest syndrome.'"

When I became Swedenborgian, I was impressed with the respectful nature of the ordination process. At that time, only Convention ordained women, although the British Conference now does so.

I told this story last week at [Gathering Leaves](#), an opportunity for women from all the New Church branches to get to know each other. I said I wanted to share my experiences of ordination, although – I added with a big smile – I was taking no position on the big question: *Are the ordained women of Convention and Conference going crazy? If we are, we would be the last to know; so we rely on the feedback of our sisters!* We all laughed heartily together!

When I was studying at the Episcopal divinity School in Cambridge, I had the opportunity to be part of their first D.Min. Class in Feminist-Liberation Theology in Ministry. I learned that women – and other people from oppressed groups – often start theology from the stories of their lives. We tell our stories to each other, and from them, we come to understand God and how God works through us.

Stories are important to me. As women from various Swedenborgian traditions gathered last week, I was happy to hear so many stories from our various experiences with our faith communities.

I concluded my talk with what I have learned from Marian's robe – now stained and tattered. "We are all part of our church, and all of our stories are important. If the church doesn't have the right size for our stories, then we can sew new garments for the church. With only some fabric, thread, and needle – we can keep making new garments for our churches – so that all of our stories are part of the whole."

Poems and Prayers

July 24, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Matthew 6:9-13 (New International Version)

"This, then, is how you should pray:
" 'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'

FROM SWEDENBORG

Spiritual Experiences (Odhner) n. 81

While I was praying the Lord's Prayer, my hands were folded and unfolded by a manifest force. Also, the words seemed to be lifted up, and mental glimpses of the contents imparted

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 2535

He shall pray for thee. That this signifies that it will thus be revealed, is evident from the signification of "praying." Prayer, regarded in itself, is speech with God, and some internal view at the time of the matters of the prayer, to which there answers something like an influx into the perception or thought of the mind, so that there is a certain opening of the man's interiors toward God; but this with a difference according to the man's state, and according to the essence of the subject of the prayer. If the man prays from love and faith, and for only heavenly and spiritual things, there then comes forth in the prayer something like a revelation (which is manifested in the affection of him that prays) as to hope, consolation, or a certain inward joy. It is from this that to "pray" signifies in the internal sense to be revealed. Still more is this the case here, where praying is predicated of a prophet, by whom is meant the Lord, whose prayer was nothing else than internal speech with the Divine, and at the same time revelation. That there was revelation is evident in Luke:

It came to pass when Jesus was baptized, and prayed, that the heaven was opened (Luke 3:21).

In the same:

It came to pass that He took Peter, James, and John, and went up into the mountain to pray; and as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment became white and glistening (Luke 9:28-29).

MESSAGE

Poems and Prayers

Whom Have I But Thee?

*Have you any joy
but of God's bestowing?
Have you any refuge
but in Him?
Though the world destroy
does not He remain?
Can He who gave the seed
forget His children's need?
sow in vain?*

*Oh, be still, be patient,
learn to pray,
and wait for wisdom, knowing,
nothing can stop the seed from growing,
nothing of men's devising,
can stop the run from rising,
hinder its course, or speed.
No Let Him, uncompromising,
lead each in His own way,
till in the dawn's first shiting,
the Truth bursts forth like lightening --
brings day!*

Alice Very

On Reading the Word

*Daily as I read
A familiar phrase will
Suddenly drop deep --
As into a well of stored rain,
Resound with new meaning
As it strikes the quiet tension
Of my listening mind,
And send out from its plumbed depths
Concentric circles, degree outreaching ,
Of plusing, vibrant life,
The outmost reflected back to its origin
By the very stony walling in
Of my limitations.
Then it lies still again,
No sign of change,
But from henceforth
My spirit will be lifted to a new level
Almost imperceptibly.*

Carolyn A. Blackmer



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

Poetry as Prayer: Robert Frost

August 1, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

23 Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25 The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

27 "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." 29 The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

30 Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. 31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. 32 But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." 33 He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

34 The crowd spoke up, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ[f] will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?"

35 Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. 36 Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

FROM SWEDENBORG

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 6476

6476. Whenever I have been reading the Lord's prayer, I have plainly perceived an elevation toward the Lord which was like an attraction, and at the same time my ideas were open, and from this there was effected a communication with some societies in heaven; and I noticed that there was an influx from the Lord into every detail of the prayer, thus into every idea of my thought that was from the meaning of the things in the prayer. The influx was effected with inexpressible variety, that is, not the same at one time as another; hence also it was made evident how infinite are the things contained in the prayer, and that the Lord is present in every one of them.

MESSAGE

Poetry as Prayer: Robert Frost

Ah, August in Kennnnebunk, Maine!

I love Saturday mornings. Farmers from the area gather down town for an outdoor market of fresh vegetables, maple syrup, and home baked goodies. The main area is closed to cars, so kids and dogs are happily romping and neighbors chatting with each other.

When I was in town this morning for my fresh veggies, I noticed a big sign from one of the local churches about a morning church camp for a week in August; it was called an "Exploration." When I was growing up, we had events like that in the summer that we called "Vacation Bible School." I have such fond memories of those summer mornings! I'd get to wear shorts and t-shirt to the church, and the teacher would come in with a arm load of books and projects. We always had a fun story, a craft project, some singing, and of course snacks. I especially remember the cookies and Kool-aid!

Still, in my mind, is the idea of summer as a relaxec and enjoyable time for learning through spiritual stories. Our theme for August is "Poetry as Prayer: Poets & Swedenborg." We'll be experiencing poetry as a restful form of worship, by reading poets who were/ are Swedenborgians or were/are influenced by Swedenborg.

Today, our poet is Robert Frost. I have some happy church camp songs for us, and a story. Then you can have a quiet meditative time listening to or reading poems. You're on your own for cookies and Kool-aid!

STORY

Robert Lee Frost was born march 26th, 1874, in San Francisco. He was named after General Robert E. Lee. His father, William Prescott Frost, was a Confederate, a Universalist, and an active alcoholic.

The Frosts had not been in San Francisco for long. Mrs. Frost was Presbyterian, but not finding the right worship community with Presbyterian churches. She enjoyed books of UU minister Thomas Starr King, so they attended King's former San Francisco congregation for a while. She started reading Emerson, and soon found herself reading Swedenborg.

Frost's mother joined the Swedenborgian church in San Francisco. When Robert was in 2nd grade, she had him baptized, by Rev. John Doughty.

Not long afterwards, he started hearing voices. When he told his mother, she said that he had "second sight," as she did. She encouraged him not to talk about it with others.

in 1885, his father died of TB, and Rev. Doughty did the service. Then Robert, with his mother and little sister, moved to Lawrence, MA. to live with his father's family. He hated the discipline of the Frost household. He started attending Universalist services with his grandparents.

His mother moved the children to Salem, N.H. to teach school there.

And so Robert grew to adulthood. He attended Harvard briefly, and fell in love fellow student, Elinor White. In 1895, when he was a reporter in Lawrence, they got married.

Neither of them belonged to a church, but Rev. John Haynes, the Salem Swedenborian minister, performed the ceremony December, 19, 1895. The service was held in the school where Robert's mother had her private school and Elinor was a teacher. The Lawrence Swedenborgians met in the same rented downtown office space, and the Frost family also lived there. Most of the guests were Swedenborgians.

In 1923, he wrote: "What is my philosophy? That is hard to say. I was brought up a Swedenborgian. I am not a Swedenborgian now. But there is a good deal of it that's left with me. I am a mystic. I believe in symbols. I believe in change and in changing symbols. Yet that does not take me away from the kindly contact of human beings. No, it brings me closer to them."

Frost died Jan. 29, 1963. He died on Swedenborg's birthday!

His daughter Lesley asked the Unitarian minister Palfrey Perkins to conduct a service.

Some of Swedenborg's concepts that are in Frost's poetry include: Love as the essence of reality, correspondences, and a process of spiritual growth.

Below are some poems by Frost.

A Prayer in Spring

Oh, give us pleasure in the flowers today;
And give us not to think so far away
As the uncertain harvest; keep us here
All simply in the springing of the year.

Oh, give us pleasure in the orchard white,
Like nothing else by day, like ghosts by night;
And make us happy in the happy bees,
The swarm dilating round the perfect trees.

And make us happy in the darting bird
That suddenly above the bees is heard,
The meteor that thrusts in with needle bill,
And off a blossom in mid air stands still.

For this is love and nothing else is love,

To which it is reserved for God above
To sanctify to what far ends he will,
But which it only needs that we fulfill.

'Twas something we knew all about to begin with
And needn't have fared into space like his master
To find 'twas the effort, the essay of love.

Directive

Robert Frost

Back out of all this now too much for us,
Back in a time made simple by the loss
Of detail, burned, dissolved, and broken off
Like graveyard marble sculpture in the weather,
There is a house that is no more a house
Upon a farm that is no more a farm
And in a town that is no more a town.
The road there, if you'll let a guide direct you
Who only has at heart your getting lost,
May seem as if it should have been a quarry—
Great monolithic knees the former town
Long since gave up pretense of keeping covered.
And there's a story in a book about it:
Besides the wear of iron wagon wheels
The ledges show lines ruled southeast-northwest,
The chisel work of an enormous Glacier
That braced his feet against the Arctic Pole.
You must not mind a certain coolness from him
Still said to haunt this side of Panther Mountain.
Nor need you mind the serial ordeal
Of being watched from forty cellar holes
As if by eye pairs out of forty firkins.
As for the woods' excitement over you
That sends light rustle rushes to their leaves,
Charge that to upstart inexperience.
Where were they all not twenty years ago?
They think too much of having shaded out
A few old pecker-fretted apple trees.
Make yourself up a cheering song of how
Someone's road home from work this once was,
Who may be just ahead of you on foot
Or creaking with a buggy load of grain.
The height of the adventure is the height
Of country where two village cultures faded
Into each other. Both of them are lost.
And if you're lost enough to find yourself



By now, pull in your ladder road behind you
And put a sign up CLOSED to all but me.
Then make yourself at home. The only field
Now left's no bigger than a harness gall.
First there's the children's house of make-believe,
Some shattered dishes underneath a pine,
The playthings in the playhouse of the children.
Weep for what little things could make them glad.
Then for the house that is no more a house,
But only a belilaced cellar hole,
Now slowly closing like a dent in dough.
This was no playhouse but a house in earnest.
Your destination and your destiny's
A brook that was the water of the house,
Cold as a spring as yet so near its source,
Too lofty and original to rage.
(We know the valley streams that when aroused
Will leave their tatters hung on barb and thorn.)
I have kept hidden in the instep arch
Of an old cedar at the waterside
A broken drinking goblet like the Grail
Under a spell so the wrong ones can't find it,
So can't get saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn't.
(I stole the goblet from the children's playhouse.)
Here are your waters and your watering place.
Drink and be whole again beyond confusion.
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From Steeple Bush | Holt, 1947

AFTER APPLE-PICKING

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight
I got from looking through a pane of glass
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
And held against the world of hoary grass.
It melted, and I let it fall and break.
But I was well
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,



And I could tell
What form my dreaming was about to take.
Magnified apples appear and disappear,
Stem end and blossom end,
And every fleck of russet showing dear.
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
The rumbling sound
Of load on load of apples coming in.
For I have had too much
Of apple-picking: I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired.
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.
For all
That struck the earth,
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,
Went surely to the cider-apple heap
As of no worth.
One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.



Poetry as Prayer: Edwin Markham

August 8, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Matthew 21

The Fig Tree Withers

18Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. 19Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered.

20When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked.

21Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. 22If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

FROM SWEDENBORG

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 885

That a "leaf" signifies truth, is evident from many passages in the Word where man is compared to a tree, or is called a tree, and where "fruits" signify the good of charity, and a "leaf" the truth therefrom (which indeed they are like); as in Ezekiel:

And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, there cometh up every tree for food, whose leaf doth not fall, neither is the fruit consumed, it is reborn every month, because the waters thereof issue out of the sanctuary; and the fruit thereof shall be for food, and the leaf thereof for medicine (Ezek. 47:12; Rev. 22:2).

Here "tree" denotes the man of the church in whom is the kingdom of the Lord; its "fruit" the good of love and of charity; its "leaf" the truths therefrom, which serve for the instruction of the human race and for their regeneration, for which reason the leaf is said to be for "medicine."

MESSAGE

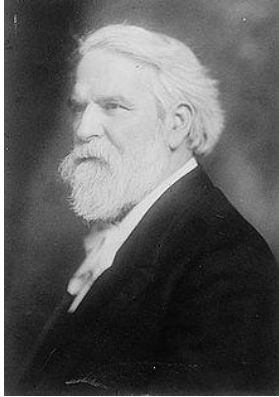
Edwin Markham

[1852-1940]

MARKHAM'S LIFE



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life



Edwin Markham was born in Oregon City, Oregon, as the youngest of 10 children. His parents separated several years later, and in and he and his mother moved to central California where he lived on a farm. He studied literature and then attended San Jose Normal school, and taught for several years and then became superintendent of the county schools.

Markham began writing poetry around 1872, and he sold a poem by 1880. He wrote poetry for Harper's, Century, and Scribner's. At the end of 1898, "The Man with the Hoe." The poem was based on the 1862 painting by Jean-Francois Millet. Markham read the poem at a New Years' Eve party, and it was published by the San Francisco Examiner.

"The Man with the Hoe" received a great deal of publicity. It supported the labor movement and working conditions, and started Markham's reputation as a social reformer and champion of the working class. He became a popular speaker at labor meetings.

In 1922 Markham, read his poem "Lincoln, the Man of the People" at the dedication of the Lincoln Memorial. On his 80th birthday in 1932, he was honored at Carnegie Hall by Pres. Hoover as one of the most important poets of his time.

THE MAN WITH THE HOE



The Man with the Hoe, by Jean-Francois Millet

The Man with the Hoe
by Edwin Markham

Bowed by the weight of centuries he leans
Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground,
The emptiness of ages in his face,
And on his back the burden of the world.
Who made him dead to rapture and despair,
A thing that grieves not and that never hopes,
Stolid and stunned, a brother to the ox?
Who loosened and let down this brutal jaw?
Whose was the hand that slanted back this brow?
Whose breath blew out the light within this brain?
Is this the Thing the Lord God made and gave
To have dominion over sea and land;
To trace the stars and search the heavens for power;
To feel the passion of Eternity?
Is this the Dream He dreamed who shaped the suns
And marked their ways upon the ancient deep?
Down all the stretch of Hell to its last gulf
There is no shape more terrible than this --
More tongued with censure of the world's blind greed --
More filled with signs and portents for the soul --
More fraught with menace to the universe.

What gulfs between him and the seraphim!
Slave of the wheel of labor, what to him
Are Plato and the swing of Pleiades?
What the long reaches of the peaks of song,
The rift of dawn, the reddening of the rose?
Through this dread shape the suffering ages look;
Time's tragedy is in that aching stoop;
Through this dread shape humanity betrayed,
Plundered, profaned and disinherited,
Cries protest to the Judges of the World,
A protest that is also prophecy.

O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,
Is this the handiwork you give to God,
This monstrous thing distorted and soul-quenched?
How will you ever straighten up this shape;
Touch it again with immortality;
Give back the upward looking and the light;
Rebuild in it the music and the dream;
Make right the immemorial infamies,
Perfidious wrongs, immedicable woes?

O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,



How will the Future reckon with this Man?
How answer his brute question in that hour
When whirlwinds of rebellion shake the world?
How will it be with kingdoms and with kings --
With those who shaped him to the thing he is --
When this dumb Terror shall reply to God,
After the silence of the centuries?

MARKHAM'S BELIEFS & SWEDENBORGIANISM

Markham was raised Methodist. He came to know Thomas Lake Harris around 1876, and may have learned about Swedenborg from him.

[Harris was a Universalist minister who came to know Andrew Jackson Davis, and became involved in Spiritualism, and then became a Christian. He discovered the Swedenborgians, and before long considered himself and his congregation to be Swedenborgian. This view was not shared by the Swedenborgian Church! For more on Harris and David, see [Wings & Roots](#).]

Markham wrote a poem about Swedenborg, and often quoted Swedenborg. He spoke at Swedenborgian Churches, but never officially joined the church.

This is a quotation from *New Church Life*:

UNITED STATES. The NEW YORK Society has, on a number of occasions, been addressed by the poet, Edwin Markham, who is a professed Newchurchman. In January, Mr. Markham addressed the congregation at the close of the services. After a sketch of his own life, and his study of the Bible; Mr. Markham then told how he had been led to see "that a revelation of truth had been made through "Swedenborg," whom he characterized as "the eye of the eighteenth century," and whose writings he has been studying for forty years. Mr. Markham also addressed members of the Church in BOSTON, Brookline and Cambridge, Mass. He has an original and forceful style.

In Maguerite Block's history of the New Church, she refers to Markham as representing the "Social Gospel" dimension of the church. She quote him as saying this in the Boston Church:

If Swedenborg had never expressed another idea than his immortal saying, "All religion has relation to life, and the life of religion is to do good," he would have given the world enough to inspire a hundred seers. I never speak his name without emotion. He lifted me out of quagmire of theology; he lifted me up to see the stars. [p. 348]

MARKHAM'S POETRY AS PRAYER

Here are two poems by Markham that are like prayers. Read them as prayer, and see if, to you, they are a form of worship.

A Song to a Tree

Give me the dance of your boughs, O tree,
Whenever the wild wind blows;
And when the wind is gone, give me
Your beautiful repose.

How easily your greatness swings
To meet the changing hours;
I, too, would mount upon your wings,
And rest upon your powers.

I seek your grace, O mighty tree,
And shall seek, many a day,
Till I more worthily shall be
Your comrade on the way.

A Prayer

Teach me, Father, how to go
Softly as the grasses grow;
Hush my soul to meet the shock
Of the wild world as a rock;
But my spirit, propt with power,
Make as simple as a flower.
Let the dry heart fill its cup,
Like a poppy looking up;
Let life lightly wear her crown
Like a poppy looking down,
When its heart is filled with dew,
And its life begins anew.

Teach me, Father, how to be
Kind and patient as a tree.
Joyfully the crickets croon
Under the shady oak at noon;
Beetle, on his mission bent,
Tarrys in that cooling tent.
Let me, also, cheer a spot,
Hidden field or garden grot—
Place where passing souls can rest
On the way and be their best.



Poetry as Prayer: Elizabeth Barret Browning

August 15, 2010

**READINGS
From the Bible**

Isaiah 59: 16-21

And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him.

For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.

According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence.

So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.

And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD.

As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever.

From Swedenborg

True Christian Religion (Rose) n. 116

Many passages in the Word make it clear that while he was in the world the Lord fought battles against the hells, conquered them, brought them under control, and made them obedient to himself. I will extract just a few.

In Isaiah:

...

These words are about the Lord's battles against the hells. The clothes in which he was honorable and which were reddish mean the Word, to which the Jewish people had done violence. The combat itself against the hells and victory over them is described by his trampling people in his anger and stamping on them in his rage. The fact that he was alone and fought from his own power is described by these phrases: "there was no man from the people with me;" "my arm performed salvation for me;" and "I made the enemies' victory go down into the ground." His bringing salvation and redemption as a result is described by these phrases: "That is why he became their Savior;" and "because of his love and mercy he redeemed them." The fact that this was the reason for his coming is meant by these phrases: "the day of revenge was in my heart and the year of my redeemed had come."

Also in Isaiah:

He saw that there was no one and was astounded that there was no one interceding. Therefore his own arm performed salvation for him and justice made him stand up. Then he put on justice like a breastplate

and a helmet of salvation on his head. He put on the clothes of vengeance and covered himself with zeal like a cloak. Then the Redeemer came to Zion. (Isaiah 59:16, 17, 20)

Message

Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Poetry as Prayer



In 1988, I was attending the Swedenborg School of Religion in Newton, MA, and preparing for my 1990 ordination in General Convention.

Trying to find my spiritual home, I had recently come into the denomination from my journey through the Unitarian-Universalists and then the Episcopal Church.

I had been reading Swedenborg for years but didn't know anything about the church, so soaked up every bit of knowledge I could. I was fascinated to realize that the year – 1988 – was the 300th anniversary of Swedenborg's birth in 1688. The Swedenborg Foundation honored the occasion with the release of a beautiful thick book called: [Emanuel Swedenborg: A Continuing Vision](#), a pictorial biography and anthology of essays and poetry. It was edited by Robin Larsen. It's a gorgeous volume, packed with essays, photos and poetry. I was thrilled that there was so much poetry by so many poets who had been influenced by Swedenborg. At the end of each of the five sections, Alice Skinner offers a Swedenborgian theme including selections from poets that reflect that theme.

Skinner wrote this about Elizabeth Barrett Browning [1806=1861]:

[She] was introduced to the works of Swedenborg in 1851 by a friend from London, Miss E. F. Haworth. Her letters to friends include references to her reading of Swedenborg and discussions of his ideas. In a letter to her sister Henrietta in 1857, Browning called herself "a Swedenborgian." [p. 180]

Elizabeth Barrett was born in 1806 in Durham, England. The Barrett's were wealthy plantation owners in Jamaica, where they used slave labor. The family was part Creole. She was tutored at home, and had read many of Shakespeare's plays before she was ten. When she was twelve she had written an epic poem! At fourteen she suffered a lung problem, and the next year she sustained a spinal injury. These problems were with her the rest of her life. She continued

reading the classics, and became involved in her local church. By 1832, the family fortunes were exhausted, due in part to the abolition of slavery in England.

Her family lived in a cottage by the sea, where she spent one year. During that time her brother died sailing nearby. She was devastated. She then lived in London with her father, who was a tyrant. She spent the next five years, a recluse, living in the bedroom of her father's London home; but continued her writing. In 1844, she published a volume of her poetry, in which she praised the poet Robert Browning. He wrote her a letter. Despite his being 6 years younger than she, they exchanged hundreds of letters in less than two years. Her father was opposed to the romance, as portrayed in the 1930 play, *The Barrettes of Wimpole Street*, by Rudolf Besier (1878-1942), later made into a 1934 movie and several TV movie versions. In 1846, they eloped and moved to Italy, where they had a son; Robert Wideman Browning. Her father never spoke to her again. In 1850, her book, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, was published, dedicated to her husband, and based on the letters they wrote before their marriage. It is considered to be one of the most widely-known romantic poems in English.



Political and social themes embody Elizabeth's later work. In 1857 she published a verse novel, *Aurora Leigh*, which has the theme of male power over woman. In her poetry she also dealt with issues like the oppression of the Italians by the Austrians, the child labor mines and mills of England, slavery, and other social issues. This focus made her less popular as a poet. Elizabeth Barrett Browning died in Florence on June 29, 1861.

SWEDENBORGIAN INFLUENCE

Our two romantics, Robert and Elizabeth, read Swedenborg's Conjugal Love together in Florence early in their marriage. Elizabeth often mentioned reading Swedenborg and she acknowledged his influence on *Aurora Leigh* (1857). Robert didn't directly talk about a Swedenborgian influence, but he and Elizabeth were both friends of the English Swedenborgian, Charles Augustus Tulk, and Robert was an early friend of James John Garth Wilkinson. As mentioned above, she may have been introduced to Swedenborg by a friend, E.F. Haworth. In a letter, Browning called herself a Swedenborgian.

SWEDENBORGIAN CONCEPTS

Alice Skinner notes that Elizabeth lived out the Swedenborgian values of "uses" in her work. She took on the causes of many who were oppressed. In *Aurora Leigh*, she "examines the meaning of useful work at length, including a confirmation of the value of simply performing

one's everyday tasks." P. 361 In addition to her social justice themes, her poetry is filled with a celebration of love and references to God.

POETRY

A poem about Love

How Do I Love Thee? (Sonnet 43) by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for right.
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

A poem about God

Chorus of Eden Spirit by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

HEARKEN, oh hearken! let your souls behind you
Turn, gently moved!
Our voices feel along the Dread to find you,
O lost, beloved!
Through the thick-shielded and strong-marshalled angels,
They press and pierce:
Our requiems follow fast on our evangels,—
Voice throbs in verse.
We are but orphaned spirits left in Eden
A time ago:
God gave us golden cups, and we were bidden
To feed you so.
But now our right hand hath no cup remaining,
No work to do,
The mystic hydromel is spilt, and staining
The whole earth through.
Most ineradicable stains, for showing



(Not interfused!)
That brighter colours were the world's foregoing,
Than shall be used.
Hearken, oh hearken! ye shall hearken surely
For years and years,
The noise beside you, dripping coldly, purely,
Of spirits' tears.
The yearning to a beautiful denied you,
Shall strain your powers.
Ideal sweetnesses shall over-glide you,
Resumed from ours.
In all your music, our pathetic minor
Your ears shall cross;
And all good gifts shall mind you of diviner,
With sense of loss.
We shall be near you in your poet-languors
And wild extremes,
What time ye vex the desert with vain angers,
Or mock with dreams.
And when upon you, weary after roaming,
Death's seal is put,
By the foregone ye shall discern the coming,
Through eyelids shut.

Do any of these poems inspire your own worship of the Divine? What would it be like to write your own poem/prayer/hymn to God?



The Very Poetic Very's

August 22, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

11What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean,' but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.' "

12Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?"

13He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots.
14Leave them; they are blind guides.[e] If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit."

15Peter said, "Explain the parable to us."

16"Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them. 17"Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? 18But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' 19For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. 20These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.' "

FROM SWEDENBORG

80. Nothing that a person only thinks, not even what he thinks to will, is appropriated to him unless he also wills it so that he does it when opportunity offers. For when a man then does it, he does it from the will by the understanding or from affection of the will by thought of the understanding. If it is something thought only, it cannot be appropriated, for the understanding does not conjoin itself to the will, or the thought of the understanding to the affection of the will, but the latter with the former, as we have shown many times in the treatise *Divine Love and Wisdom*, chapter 5. This is meant by the Lord's words: Not that which enters the mouth renders a man unclean, but that which goes forth from the heart by the mouth renders a man unclean (Matt. 15:11, 17–19).

From rationality a man can understand and from liberty he can will, doing each as of himself. Yet he does not have the ability to will good in freedom and to do it in accord with reason unless he is regenerated. Divine Providence #87

MESSAGE

The Very Poetic Very's

Pt. 1: Alice Very

[1894- 1977]



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Alice Very was the daughter of Frank Washington Very -- a man who was very Swedenborgian and raised his children as Swedenborgians.

Frank's uncle was Jones Very, a very respected Transcendental poet whom Emerson compared to Swedenborg.

This week we'll talk about Alice, and next week we'll look at her great Uncle Jonas.

First, it should be said, there is little information about Alice in the public domain. I learned of her through Alice Skinner's research in *Continuing Vision*, as a poet influenced by Swedenborg. Then I heard from an active member of our own web community, Gwynne Griswold, that Alice Very had been her aunt!

In this series of prayful poets influenced by Swedenborg, I have been able to learn about the poets through internet searches. In the case of Alice, I have only found her father Frank and her great-uncle Jones on-line. Fortunately, our own Gwynne has been very helpful at providing information about Alice. Perhaps others of you will know something about Alice to add to our few resources.

Alice grew up in the Swedenborgian churches of Boston and Providence. When she was married, there was a crisis in the family: her mother-in-law Mary Hosmer Brown contracted TB. Her father-in-law and her husband both became Christian Scientists in an effort to cure her. Alice converted to Christian Science as well. Later in life she tried to become a Christian Science practitioner, but felt that she did not have the talent to cure others. In her latter years, she read Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Wisdom*. Then she told her mother that if she had read that book at a younger age, she would have stayed Swedenborgian.

Gwynne has generously loaned me a copy of Alice's final book, *Write on the Water*. Gwynne points out that much of Alice's poetry is bitter and sad. She was poor through much of her life, and she lost a child to drowning.

Ms. Griswold also discusses her aunt Alice in the article "Just When Did I Start Acting Like My Mother," published in *Rooted in Spirit: A Harvest of Women's Wisdom*. Griswold writes:

"She had a degree from Wellesley College, a husband starting a publishing business, five children, a large vegetable garden, and a pressure cooker for preserving. She was expected to be an unpaid proofreader and editor for her husband's publishing business. I remember her with galley proofs in one hand and a wooden spoon in the other, stirring a pot on the stove. Yet she frequently found time to care for me for my mother, include us in family outings, and generally enrich our lives." [p. 150]

Certainly the most profound Swedenborgian influence in Alice's life was her father, Frank [1852-1927]. He was an astronomer who had graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was a professor at Western University of Pennsylvania, and then acting director of the Ladd Observatory at Brown University.

Mars and the moon both have craters named after him. Frank wrote several books about

Swedenborg, which can still be obtained on-line.

This is a poem that Alice wrote in honor of her father:

F.W. Very

No portrait could do justice to my father,
--with the possible exception of the Great Stone Face.
He might have been a last survivor
of the Cro-Magnan, that magnificent race
whose heads were bigger than ours and who invented
so many useful things we take for granted.
He might have been a man from Mars; he went
there more than once *via* the spectroscope;
or rocketed to the moon via a telescope bore;
--her caves were his familiar haunts.
Yet not content
with the stars, he must explore
the geography of heaven, his element,
with Swedenborg, who took him by the hand.
He had no Beatrice, that is sure.
his Dulcinea, the lady whose command
is to the few whose sciences are pure,
whose name he wrote.

There are two of Alice Very's poems that I find especially prayful. Read them for yourself, and see if they are an experience of worship for you.

WHOM HAVE I BUT THEE?

Have you any joy
but of God's bestowing?
Have you any refuge
but in Him?
Though the world destroy
does not He remain?
Can He who gave the seed
forget His children's need?
sow in vain?

Oh, be still, be patient,
learn by pray,
and wait for wisdom, knowing
nothing can stop the seed from growing;

nothing of men's devising
can stop the sun from rising,
hinder its course, or speed.

Let Him, uncompromising,
lead each in His own way,
till in the dawn's first whitening
the Truth bursts forth like lightening --
brings day!

MOUNTAIN CLIMBING

We walk by faith
more than by sight;
foot feels the trail,
hand holds tight.

Ethereal voices,
a treetop choir,
veery and whitethroat
beside us sing;
pointing the way
by the woodland spring
Madonna orchids
beckon higher.

Beyond the path
on the bare rock height
stretches uninterrupted blue.
Earth falls away
with its blight and care
and only the light
is everywhere.

Mountains, heaven's blazes,
footprints of peace!
Eye can't contain
all it takes in,
dimly discerns
unfolding plan --
where sight leaves off
vision begins.



Jones Very

August 29, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

John 15 (New International Version)

John 15

The Vine and the Branches

1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes[a] so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

FROM SWEDENBORG

30. The Lord's heaven in the natural world is called the church; an angel of this heaven is a man of the church who is conjoined to the Lord; on departure from this world he also becomes an angel of the spiritual heaven. What was said of the angelic heaven is evidently to be understood, then, of the human heaven also which is called the church. The reciprocal conjunction with the Lord which makes heaven in the human being is revealed by the Lord in these words in John: Abide in me, and I in you; . . . he who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing (John 15:4, 5, 7). D.P. #30



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MESSAGE

The Very Poetic Very's Pt. 2: Jones Very

JONES VERY



1813-1880

Jones was only 11 when his father died, and he started working at 14 to help support his Mother and siblings. He educated himself, and was accepted into Harvard as a sophomore. He graduated in 1836 with honors. He then entered Harvard Divinity School and studied for the Unitarian ministry. He was a tutor in Greek, and began writing poetic notes to encourage his students. He began to lecture on epic poetry, which brought him to the attention of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson was extremely impressed by his brilliance, ability, and religious fervor. Very became part of the group around Emerson that called themselves “transcendentalists.”

This group differentiated themselves from a Unitarian theology that saw reality and religion as based in rational thought. The “transcendentalists” saw reality as having an intuitive, inner knowing that was based in the Divine.

Very was a deeply religious mystic. He had profound personal experiences of God and tried to be an obedient servant. In 1839, Emerson helped him publish his first book, *Essays and Poems*. Emerson was extremely frustrated with Very; Emerson tried to edit the work, and Very insisted that every word came from God, and it could not be edited! Emerson’s demanding persistence wore down Very on most of those arguments.

Very’s religious fervor came to alarm those around him. He claimed to be the Second Coming, and then told his students to flee to the mountains, for the end was at hand. He especially alarmed people when he went about Salem baptizing other Unitarian ministers! He was put into the McLean Asylum, where he taught the patients about poetry. His doctor finally concluded that he could find no mental or physical illness in Very, and released him. He stayed for awhile with Emerson in Concord.

Emerson defended Very’s sanity, as did most of the other Transcendentalists.

Very withdrew to Salem, where he lived out a quiet and contemplative life.

SWEDENBORGIAN INFLUENCE

Was Jones Very influenced by Swedenborg? We do not know for certain that he even knew of Swedenborg. However, we can assume that he probably did. Why?

The Transcendentalists were influenced by the work of mystics, and they particularly read Swedenborg. Emerson was impacted by Swedenborg. His book "Nature" mentioned Swedenborg, and we know that Very purchased a copy and read it numerous times. Very's approach to the inner, intuitive way of knowing was quite consistent with Swedenborg. Emerson commented at one time that the work of Jones was quite Swedenborgian.

SOME POETRY

"Faith"

There is no faith; the mountain stands within
Still unrebuked, its summit reaches heaven;
And every action adds its load of sin,
For every action wants the little leaven;
There is no prayer; it is but empty sound,
That stirs with frequent breath the yielding air,
With every pulse they are more strongly bound,
Who make the blood of goats the voice of prayer;
Oh heal them, heal them, Father, with thy word,—
Their sins cry out to thee from every side;
From son and sire, from slave and master heard,
Their voices fill the desert country wide;
And bid thee hasten to relieve and save,
By him who rose triumphant o'er the grave

"The Prayer"

Wilt Thou not visit me?
The plant beside me feels Thy gentle dew;
And every blade of grass I see,
From Thy deep earth its quickening moisture drew.

Wilt Thou not visit me?
Thy morning calls on me with cheering tone;
And every hill and tree
Lends but one voice, the voice of Thee alone.

Come, for I need Thy love,
More than the flower the dew, or grass the rain;
Come, gently as Thy holy dove;
And let me in thy sight rejoice to live again.

I will not hide from them,
When Thy storms come, though fierce may be their wrath;
But bow with leafy stem,

And strengthened follow on Thy chosen path.

Yes, Thou wilt visit me,
Nor plant nor tree Thing eye delights so well,
As when from sin set free
My spirit loves with Thine in peace to dwell.

“The Light from Within”

I saw on earth another light
Than that which lit my eye
Come forth as from my soul within,
And from a higher sky.

Its beams shone still unclouded on,
When in the farthest west
The sun I once had known had sunk
Forever to his rest.

And on I walked, though dark the night,
Nor rose his orb by day;
As one who by a surer guide
Was pointed out the way.

'Twas brighter far than noonday's beam;
It shone from God within,
And lit, as by a lamp from heaven,
The world's dark track of sin.

THE SILENT

There is a sighing in the wood,
A murmur in the beating wave;
The heart has never understood
To tell in words the thoughts they gave.
Yet oft it feels an answering tone,
When wandering on the lonely shore;
And could the lips its voice make known,
'T would sound as does the ocean's roar.
And oft beneath the wind-swept pine,



Some chord is struck the strain to swell;
Nor sounds nor language can define,—
 'Tis not for words or sounds to tell.
 'Tis all unheard, Your silent Voice,
Whose goings forth, unknown to all,
Bids bending reed and bird rejoice,
 And fills with music Nature's hall.
Now in the speechless human heart
It speaks, where'er our feet have trod;
 Beyond the lips deceitful art
 To tell of You, the Unseen God.



Mysticism or Mental Illness? Jones Very's Story

September 5, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Mt. 5

14"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven

FROM SWEDENBORG

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 4413

4413. That the light of heaven has within it intelligence and wisdom, and that it is the intelligence of truth and the wisdom of good from the Lord that appear as light before the eyes of the angels, it has been given me to know by a living experience. I was taken up into a light that sparkled like the light radiating from diamonds; and while I was kept in it, I seemed to myself to be withdrawn from bodily ideas and to be brought into spiritual ideas, thus into those things which belong to the intelligence of truth and of good. The ideas of thought which originated from the light of the world then appeared to be remote from me, and as it were not belonging to me, although they were present obscurely; and by this it was given me to know that insofar as anyone comes into the light of heaven, so far he comes into intelligence. It is for this reason that the more intelligent the angels are, the greater and the brighter is the light in which they are.

MESSAGE



September in Harvard Square has a magical feel to it. For the years I studied at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, I loved walking to the Square, and over to Harvard Yard. The streets were teeming



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with new students and returning students, who were filled with excitement and fear about a new term.



I didn't know then about a September in Cambridge some 150 years earlier: 1838. A young tutor of Greek at Harvard was having an experience of spiritual emergence.



Thursday, Sept. 13th:

Jones Very felt not *a feeling of my own but a sensible will that was not my own, a will to do good. There was "a consciousness which seemed to say —'That which creates you creates also that which you see or him to whom you speak.'*

Very felt an *identification with Christ.*

The next day, on Friday morning, Very felt inspired to cry out to his students: *Flee to the mountains, for the end of all things is at hand.* Then he stopped by the debating club at the Divinity School to explain that they were merely doing their own wills, but he was longer acting through his human self. The Holy Spirit now spoke through him, and he was passing along the "eternal truth." One of his students wrote that evening in his diary that Very seemed like George Fox.

On Saturday: Jones Very's younger brother Washington, a freshman at Harvard, was asked to escort him home to Salem. Very wanted to go through Concord and speak with Waldo Emerson, but was persuaded to send Emerson a letter instead.

On Sunday, back in Salem, Very visited various local ministers to baptize them for “The coming of Christ.” The local Baptist minister threw him out of his home. Rev. Charles Wentworth Upham took the opportunity to remind Very that his hero Ralph Waldo Emerson was nothing but an Atheist, and warned Very that he was headed to the insane asylum.

Very then attempted to baptize his own Unitarian minister, the Reverend John Brazer of the North Church. Brazer demanded to know what miracles accompanied his revelation. Very responded, *This revelation would not have miracles*. The minister then suggested that his parishioner was having hallucinations.

He then went to the home of his friend Elizabeth Palmer Peabody. He placed his hand on her head, saying *I come to baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. I am the Second Coming. This day is this fulfilled*. She doubted his sanity.

Gittleman points out that Very's actions were a profound embarrassment to the local Unitarian society, and to the Transcendentalists. His mother defended him as being extremely spiritual; in fact his fervor brought her from her atheism to a strong belief.

However, on Monday, Very was taken against his will to McLean Insane Asylum. He was only kept there for a month, until the doctor released him; not finding any way that McLean could be of help to this man who was healthy, not depressed, not violent, and had a constructive attitude of wishing to return to



the community.

Very had made one change during his hospitalization: He gave up any attempt to convince others of his beliefs. He himself, however, continued with complete confidence in them.

[Note: McLean Hospital in Belmont MA has since treated Robert Lowell (1917-1977), Sylvia Plath (1932-1963), and Anne Sexton (1928-1974).]

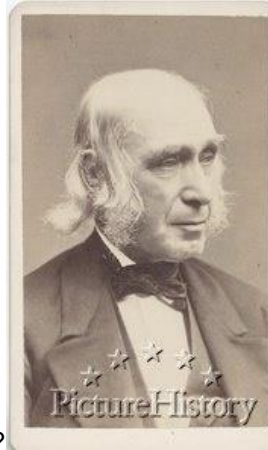
When he returned home, his pastor, The Reverend John Brazer, paid him a visit and again asked for a miracle; or for an acknowledgement of insanity. He urged Very to discontinue his association with Emerson.

Then Very visited Elizabeth Palmer Peabody and apologized for having been so *intoxicated with the Holy Spirit*. When Very told her about the visit from his pastor, Elizabeth was angry: *A miracle, indeed*. She did, however, encourage him to take his medication.

Very spent some time with Emerson. Emerson was supportive of Very's writing, and especially of the poetry he had started to create. Emerson did not seem particularly concerned about the issue of sanity, but he did find Very a rather trying house guest. His relationship with Very became rather strained when

Emerson worked to publish some of Very's work: they did not agree on whether the Holy Spirit should be edited.

By 1840, Very was withdrawing from an active life. He lived a fairly reclusive life. He was licensed to preach, and did do some preaching, as well as genealogical research.



Was Very insane? Was he a great mystic?

Here, we enter a realm in which many opinions abound! Here are a few for your consideration:

Bronson Alcott:

Is he insane? If so, there yet linger glimpses of wisdom in his memory. He is insane with God ...Living, not thinking, he regards as the worship meet for the soul. This is mysticism in its highest form. [P. 278]

Amos Bronson Alcott (1799-1888)

Alcott was a transcendentalist philosopher and author as well as an educational and social reformer. He was the father of author Louisa May Alcott.

Elizabeth Palmer Peabody:

... I have feared insanity before. — I thought (at the time) that the visit to Groton showed it. — These impulses from above I think are never sound minded — the insanity of Quakers — (which is very frequent under my observation) always grows out of it—or rather begins in it.

Gittleman: *He was insane*

Wilson Van Dusen: *My guess is that Swedenborg systematically explored the same worlds that psychotic patients find themselves thrust into, and these worlds are heaven and hell, the worlds beyond this one, inside this one.*

Kenneth Wapnick:

William James noted the similarity between the mystic and the schizophrenic experience as far back as 1902. He distinguished between two kinds of mysticism: a higher and a lower. The former included the classic mystical experiences, while the latter James identified with insanity, which he termed a 'diabolical mysticism.'

What would I do as a social worker, if some family member pushed a Jones Very to come see me because they thought he was insane? Or what if, as I'm getting ready for church some Sunday morning, a Jones Very showed up at my door to baptize me in the Holy Spirit?

I would probably welcome the baptism, and see Very as a mystic, whose spiritual journey followed the general path of Swedenborg's regeneration. In September of 1838, he seemed to have a genuine encounter of "oneness" or "union" with the Divine, which left him uncertain how to function in the world. I might point out to him that mystics have often not adapted well to the earthly world, and tend to make people uncomfortable.

I think he came to the same conclusions, as he withdrew from active involvement in the world after 1840.

Emerson and other Transcendentalists often compared Very to Swedenborg. I think it was a realistic comparison. Swedenborg seemed to have had a longer period of preparation for his spiritual awakening [see the *Dream journal*], seemed to have integrated it better, and carefully hid his identity from the world for quite a while. I think that Jones Very was quite vulnerable in his experience of spiritual emergence, and was shut out by ministers, Harvard officials, and Transcendentalists who were embarrassed by him.

What do you think?

During the period after his awakening, he wrote some of his most profound poetry. The following poem is one he wrote right after his awakening:

The New Birth

a new life;--thoughts move not as they did
With slow uncertain steps across my mind,
In thronging haste fast pressing on they bid
The portals open to the viewless wind
That comes not save when in the dust is laid
The crown of pride that gilds each mortal brow,
And from before man's vision melting fade
The heavens and earth;--their walls are falling now.--
Fast crowding on, each thought asks utterance strong;
Storm-lifted waves swift rushing to the shore,
On from the sea they send their shouts along,
Back through the cave-worn rocks their thunders roar;
And I a child of God by Christ made free
Start from death's slumbers to Eternity.

These two poems convinced Emerson of his talent, and he put them in his published collection of Very's work.

Enoch

I looked to find a man who walked with God,
Like the translated patriarch of old;--
Though gladdened millions on His footstool trod,
Yet none with him did such sweet converse hold;
I heard the wind in low complaint go by
That none his melodies like him could hear;
Day unto day spoke wisdom from on high,
Yet none like David turned a willing ear;
God walked alone unhonored through the earth;
For Him no heart-built temple open stood,
The soul forgetful of her nobler birth
Had hewn him lofty shrines of stone and wood,
And left unfinished and in ruins still
The only temple he delights to fill.

In Him We Live

Father! I bless thy name that I do live,
And in each motion am made rich with thee,
That when a glance is all that I can give,
It is a kingdom's wealth if I but see;
This stately body cannot move, save I
Will to its nobleness my little bring;
My voice its measured cadence will not try,
Save I with every note consent to sing;
I cannot raise my hands to hurt or bless,
But I with every action must conspire;
To show me there how little I possess,
And yet that little more than I desire;
May each new act my new allegiance prove,
Till in thy perfect love I ever live and move.



Sufi Poetry of Rumi

September 12, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Matthew 25:34-45 (New International Version)

34"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

37"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

40"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

41"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

44"Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

45"Then he will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

FROM SWEDENBORG

New Jerusalem and Heavenly Doctrine (Chadwick) n. 90
sRef Matt@25 @38 S0' sRef Matt@25 @36 S0' sRef Matt@25 @35 S0' sRef Matt@25 @39 S0' sRef
Matt@25 @40 S0' sRef Matt@25 @34 S0' sRef Matt@25 @37 S0' 90. This too the Lord teaches in
Matthew; for He said to those in a state of good that they had given Him food, they had given Him drink,
given Him hospitality, clothed Him, visited Him and come to Him in prison; and then that so far as they
had done these things to the least of His brothers, they had done it to Him (Matt. 25:34-40). Those six
good deeds understood in the spiritual sense comprise all the different kinds of neighbour. It is also plain
from this that when good is loved, the Lord is loved; for it is the Lord who is the source of good, who is in
a state of good and who is goodness itself.

MESSAGE

The Sufi Poetry of Rumi

This week-end we honor the 9th anniversary of the 9-11 tragedy. We have had a week filled with fears and misunderstandings of Islam. Let's open our hearts to the most mystical dimension of this religion: the Sufi's, and to one of the best-known of the Sufi poets: Rumi.

Sufism or tasawwuf, as it is called in Arabic, is generally understood by scholars and Sufis to be the inner, mystical, or psycho-spiritual dimension of Islam. Today, however, many Muslims and non-Muslims believe that Sufism is outside the sphere of Islam. Nevertheless, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, one of the foremost scholars of Islam, in his article [The Interior Life in Islam](#) contends that Sufism is simply the name for the inner or esoteric dimension of Islam.

After nearly 30 years of the study of Sufism, I would say that in spite of its many variations and voluminous expressions, the essence of Sufi practice is quite simple. It is that the Sufi surrenders to God, in love, over and over; which involves embracing with love at each moment the content of one's consciousness (one's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings, as well as one's sense of self) as gifts of God or, more precisely, as manifestations of God. [From [Sufism's Many Paths](#), by Dr. Alan Godlas, University of Georgia.]



SUFI POETRY

Sufism and the encounters that Sufism facilitates --encounters with God, love, and the deepest aspects of human consciousness-- have evoked feelings in Sufis that have poured out through their ravaged hearts onto their lucid tongues, providing us with some of the most beautiful and profound poetry ever written.

Rumi's poetry is filled with deep love of and longing for God. Here are a few of his poems:

Our death is our wedding with eternity.
What is the secret? "God is One."
The sunlight splits when entering the windows of the house.
This multiplicity exists in the cluster of grapes;
It is not in the juice made from the grapes.
For he who is living in the Light of God,
The death of the carnal soul is a blessing.
Regarding him, say neither bad nor good,
For he is gone beyond the good and the bad.
Fix your eyes on God and do not talk about what is invisible,
So that he may place another look in your eyes.
It is in the vision of the physical eyes
That no invisible or secret thing exists.
But when the eye is turned toward the Light of God
What thing could remain hidden under such a Light?
Although all lights emanate from the Divine Light
Don't call all these lights "the Light of God";
It is the eternal light which is the Light of God,
The ephemeral light is an attribute of the body and the flesh.
...Oh God who gives the grace of vision!

The bird of vision is flying towards You with the wings of desire.
(Mystic Odes 833)



"Say I am You" Coleman Barks Maypop, 1994

God has given us a dark wine so potent that,
drinking it, we leave the two worlds.

God has put into the form of hashish a power
to deliver the taster from self-consciousness.

God has made sleep so
that it erases every thought.

God made Majnun love Layla so much that
just her dog would cause confusion in him.

There are thousands of wines
that can take over our minds.

Don't think all ecstasies
are the same!

Jesus was lost in his love for God.
His donkey was drunk with barley.

Drink from the presence of saints,
not from those other jars.

Every object, every being,
is a jar full of delight.

Be a connoisseur,
and taste with caution.

Any wine will get you high.
Judge like a king, and choose the purest,

the ones unadulterated with fear,
or some urgency about "what's needed."

Drink the wine that moves you

as a camel moves when it's been untied,
and is just ambling about.

Mathnawi IV, 2683-96



The Essential Rumi, Coleman Barks

Painting as Prayer

September 19, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Genesis I

27. And God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. 28. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the heavens, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth.

SWEDENBORG

The Divine is the same in the greatest and the smallest things. (Divine Love and Wisdom n.77)

So long as man is spiritual, his dominion proceeds from the external man to the internal .. But when he becomes celestial, and does good from love, then his dominion proceeds from the internal man to the external... [Heavenly Secrets, #2]

The Divine fills all space of the universe w/o being bound by space. [Divine Love and Wisdom, #69]

MESSAGE

Painting as Prayer:

George Inness

The true end of Art is not to imitate a fixed material condition, but to represent a living motion.

We've been exploring the concept of poetry as prayer, looking at poets influenced by Swedenborg:

Now, let's consider paintings as prayer.

Many religious traditions honor the prayer in art. "The purpose of traditional Buddhist art is to express the indescribable beauty of the Buddha's enlightened qualities so that they remain deeply imprinted on our memory." [Van Dusen, p. 81].

Let's explore the work of Swedenborgian artist George Inness [1825-1894], who was one of the Hudson River painters.

He was born in the Hudson River town of Newburgh, New York, in 1825; the 5th of 13 children. His household included a Baptist, a Methodist, and a Universalist.

His father was a successful grocer, and Inness began work as a grocer's clerk when he was in his teens. He taught himself to paint, and began painting seriously in 1841 [age 16]. He had his first



exhibition at the National Academy of Design four years later.

He became Swedenborgian in 1860 at the age of 35, when a fellow painter, William Page, introduced him to Swedenborg. From then on, he attempted to express Swedenborgian theology in his painting.

At the 1893 Chicago fair, Inness was the best-represented American, with fifteen paintings.

He wanted to express the Swedenborgian concept of the presence of the Divine in the earth. He wrote:

The paramount difficulty with the artist is to bring his intellect to submit to the fact that there is such a thing as the indefinable, God is always hidden, and beauty depends upon the unseen--the visible upon the invisible.

He often stated he was not out to glorify nature, *but to express its hidden spirit and underlying character*. At the heart of this approach to painting was Inness's understanding of the aim of art, which



was not to instruct, not to edify, but to awaken an emotion.

He wanted his paintings to show divine influx, and wrote:

The intelligence to be conveyed by it [art] is not of an outer fact, but of an inner life. The greatness of art is not in the display of knowledge, or in material accuracy, but in the distinctness with which it conveys the impressions of a personal vital force, that acts spontaneously, without fear or hesitation.

Inness termed his work "civilized landscapes" and tried to paint an integration of humanity and nature. He saw God as ever-changing, and wanted to express this concept in his paintings.

Because of this, he never saw his painting as "finished." As his son wrote:

My father had the idea firmly established in his mind that a work of art from his brush always remained his property, and that he had the right to paint it over or change it at will, no matter where he found it or who had bought it, or what money he may have received for it. Wherever he found his pictures after they had left his studio he criticized, and would in most violent language declare the thing was "rot," that the sky was false or the distance out of key, and in a very matter of fact way would say "Just send it around to the studio to-morrow and I'll put it into shape.'



If the owner of the painting objected that he liked it just as it was, Inness would say,

it makes no difference what you like; I say the thing is false.... And I want you to understand, sir that I claim the right to go into any house and change a work of mine when I am not satisfied with it, and see where I can improve it. And he said, "Do you think, because you have paid money for a picture of mine, that it belongs to you?"

He also wrote: *I have changed from the time I commenced [painting] because I had never completed my art and as I do not care about being a cake I shall remain dough subject to any impression which I am satisfied comes from the region of truth.*

Inness's devotion to Swedenborgian doctrine and his desire to find new ways of seeing the world, led to the creation of a new form of landscape painting. His innovative style and his studies in psychology and

philosophy distinguish Inness from other American painters of his time; give his work a deeply spiritual



quality.

Roberta Smith wrote in a New York Times article that *Inness wanted to show that paint has a nature all its own, and that God, or something close, was in the lack of details. Ms. Smith added that Inness's appreciation of paint as a vehicle for personal, complex emotional expression was years ahead of its time. His work has long been considered a precursor to the painterly, process-oriented art of Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Willem de Kooning.*

[The New York Times; Sept. 26, 2003].



When Inness painted, he was expressing his love of God, as one might do in a sermon or a prayer. What is it like for you to look deeply at his paintings? Are they, for you, a way to experience and worship God?

Painting as Prayer- Gillian Bedford

September 26, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Psalm 54

New International Version

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. Amaskil of David. When the Ziphites had gone to Saul and said, "Is not David hiding among us?" [a]

*1 Save me, O God, by your name;
vindicate me by your might.*

*2 Hear my prayer, O God;
listen to the words of my mouth.*

*3 Strangers are attacking me;
ruthless men seek my life—
men without regard for God.*

Selah

*4 Surely God is my help;
the Lord is the one who sustains me.*

*5 Let evil recoil on those who slander me;
in your faithfulness destroy them.*

*6 I will sacrifice a freewill offering to you;
I will praise your name, O LORD,
for it is good.*

*7 For he has delivered me from all my troubles,
and my eyes have looked in triumph on my foes.*

Footnotes:

Psalm 54:1 Title: Probably a literary or musical term

FROM SWEDENBORG

Heaven and Hell (Dole) n. 185

185. I have seen palaces in heaven that were so splendid as to be beyond description. Their upper stories shone as though they were made of pure gold, and their lower ones as though they were made of precious gems. Each palace seemed more splendid than the last. It was the same inside. The rooms were graced with such lovely adornments that neither words nor the arts and sciences are adequate to describe them. On the side that faced south there were parklands where everything sparkled in the same way, here and there the leaves like silver and the fruits like gold, with the flowers in their beds making virtual rainbows with their colors. On the horizon of sight there were other palaces that framed the scene. The architecture of heaven is like this, so that you might call it the very essence of the art-and small wonder, since the art itself does come to us from heaven.

Angels tell me that things like this and countless others even more perfect are presented to their view by the Lord; but that such sights actually delight their minds more than their eyes because they see correspondences in the details, and through their correspondences they see things divine.



Swedenborgian
Community Online
Love, Spirit, Life

MESSAGE

by Rev. Wilma Wake

Painting as Prayer: Gillian Bedford

One of the highlights of my summer was attending [Gathering Leaves](#) in Byrn Athyn, PA. One of the highlights of *Gathering Leaves* for me was a visit to [Orchard Art Works](#).



Their website says this about their purpose:

The purpose of Orchard Artworks is to provide a high quality showcase, a marketplace, and supportive, cooperative fellowship for artists and craftspeople primarily in Bryn Athyn and the tri-county area; to encourage artistic creativity and excellence in craftsmanship; to provide community arts education, and to promote fine art and craft art as a viable means of livelihood.

One of the artists active at this gallery is [Gillian Bedford](#).

Gillian grew up in the General Church in Byrn Athyn, PA. She went to church every Sunday, and attended services in her home that her father conducted.

She has vivid memories of doing art with her mother. Her mother guided her into baking, making candles, drawing, and coloring. Gillian was grief-stricken as a teen-ager when her mother died.

Today Gillian is married to Allen Bedford and they have two daughters: Amara [age 20] and Michelle [age 16].

Painting has always been a special time for Gillian; a time of getting in touch with her feelings and to be aware of God's presence.

The past year has been an intense spiritual journey for her; a process of regeneration. It began with feelings of loss, and of just simply surviving. It ended with Gillian finding the pain, joy, and hope in her spirituality.

During this year, she found that as she put paint to canvas, deep feelings were released. She cried in grief over her mother's death many years ago, and her father's death just a year and a half ago. As she painted, she cried. And she healed. Painting brought her feelings of deep serenity, and a sense of awe in the majesty of the Divine. Painting has become for her a time to worship and to pray. She emerges from her painting time feeling uplifted and connected to God.

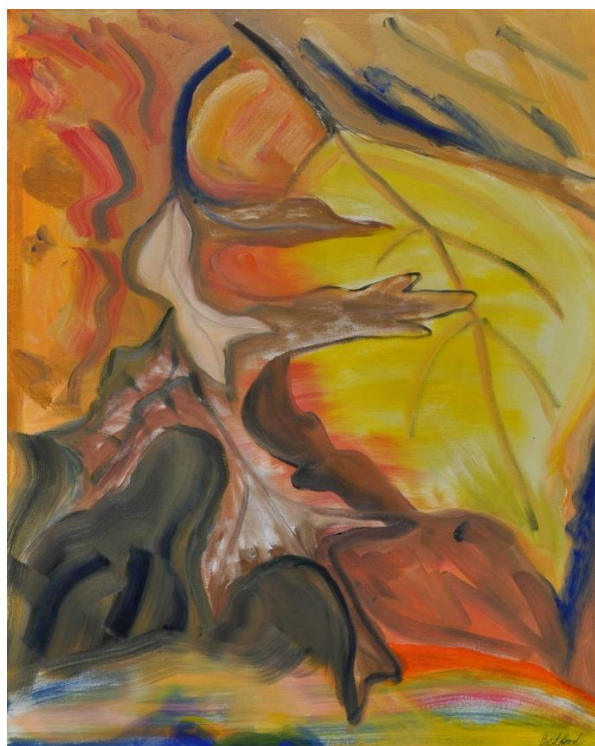
Gillian would like to share with us the spiritual journey of this past year. However, it is not a story that can be told in words; it can only be told through her paintings.

Below, are the 11 paintings of this journey, in sequential order. Gillian provides some words to guide our understanding of her process. She invites us into a sacred space beyond words to join her on this journey.

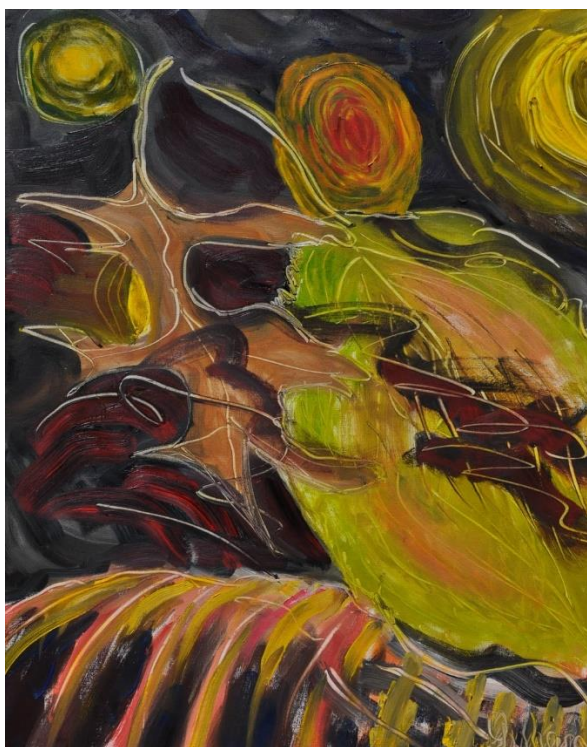
The paintings and the words of "Gillian's Journey" are all Gillian's own.

Gillian's Journey

The first three paintings are a triptych of leaves. In the first two paintings, set in early and late fall, the leaves resemble a couple dancing. As they fall through the sky the dead brown oak leaf reaches out to the lively green one.



Falling Leaves



Leaves

In "Leaves," the second of the series, the sky is a reddish black color, there are glowing streetlights, and the moon is in the background. The earth boasts of tilled rolling hills.

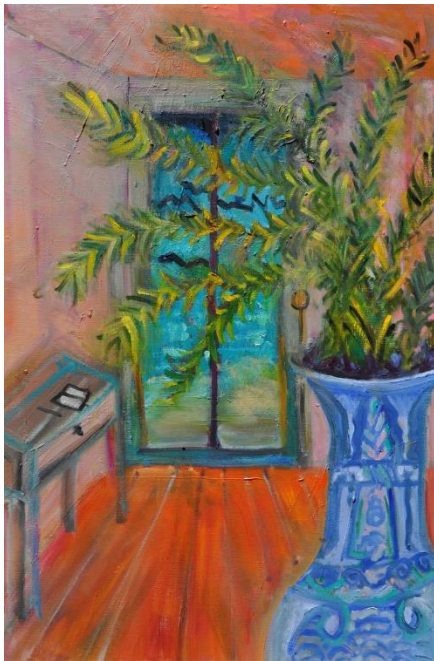
The third is set in early winter, here; the leaves are covered with sleet.

The final painting of the triptych, "Gone," is about the experience of losing a loved one; the family members are standing above as the form disintegrates onto the earth. There are green stones for remembrance around the brown fallen leaf. Even though the sky has blues and there are spirited colors in the background, there is much pain in the subject.



Gone

During the painting process, I rhythmically scraped into the paint while it was still wet, with my thumbnail, to achieve the effect of gritty loss.



Van Gogh's Heaven

In "Van Gogh's Heaven" I was thinking of Van Gogh's struggles, waking up in an intermediary place before heaven, and about the visionary, Emanuel Swedenborg, writing of Van Gogh's experience. The room is apricot colored, and the glass door looks out onto a warm, tropical scene. Van Gogh's "crows", the crows he painted before he took his life, can be seen through the glass doors. They represent working through life's difficulties before moving to heaven. The colors are bright and encouraging. The floorboards hearken back to Van Gogh's paintings.

This painting is the first of the series in this collection about windows to eternity.

In "Monet's Heaven" the window represents earthly attachments opening up to Monet's wild poppy dreamland, this signifies the transition from life on earth to heaven. The right windowpane opens up and begins to dissolve into the garden. I used large brushes with thin layers of paint to create movement and give the feel of wispy transitions. The poppies on the hillside are painted with thicker paint and smaller strokes that have rhythm and joyful bright color. This painting was also influenced by Matisse's window paintings.

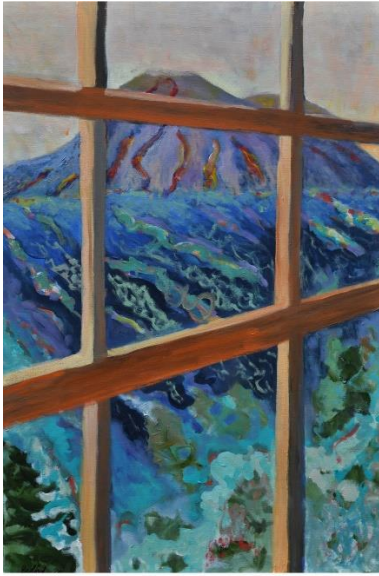


Monet's Heaven

"New Playful World" describes a person moving emotionally from a restrained life on earth to a more lighthearted one. In this painting I was influenced by Fairfield Porter's playful color filled landscapes. I sought to paint a story of a person who moves from a dark world to a lighthearted spiritual world. The trees are talking to each other joyfully, and the sky echoes the foreground.



New Playful World



New Life

In "New Life," the windowpane acts as a transition from this life crossing over to the next. The scene through the window has multiple perspectives from looking downward onto foamy water to looking outward, across a lake at two volcanic mountains. The mountains symbolize eternal married partners. In this painting the window frame shows resistance to moving over, yet the water and mountains are alive and encouraging.



Hockney's Heaven

"Hockney's Heaven" is full of brilliant colors and leads the eye to two trees representing two eternal married partners. There is a reddish path that leads behind the trees, beyond the pool and back into the landscape. The red and whitish trees represent the marriage of good and truth. The ocean in the background is the Pacific. I was influenced by David Hockney, a colorful California painter, and by my family camping trips in California where we saw beautiful scenic areas.



Child's Play

"Child's Play" is similar to "Hockney's Heaven" but is about a grouping of childlike friends, which are the bushes and trees, all enjoying life together.



Celestial Heaven

"Celestial Heaven" is about the highest love because it is of God's love and light pouring inwards on two pots. The pots are symbolic of two married people in the highest heaven, receiving the Lord's ever-present love and wisdom. It evolved out of the other paintings as a way to describe an immediate feeling of God wrapping us in warmth.



Becoming

And finally, "Becoming" describes me thinking of waking up in heaven, to my favorite spot of peace in my house, my deck. There I am looking out at my favorite old apple tree, which my father planted on the property as a sapling many years ago. It is called "Becoming" because it moves from rigid branches to sweeping, lively branches peering out the other side of the deck's beams.

Painting this series of works has taken me on a journey through loss, survival, hope, pain and joy.

Reflection

What is your experience of walking through this regeneration journey with Gillian? As you look at the paintings, can you feel the sacred space that she was in when she painted them? Can they be, for you, a form of prayer?

In your life, when do you feel most connected with the Divine? In church? Walking in the woods? Listening to music? Drawing? Writing? Find those moments in your life when God's inflow is most clear to you. Can you let yourself have more of those moments, as your time of prayer?



Mental Illness: Healing Journey

October 3, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Luke 6 (New International Version)

Luke 6

Lord of the Sabbath

1On a Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. 2Some of the Pharisees asked, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" 3Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 4He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." 5Then Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

6On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. 7The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. 8But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." So he got up and stood there.

9Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?"

10He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was completely restored. 11But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Arcana Coelestia (Elliott) n. 994

994. That 'every creeping thing that is living' means all pleasures containing good, which is living, is clear from the meaning of 'creeping thing' dealt with already. The fact that 'creeping thing' here means all clean beasts and birds is clear to everyone, for it is said that they are 'given for food'. In their proper sense 'creeping things' comprise those which were the basest of all, mentioned by name in Lev. 11:27, 29, 30, and were unclean. But in a broad sense, as here, they are the living creatures that have been given for food. They are called 'creeping things' here however because they mean pleasures. In the Word, human affections are meant by 'clean beasts', as has been stated. But because no one perceives those affections except within his pleasures, so much so that he refers to them as pleasures, they are for this reason called 'creeping things' here.

[2] There are two kinds of pleasures - those of the will and those of the understanding. In general there are the pleasures of possessing land and wealth; the pleasures of positions of honour and those of service to the state; the pleasures of conjugal love, and of love of infants and children; the pleasures of friendship and of social intercourse; the pleasures of reading, writing, having knowledge, being wise, and many others. Then there are the pleasures of the senses; such as that of hearing, which in general is the pleasure taken in the sweet sounds of music and song; that of seeing, which in general is the pleasure taken in various things of beauty, which are manifold; that of smell, which is that taken in pleasant odours; that of taste, which is that taken in all the delicious and nourishing qualities of food and drink; and that of touch, which arises from further joyous sensations. Because these different kinds of pleasures are experienced in the body, they are called pleasures of the body. But no pleasure ever arises in the body unless it arises from, and is sustained by, some interior affection. Nor does any interior affection ever do so unless this in turn stems from a still more interior affection in which use and the end in view reside.

[3] These areas of affection, which are interior and properly ordered, starting with the inmost, are not discerned by anyone during his lifetime. The majority scarcely know that they even exist, let alone that they are the source of pleasures. Yet nothing can possibly arise in things that are external except from those that are interior and in order. Pleasures are simply ultimate effects. Interior things are not evident during life in the body except to those who reflect. It is in the next life that they first manifest themselves, and indeed in the order in which the Lord raises them up towards heaven. Interior affections together with their joys manifest themselves in the world of spirits; still more interior ones together with their delights do so in the heaven of angelic spirits; and yet more interior ones together with all their happiness in the heaven of angels. For there are three heavens, one interior to and more perfect and happy than the next, see 459 and 684. Such is the order in which these things unfold and enable themselves to be perceived in the next life. But so long as someone is living in the body, because his ideas and thought are constantly of bodily things, those that are interior are so to speak dormant because they are immersed in bodily things. All the same, to anyone who stops to reflect it becomes clear that the nature of all pleasures is such as are the affections ranged in order within them and that those pleasures derive their entire essence and character from those affections.

Finding God's Spot

October 10, 2010

READINGS

Scripture: Mark 11: 23-26

For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.

Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

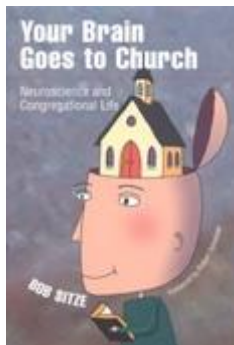
But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

Swedenborg:

The brain, like heaven, belongs to the realm of ends which are uses, for whatever flows in from the Lord is an end looking towards the salvation of the human race. This is the end which reigns in heaven, and also which as a result reigns in the brain, for the brain, where man's mind is seated, looks to ends in the body, that is to say, so that the body may serve the soul and that the soul may be eternally happy.

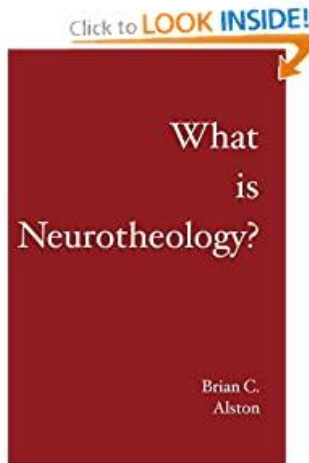
MESSAGE

Researchers at the University of California, San Diego, believe they have found the 'God Spot', an area of the brain which becomes hyper sensitive and stimulated during moments of deep religious reflection. Located within the frontal cortex, this area is concurrent with where Eastern Religions perceive the 'Third Eye'.



A new field has developed called *neurotheology*: it combines study of the brain and theology.

People in prayer and meditation show brain change: a study of Tibetan Monks and Franciscan Nuns as they engaged in deep meditation and prayer found that the parietal lobe, the area associated with time and space, showed very little activity. With limited neuronal activity, the parietal lobe is unable to distinguish the boundary between the external world and the physical self. This could account for the meditators reporting a 'sense of unity' with the universe and a 'mingling with God' during intense trance (Newberg et al 2001, p7).



Researchers have learned that meditation causes real changes in the brain; it can lead one to the "God spot" of deep peace, love, and healing.

Increasingly "neuro theologians" are learning that many forms of meditation, prayer, and experience with the arts can lead us to this spot.

Art therapists are finding that drawing, singing, dancing and other arts can lead us to God's spot.

This past week has been mental illness awareness week. We are honoring the ways God's healing works in mental illness. There is a lot of theory about how prayer, meditation, and the arts change the brain to bring about wholeness. But let's look at a real life story of how God has helped a family become whole through a journey with mental illness.

Phyllis is a mother in her 50's, living in California with her husband and teen-aged son, Erik. They have four children [ages 35, 30, 21, and Erik who is 19.] She registered with our community this past Thursday, and we invited her to join the chat that evening. She logged in and joined our lively discussion about mental illness and healing. She shared her own family's journey with us. I was quite moved by it, and asked her to tell me more about it. She wrote a beautiful account of a journey through pain to healing. She has offered to share her story with us in today's message, and will join us on Thursday during our chat to talk more with us.

[if you are registered with the web community and logged in, you can view the [family photos](#) for Phyllis' family.]

My Son

by Phyllis

..... was always a happy-go-lucky kid.

However, his senior year of high school we and the staff at his high school began to notice a change in Erik. He began to develop a shorter and shorter fuse and would become angry with the other students as well as the staff. This was so unlike him. He also wore a beanie 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We just figured he was a teenage boy and it was his favorite beanie.

Around Christmas 2009 he was asked to remove his beanie for a picture. He became very anxious and wanted to leave. We realized then there was definitely something more going on. He finally told us that he hated his ears. They stuck out, kids made fun of him, and he was ugly. There

wasn't any truth to any of this but it was very real to him. He was struggling in school and we told him that, as a graduation present, we would pay for otoplasty (ear pinning) if it was that important to him. We figured even though we weren't seeing it, it was worth it if it was affecting his life to that degree. He had the otoplasty and everything was great....for about three weeks. Then when he would look in the mirror, which was all the time, he was unhappy with the job the surgeon did, his ears still were huge, and he needed otoplasty revision. I made the comment to him, "If you do anything more to your ears, they will look like Michael Jackson's nose." When I said that a little bell went off in my head. I remember reading about some strange disorder it was believed that Michael Jackson suffered from. So, I began googling Michael Jackson, disorder, anything I could think of. It finally took me to a website about Body Dysmorphic Disorder. When I read the symptoms I told my husband, "Oh my gosh, this is Erik!" The disorder had begun to take over his life.

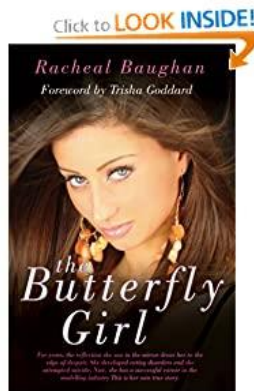
His ugliness was all he could talk about and he was miserable. He was having an especially rough day when, on August 31st, 2009 he came into my bedroom shaking and crying and told me he could not live his life like this! I had to believe he was serious. I took him to Behavioral Health and he was admitted because he was suicidal. We were totally blind sided by all this. I had e mailed or phoned anyone and everyone whose name came up associated with the disorder, which I will refer to as BDD from here on. The day that he was admitted a psychiatrist from Stanford who specializes in the disorder called me and provided a wealth of information. He recommended a book called "The Broken Mirror" by Dr. Katherine Phillips which is basically the BDD bible. With his help and the info in the book I was able to understand more about the disorder as well as the proper treatment

LEARNING ABOUT BDD

by Phyllis

When he was released from mental health I insisted that they add BDD to their diagnosis of major depressive disorder and anxiety. Then our quest for help began. Since I was new to this mental illness scene, I thought any psychologist could treat the disorder and any psychiatrist could prescribe the proper medication. Wrong!!!!!! He was drugged to the point he slept all the time and the therapist didn't have a clue how to get through to him. As a mother, I felt totally helpless and I have to say, it was the toughest thing I have ever had to deal with. I wanted so much for him to get better but I couldn't fix it. There was one time, a few months into his treatment, that I looked at my husband and said, "Are we ever going to get our son back? Have we lost him in this world of his forever?"

[Body Dysmorphic Disorder](#)



The story of Rachael Baughan

PRAYER

by Phyllis

Then, I began to pray! See, it is times like this when you play Let's Make a Deal with God. I was raised in a Presbyterian Church, attended a Catholic Church for the last ten years, and recently, a Hindu Temple. In between I have attended services at just about every denomination that exists in the world today. I have a copy of, and am reading, many Holy Books. As a result of my quest for knowledge, I began to realize that there isn't any "one true church" but many paths to the same destination. There are many more similarities, than differences, and I chose to focus on the similarities.

So, I asked for God to heal my son. I also prayed that he could guide us to the proper mental health professionals.

Sometimes, when I would prayed, I would pray so hard and so often that I wondered if anyone was even listening to me. Then I realized that I simply wasn't "believing". I was hoping that God would heal my son, and I was asking Him to, but deep inside I had my doubts and I wasn't "believing". That is when I decided to put all my eggs in one basket and all my faith in God. Once I began to do that, I no longer viewed the bumps in the road as anything more than a speed bump. It slowed things down a bit but once we got over that little bump it was full speed ahead. He still has a ways to go but his progress has been amazing. I am so thankful that we were able to diagnose his condition so early , while he was so young and provide the best possible care for him.

At first, when I would pray for God to heal Erik, I would pray repeatedly asking for the same thing. Like I said, sometimes I wanted to say, "Hey, is anybody listening?" I seriously started searching the bible for answers. I read Mark 11: 23-26 and Matthew 21:12 and started thinking maybe I am being selfish here, always asking God for something. Why do I keep asking him for the same thing? Am I really not expecting an answer? Maybe there is something in all of this that is being asked of me but I'm not listening. I just keep asking away. Then I started to change the way I prayed. It was more like a conversation with God. Conversations are best when there are two participates and both also listen.

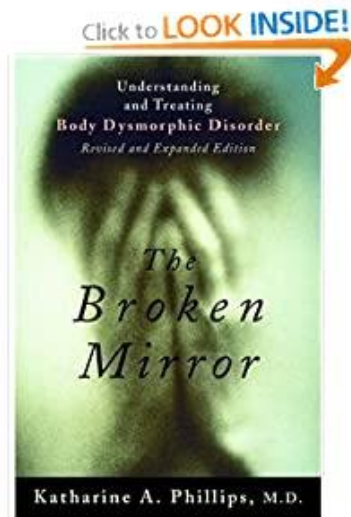
The Arts

by Phyllis

Music has certainly played a part. One of the songs I discovered and listen to often because it had new meaning for me was Josh Groban's, You Lift Me Up. What also is interesting is that Erik began listening to jazz and classical music. That came out of nowhere! He always listened to what typical teenagers listen to but when he first began treatment his taste in music also began to change. Michael Buble and Josh Groban are two of his favorites now. He didn't even know who they were before.



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ADVICE FOR OTHERS:

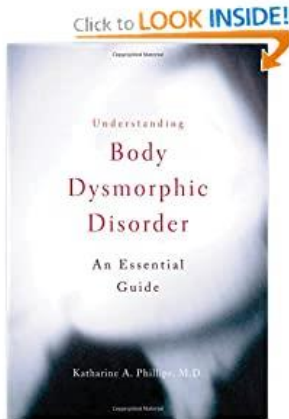
by Phyllis

Anyway, this is our story. There is hope for those suffering from mental illness. You need to seek out mental health professionals who are knowledgeable about your particular disorder. Don't be afraid to ask questions and don't hesitate to make a change if necessary, and there is a good chance it will be necessary. Not everyone is an expert in everything. Therapy will probably be one of the hardest things you will ever do but with proper treatment, it works! It is so worth it! Sometimes it takes several tries to get the care that is best for you. Roll up your sleeves and learn everything you can about the disorder. You will need to be armed and dangerous when you take on the challenge. Look at it as a challenge. Every day there are challenges and they can be turned into something positive or negative. Go with the positive!!!! Most of all.....PRAY! Pray and believe! I have had many people comment on how I was able to take charge of this with Erik from the diagnosis to obtaining the proper treatment. I am convinced I really didn't have anything to do with it. Or, rather, I could not have done it on my own. Thank God for answered prayer. Thank God for leading us to all the right people and allowing all the pieces of the puzzle to come together as it needed to happen. So, the best advice I can give is.....Pray, Believe, then let go and let God!

Don't give up! Don't ever give up!



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HOW THIS CONNECTS WITH SWEDENBORG:

All of this, of course, is what our Swedenborg wrote about over 300 years ago. He believed that all of heaven was like a Grand Person, with each part of the body playing a special role. The brain is particularly important:

"By the human mind are meant its two faculties, which are called the understanding and the will. The understanding is the receptacle of the light of heaven, which in its essence is wisdom, and the will is the receptacle of the heat of heaven, which in its essence is love."

It was important to Swedenborg to allow opposites to work together:

science and religion
matter and spirit
wisdom and love
humanity and God

What we consider dualities are, in fact, a holographic whole. Within that whole, they are "distinguishably one." Each quality continues to exist in its uniqueness, and they blend into a wholeness that cannot exist without both of them.

This concept is a perfect way to understand the human brain. We have two parts to our brain: right and left. To be whole, we have to embrace each side. Yet, we live in a culture that honors the left brain and ignores the right. Sometimes, it takes a stroke or brain injury or mental illness to push a person into their right brain where creativity lives. We cannot find our "God spot" of love and peace without using the right side of the brain. People like Erik can show us the pathway there.

Through prayer, love, and music; Phyllis has helped her son to connect to his God spot; and it is there that he finds wholeness and healing. And Phyllis and Erik show us that each of us can get there, too; no matter what challenges we face in life.

The Phoenix

October 17, 2010

READINGS

Scripture: John 1

23 Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25 The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

Swedenborg:

Divine Providence, 28

8. (1) Heaven is conjunction with the Lord. Heaven is not heaven owing to the angels, but owing to the Lord, for the love and wisdom which angels possess and which make heaven heaven come not from them but from the Lord. Indeed love and wisdom are the Lord in them. Moreover, because love and wisdom are the Lord's and are the Lord in heaven, and love and wisdom form the angels' life, it is apparent also that their life is the Lord's, indeed is the Lord. The angels themselves confess that they have their life from the Lord. It can be seen from this that heaven is conjunction with the Lord. But because conjunction with the Lord varies, and heaven is therefore not the same for one as for another, it follows also that heaven is heaven according to one's conjunction with the Lord. We will see in the following discussion that the conjunction may be more and more close, or more and more remote.

MESSAGE

The Phoenix

I have been glued to the television set these past days, watching the miraculous rescue of 33 miners who, defying all odds, survived more than 2 months from being buried in the bowels of the earth.

I watched each miner being applauded as he stepped out of a little contraption called "The Phoenix" into loving arms and a new life.

I understood at once why that contraption was called "The Phoenix."

When I was ten years old, my children's monthly book club had sent me the newly-published book *David and the Phoenix*.

I read over and over the adventures of a lonely boy in a new town who climbed the mountain behind his house. There he met and befriended Phoenix, a majestic mythical bird whose story of rebirth has appeared in many traditions.

In Jewish legend, the phoenix is called *Milcham*. In the Garden of Eden, Eve tried to persuade all the animals to eat fruit from the forbidden tree. Only the Phoenix refused. God rewarded the bird by letting him live peacefully in a walled city for eternity. At the end of every thousand years, the Phoenix was consumed by fire and reborn from an egg found in the ashes.

Clement of Rome said the phoenix was a myth about Christ's resurrection.

In the middle ages, the phoenix symbol was used in signs over chemists' shops to represent regeneration and rebirth.

In the book of my childhood, Phoenix was eager to educate Davie. The Phoenix said: "Life is real, life is earnest. One must face it with a practical education. ... for example, how do you tell a true Unicorn from a false one?"

"I – I don't know, " David responded.

"I thought not. Where do you find the Philosopher's Stone?"

"I don't know."...

"There you are! " Cried the Phoenix. You do not have a true, practical education – you are not ready for life. I, my boy, am going to take your education in hand." ... My acquaintances, to mention but a few, include Fauns, Dragons, Unicorns, Trolls, Gryffins, Gryffons, Gryffens Sea Monsters, Leprechauns, Rocs, Gnomes, Elves, Basilisks, Nymphs. And – and many others"

Needless to say David had an incredible summer with Phoenix, and helped to save his friend from capture by his enemy The Scientist.

But at the end of the summer, David was shocked.

"Now," said the Phoenix gently, "the fact is that I have, besides my unusually acute Intellect, an Instinct. This Instinct told me that it was my [500th] birthday today. It also told me to build this nest of cinnamon. Now it tells me that I must make this nest my pyre because that is what the Phoenix does at the end of five hundred years. ... This is the traditional end of the Phoenix, my boy, and we cannot ignore the tradition, no matter what our feelings may be."

David was beside himself with grief, as his best friend burned to a crisp in the intense fire.

"His mouth dropped open. In the middle of the white ashes and glowing coals there was movementNow like a plant thrusting its way out of the soil appeared ... a crest of golden feathers!.. And from the ruins of the pyre stepped forth a magnificent bird. It was the Phoenix ... But it was a different Phoenix. It was young and wild, with a fierce amber eye."

All David wanted was to get to know his new friend, but the Scientist appeared with his rifle shooting at the Phoenix. David helped his friend off the edge of the mountain,

The bird launched itself into the air. David cried "Fly, Phoenix, Fly!" And the book ended.

The miner's described their rescue as a rebirth.

Swedenborg talks about how we must die to parts of ourselves before we can be regenerated. The miners experienced that rebirth in a powerful way.

Swedenborg's regeneration isn't a passive process; neither was the rebirth of the miners. They faced a horrible tragedy. They could have berated God for bring trouble into their lives. Instead, they used the time to come closer to God and to each other. They learned how to live and work as a group; and were prepared to die as a group.

Because they were willing to face death, they found life.

We don't choose tragedy. Nor does God choose it for us. But we do choose how we will respond. Those 33 men were thrust into the dark night of the worst imaginable hell. They could not get themselves out the mine. BUT they made the choice to leave hell and create heaven in the environment. They learned to share, to love, to learn, to grow, to do uses. They created a vibrant heavenly live, and now emerge as a powerful example.

It's hard to comprehend Swedenborg's concept that we create heaven or hell every day in our lives. The miners demonstrated it for us. Through the circumstances of earthly life, we can be thrust into hell in an instant. We have all been there. We do not choose to go there. We may not be able to change the outer conditions of the event ... but we can choose whether we will accept the hell we find ourselves in, or create heaven.



Helen Keller's Inspiration

October 24, 2010

READINGS

FROM SCRIPTURE

John 9 (New International Version)

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

1As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

3"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. 4As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. 5While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

6Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. 7"Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

8His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" 9Some claimed that he was.

Others said, "No, he only looks like him."

But he himself insisted, "I am the man."

10"How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded.

11He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see."

12"Where is this man?" they asked him.

"I don't know," he said.

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

FROM SWEDENBORG

Before we can learn what is true and be affected by what is good, the things that stand in the way and resist have to be put aside. The old self must die before the new self can be conceived.

19. *The Spirit of God stands for the Lord's mercy, which is portrayed as moving constantly, like a hen brooding over her eggs. What is being brooded over in this instance is what the Lord stores away in us, which throughout the Word is called "a remnant" [or "survivors"]. It is a knowledge of truth and goodness, which can never emerge into the light of day until our outer nature has been devastated. Such knowledge is here called the face of the water.*

20. *Genesis 1:3. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.*

The first step is taken when we begin to realize that goodness and truth are something transcendent. People who focus exclusively on externals do not even know what is good or what is true; everything connected with self-love and love of worldly advantages they consider good, and anything that promotes those two loves they consider true. They are unaware that such "goodness" is evil and such "truth" false.

When we are conceived anew, however, we first begin to be aware that our "good" is not good. And as we advance further into the light, it dawns on us that the Lord exists and that he is goodness and truth itself.

Heavenly Secrets, NCE



Swedenborgian
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Love, Spirit, Life

MESSAGE

Helen Keller and the Arts

Helen Keller is the inspiration for many people with disabilities to express themselves through the arts.

At the core of Helen Keller's life was her Swedenborgian faith, which she adopted at age 13.



"I do not know whether I adopted the faith, or the faith adopted me. I can only say that the heart of the young girl sitting with a big book of raised letters on her lap in the sublime sunshine was thrilled by a radiant presence and inexpressibly endearing voice ... the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg have been my light and a staff in my hand, and by his vision splendid I am attended on my way.

If you don't know much about Helen Keller and Swedenborg, be sure to visit [our page](#) about her on our site. While there, you'll be able to read the [text of the talk](#) she gave to our 1919 convention.

And you can read a [sermon](#) by her good friend and minister in the NY Church, Clayton Priestnal.

These are some of the words he spoke at her memorial service, after her death in 1968 at the age of 85.

"At least two foundation stones of Miss Keller's religious philosophy were hewn out of Swedenborg's teachings on the afterlife. The first was hope. She began to see clearly that this world was not an end in itself, but a seminary of heaven--a proving ground for the life eternal. Her faith assured her that she would not be burdened forever by sightlessness and a total inability to hear and distinguish sounds. Helen Keller could now look upon her handicaps as a challenge, as a means of spiritual growth, as an education for a future life when she would be able to see, hear, and speak without impediment. There was no bitterness in her towards divine providence, for she knew the Lord was good to all, and he was not in any way accountable for the visitation of a dreadful affliction. This hope that shone forth so radiantly in her personality shone into the dark corners of despair where sat others who were also without sight. The other foundation stone of her faith was this: love and use are synonymous. Over and over again her thoughts turned to this basic doctrine of Swedenborg: "The kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of uses" (Heaven and Hell #387). This truth became the driving force of Miss Keller's life. Love has no reality, no existence, no meaning, until it goes forth into the lives of others in the form of some essential service."

As a teen-ager, Helen came to have many questions about spirituality. It so happened that a very prominent Swedenborgian wandered into her life about that time. He was John Hitz. He worked with Alexander Graham Bell in an organization to provide material about deafness. When Helen took her



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questions to him, he provided her with a Braille volume of his writing.

Reading it in Braille, she had a spiritual awakening similar to the one she had had years earlier with her teacher, Anne Sullivan when she realized at the water pump that letters had meaning.

Helen Keller was an ardent advocate of the rights of the disabled and others socially disadvantaged by society.

Eugene Taylor, Ph.D, is a Swedenborgian who is a Lecturer on Psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School, and the 1983 William James Lecturer on the Varieties of Religious Experience at Harvard Divinity School. In his book, A Psychology of Spiritual Healing, he writes this about art and disabilities:

"Often, we think of sickness as something transitory; but for millions of people, illness is chronic, even lifelong. The loss of limbs, a radical disfigurement, terrible pain, all of these may be permanent adjustments that a person has to make. Chronic illness, however, can also be a stimulus to kinds of internal growth that would not have been otherwise possible. ... Beethoven composed symphonies while completely deaf. Jackson Pollock, as well as numerous other artists, used conditions of psychopathology to produce new dimensions in modern art. ... while terrible things might happen to us, there is simply no telling what new doors will open up for us in our response to pain, sickness, and infirmity. Our illness can always become the vehicle toward the actualization of a spiritual destiny higher than the physical or psychological." [140-41]

Swedenborg wrote: "There is a constant inflow from the spiritual world into the physical world. [DLW 340] and The true principle of cure is the divine love brought by the Lord's humanity and life of divine truth ..." AC 571

The more we align with the spiritual influx, the more we are in a state of healing; regardless of the circumstances of the body.

Physicist Stephen Hawkins says of his severe disabilities:

"I guess we're all pretty disabled on the cosmic scale. What difference is a few muscles more or less? Disability does not really affect my consciousness. I see it as an inconvenience like color blindness."

Through reading Swedenborg, Helen Keller came to have a similar view on her disabilities. It was only her physical sight and physical hearing that were impaired. Internally, everyone has impairment of the spiritual eyes and ears. Hers, however, were far more developed than for most people around her.

One of the art shows inspired by Helen Keller is for children in Alabama.

The Helen Keller Art Show was established in 1983, as a project among agencies in Alabama that serve children with visual impairments. It presents winning entries of art by children who are visually impaired, blind and deafblind; using a variety of media.

For Helen, her darkness was only to the physical world. Her spiritual eyes within saw God, giving her far clearer sight than those of us with physical seeing.

We think of these as physical terms that describe aspects of our bodies. To Helen Keller, they had a deeper spiritual meaning. Ponder these “impairments” as spiritual, rather than physical. How might they apply to your own spiritual life? How does the hope of Helen Keller inspire you in your life’s journey today?

As you enjoy the following art work that was done for the Helen Keller Art Show, consider the concept of being “blind” or “deaf.” They have a spiritual meaning for all of us, and are healed through God’s inflowing Love.



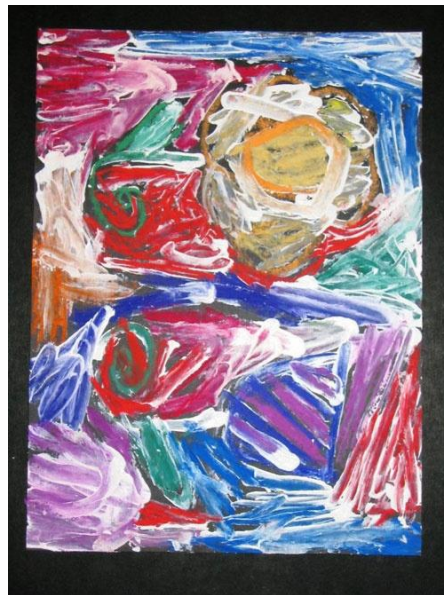
Children Playing in the Park
C.C. Perry
Gardendale High School – Jefferson County
Teacher: Liz Jansen, O & M
Medium: Acrylic Paint



Purple in my Mind
Matthew Calhoun
ALABAMA INSTITUTE FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND
Teacher: Stephanie McGhee
Medium: Acrylic Paint, Textured Brushes



Stars
Curtis Taylor
Center Point Elementary – Jefferson County
Teacher: Bonnie Armistead, VI - Kimberly Brodie-Art
Medium: Watercolor



Jumble
Haley Haynes
ALABAMA INSTITUTE FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND
Teacher: Muffet Conover
Medium: Paint and Pastels

The Hildegard Experience

October 31, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Isaiah 6:1-13

6In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. 2Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. 3And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." 4The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

5And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" 6Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. 7The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." 8Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

FROM SWEDENBORG

Divine Love and Wisdom (Rogers) n. 115

115. But how the Lord is in an angel, and an angel in the Lord, cannot be comprehended unless one knows the nature of their conjunction. It is a conjunction of the Lord with the angel, and of the angel with the Lord. Consequently it is a reciprocal conjunction.

This conjunction on the part of the angel is as follows. An angel has no other perception than that he possesses love and wisdom of himself, like any person, and thus he feels as though love and wisdom are his as qualities belonging to him. If he did not have that perception, there would be no conjunction; thus he would not have the Lord in him, and he would not be in the Lord. Nor is it possible for the Lord to be in any angel or person unless the one in whom He is present with His love and wisdom perceives and feels that presence as something his own. Because of this the Lord is not only received, but, having been received, is retained and also loved in return. Consequently it is because of this that an angel becomes wise and remains wise.

Who could possibly want to love the Lord and the neighbor, and who could possibly want to become wise, if he did not feel and perceive what he loves, learns and incorporates as being something his own? Who would otherwise retain it in himself? If the case were not as it is, any love and wisdom flowing in would have no seat, for it would flow on through a person without affecting him. Thus the angel would not be an angel, and the person would not be a person; indeed, the angel or person would be only like something inanimate.

It can be seen from this that there must be reciprocity for conjunction to exist.

THE HILDEGARD EXPERIENCE

HILDEGARD: HER LIFE

Hildegard of Bingen [1098 - 1179] , at age 42, was the abbess of a convent. She had been a resident since the age of eight, when her parents gave her [their 10th child], to the convent as their "tithing" to the church. Despite her religious background, she resisted the call of God. It was a powerful call. She

describes the experience:

Heaven was opened and a fiery light of exceeding brilliance came and permeated my whole brain, and infiltrated my whole heart and my whole breast, not like a burning but a warming flame, as the sun warms anything its rays touch. And immediately I knew the meaning of the exposition of the Scriptures ...



She realized that she had been having visions since she was five years old, but always dismissed them as insignificant. Even with this powerful experience of call, she tried to ignore it. She did not feel worthy to be an instrument of God. God told her to write down all that she saw and heard in her visions, but she resisted.

But although I heard and saw these things, because of doubt and low opinion of myself and because of diverse sayings of men, I refused for a long time a call to write, not out of stubbornness but out of humility, until weighed down by a scourge of god, I fell onto a bed of sickness.

Her health only improved when she decided to follow God's call. She started painting and writing -- music, poetry, and books. She became famous in her time, and is perhaps even better known today. Matthew Fox has brought her works back into public prominence, and many are discovering her again today.

Like Swedenborg, she received a dramatic call in middle age and was given new understanding of the scripture. Because of her willingness to respond to the call, she has enriched the world of spirituality.

Many of her visions, or "Illuminations" were beautiful and complex paintings that contained spiritual meaning. Her music is deeply haunting. Let yourself become immersed in the experience of her illuminations and off her music.

HILDEGARD: HER ILLUMINATIONS

Hildegard's visions are called "illuminations". For Hildegard, it is the Holy Spirit who illumines. She compared her awakening to the experience of Pentecost.



Most researchers now believe that Hildegard suffered from migraines. Her visions were like the visual hallucinations that are part of migraine headaches. After a migraine attack, sufferers usually experience sickness, paralysis, and/or blindness. Hildegard had all of these symptoms. Hildegard, like other patients, felt a sense of well-being -- even euphoria -- afterwards.

With God's help, Hildegard turned a serious illness into mystical experience and creative outpourings for the world.

Illuminations: A Slide Show



HILDEGARD: HER SIMILARITY TO SWEDENBORG

Like Swedenborg, Hildegard had a vision that changed her life; she was given an understanding of the meaning of the Bible. She was told to write down everything she experienced during these mystical experiences.

And it came to pass ... when I was 42 years and 7 months old, that the heavens were opened and a

blinding light of exceptional brilliance flowed through my entire brain. And so it kindled my whole heart and breast like a flame, not burning but warming... and suddenly I understood of the meaning of expositions of the books...

Swedenborg wrote about the importance of doing "uses." Hildegard's order, the Benedictines, "valued doing good labor. She started out as a nurse, and then illustrated books.

Like Swedenborg, Hildegard felt that her mystical experiences were given to her in order to be shared with others. She did not indulge herself in a "private" mysticism, but rather accepted a mission to educate others.

She valued science as well as mystical experience, and spent her life integrating both aspects of her being.

HILDEGARD; HER CENTER



This is a new center in Lincoln, Nebraska. Here is its mission:

*The mission of the **Hildegard Center for the Arts** is to provide a forum for all who seek to experience God through an appreciation of the visual and performing arts. **Hildegard** will provide opportunities for artistic expression, education and appreciation which will enrich our community and enhance humanity. It is the goal of Hildegard "to affirm that true beauty, which as a glimmer of the Spirit of God...opens the human soul to the sense of the eternal". **

**John Paul II, Letter to Artists, 1999*

HILDEGARD: HER MUSIC

Spiritus Sancto

Spiritus Sancto honor sit,
qui in mente Ursule virginis
virginalem turbam velut columbas collegit,
Unde ipsa patriam suam
sicut Abraham reliquit.
et etiam propter amplexionem Agni
desponsationem viri sibi abstraxit.
Nam iste castissimus et aureus exercitus
in virgineo crine mate transivit.
O quis umquam talia audivit?
Et etiam propter amplexionem Agni
desponsationem viri sibi abstraxit.
Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.

Et etiam propter amplexionem Agni
desponsationem viri sibi abstraxit.

Holy Spirit

Honor be to you, O Holy Spirit,
who, through the mind of the virgin Ursula,
brought together a whirling tumult
of the purest doves.
Thereupon, like Abraham,
she relinquished her homeland,
and releasing herself from worldly betrothal,
she entered into the embrace of the Lamb.
So this pure golden army with flowing hair
passed over the sea.
O whoever heard of such as this?
For she released herself
from worldly betrothal,
and entered into the embrace of the Lamb Himself.
Glory to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
She released herself from worldly betrothal,
and entered in to the embrace
of the Lamb Himself.

HILDEGARD: SPIRITUAL INSPIRATION

O Holy Wisdom, Soaring Power, encompass us with wings unfurled, and carry us, encircling all,
above, below, and through the world.
--O Holy Spirit, Root of Life

Every element has a sound, an original sound from the order of God; all those sounds unite like
the harmony from harps and zithers.

I, the fiery life of divine wisdom, I ignite the beauty of the plains, I sparkle the waters, I burn in
the sun, and the moon, and the stars.

The earth which sustains humanity must not be injured, it must not be destroyed.

The soul is a breath of living spirit, that with excellent sensitivity, permeates the entire body to
give it life. Just so, the breath of the air makes the earth fruitful. Thus the air is the soul of the
earth, moistening it, greening it.

There is the Music of Heaven in all things and we have forgotten how to hear it until we sing.
Underneath all the texts, all the sacred psalms and canticles, these watery varieties of sounds
and silences, terrifying, mysterious, whirling and sometimes gestating and gentle must
somehow be felt in the pulse, ebb, and flow of the music that sings in me. My new song must
float like a feather on the breath of God.

When the words come, they are merely empty shells without the music. They live as they are
sung, for the words are the body and the music the spirit.

Sing, Sing, Sing

November 7, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Psalm 98 (New International Version)

A psalm.

Sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvelous things;
his right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.
The LORD has made his salvation known
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.
He has remembered his love
and his faithfulness to Israel;
all the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music;
make music to the LORD with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,
with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—
shout for joy before the LORD, the King.

Let the sea resound, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it.
Let the rivers clap their hands,
let the mountains sing together for joy;
let them sing before the LORD,
for he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples with equity.

FROM SWEDENBORG

Apocalypse Revealed (Whitehead) n. 276

Having everyone of them harps, signifies confession of the Lord's Divine Human from spiritual truths. It is known that confessions of Jehovah were made in the temple at Jerusalem by singing, and at the same time by instruments of music which corresponded; the instruments were principally trumpets and timbrels, and psalteries and harps; the trumpets and timbrels corresponded to celestial goods and truths, and the psalteries and harps to spiritual goods and truths; the correspondences were with their sounds. What celestial good and truth is, and what



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spiritual good and truth, may be seen in the work concerning Heaven and Hell (n. 13-19, and 20-28). That "harps" signify confessions of the Lord from spiritual truths, may appear from these passages:

Confess to Jehovah with the harp, sing unto Him with the psaltery of ten strings (Ps. 33:2).

I will confess to Thee on the harp, O God, my God (Ps. 43:4).

I will confess to Thee on the instrument of the psaltery, I will sing unto Thee with the harp, O Thou Holy One of Israel (Ps. 71:22).

Arouse me psaltery and harp, I will confess Thee among the nations, O Lord (Ps. 57:8, 9; 108:2-4).

Answer to Jehovah by confession, play on the harp to our God (Ps. 147:7).

It is good to confess to Jehovah upon the psaltery, and upon higgsion on the harp.

SING, SING, SING

Is music an important part of your worship experience? Most of us use music in some form: playing or listening to instruments; singing or listening to choirs; dancing or watching liturgical dance.

When the Israelites successfully crossed the Red Sea, Miriam and the women celebrated with timbrels and dancing.

19 When Pharaoh's horses, chariots and horsemen[e] went into the sea, the LORD brought the waters of the sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. 20 Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing. 21 Miriam sang to them:

*"Sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted.
Both horse and driver
he has hurled into the sea."*

[from Exodus 15]

Swedenborg talked of the life in heaven as filled with music, concerts, and singing. He said that music originated in the heavens before coming to the natural world. In a 1914 New Church Life article, "Was Swedenborg a Music Lover?" the author concludes that he was, and cites a story by a contemporary of Swedenborg enjoying music.

Sometimes music and dance designed for the theater has a worshipful quality to it. An example is Alvin Ailey's "Revelation."

How do you use music in your worship? You might want to explore ways of deepening your worship experience through music, singing, and dancing. Remember that Swedenborg says that music originates in Heaven!

The Artist's Way

November 14, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

[via Swedenborg]

Apocalypse Revealed (Whitehead) n. 254

[2] That "to create," in the Word, signifies to reform and regenerate, is plain from these passages:

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a firm spirit in the midst of me (Ps. 51:10).
Thou openest Thine hand, they are filled with good; Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit; they are created (Ps. 104:28, 30).

The people which shall be created shall praise Jah (Ps. 102:18).

Behold, I create a new heaven and a new earth, rejoice for ever in that which I create; behold I create Jerusalem an exultation (Isa. 65:17-18).

Jehovah createth the heavens, He that stretcheth out the earth, He giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein (Isa. 42:5; 45:12, 18).

Thus saith Jehovah thy Creator, O Jacob, thy Former, O Israel; I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by My name; everyone that is called by My name, I have created him in My glory (Isa. 43:1, 7).

They were prepared in the day that thou wast created; thou was perfect in thy ways in the day that thou was created, until perversity was found in thee (Ezek. 28:13, 15).

These things are concerning the king of Tyre, by whom are signified they who are in intelligence by the Divine truth.

That they may see, know, consider, and understand that the hand of Jehovah hath done this, and the Holy one of Israel hath created it (Isa. 41:20).

FROM SWEDENBORG

Apocalypse Revealed (Rogers) n. 475

475. Who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it. This symbolically means, who animates all who are in heaven and the church, and enlivens each and every thing in them.

In the natural sense, to create means to create, but in the spiritual sense to create means, symbolically, to reform and regenerate (nos. 254, 290), which is also to enliven. Heaven means the heaven inhabited by angels. The earth and the sea symbolize the church? the earth those people who concern themselves with its internal elements, and the sea those people who concern themselves with its external ones (nos. 398, 470). The things that are in these symbolize each and every thing in such people.

THE ARTIST'S WAY and SWEDENBORG

Julia Cameron, author of *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* writes:

Creativity is a spiritual force. The force that drives the green fuse through the flower, as Dylan Thomas defined his idea of the life force, is the same urge that drives us toward creation. There is a central will to create that is part of our human heritage and potential. Because creation is always an act of faith, and faith is a spiritual issue, so is creativity. As we strive for our highest selves, our spiritual selves, we cannot help but be more aware, more proactive, and more creative.

William Blake wrote: *I myself do nothing. The Holy Spirit accomplishes all through me.*

How are creativity and spirituality connected? To Swedenborg, they were the same. *That "to create," in the Word, signifies to reform and regenerate.*

For Swedenborg, regeneration was a deeply spiritual process of a human being becoming one with the Divine.

In your life, how do the creative and the spiritual merge? Below is art work from D'Ann Loomis, one of the registrants on our web site. She writes about how the creative and the spiritual are connected for her:

From D'Ann Loomis:



"Music", 1968, Tempera Painting

I feel a desire to make a picture -- a drawing or a painting, of whatever I feel very taken with, either something I see in life, or in a photograph, or in my mind. As I become more involved in making the picture, I feel that I see more and more what is there for me to find and bring out in my portrayal of it. I keep working with it until I cannot see any way to make it more like that, or when it seems to express those qualities as well as possible. Often the finished picture is quite different from what I originally had in mind when I began the work. Doing art work opens my awareness of what I see around me. Everything becomes more vivid and enjoyable to look at and I notice things I had passed by without really seeing. I go for long periods without doing art work. I have not done art work since January of this year, when my late husband fell so ill. Music is a great comfort to me, and I'm participating in several groups -- the church choir, local

university civic orchestra, and a piano ensemble group. I was a professional violinist in my younger days.



D'Ann Loomis, 1968, Journey -- pencil with computer enhancement by son Jerry



D'Ann Loomis, 1968, Firebird. Ink with computer enhancement by son Jerry

Julia Cameron offers what she sees as the Basic Principles of creativity. They are also the Basic Principles of spirituality:

- 1. Creativity is the natural order of life. Life is energy: pure creative energy.*
- 2. There is an underlying, in-dwelling creative force infusing all of life -- including ourselves.*
- 3. When we open ourselves to our creativity, we open ourselves to the creator's creativity within us and our lives.*
- 4. We are, ourselves, creations. And we, in turn, are meant to continue creativity by being creative ourselves.*
- 5. Creativity is God's gift to us. Using our creativity is our gift back to God.*
- 6. The refusal to be creative is self-will and is counter to our true nature.*

7. When we open ourselves to exploring our creativity, we open ourselves to God: good orderly direction.

8. As we open our creative channel to the creator, many gentle but powerful changes are to be expected.

9. It is safe to open ourselves up to greater and greater creativity.

10. Our creative dreams and yearnings come from a divine source. As we move toward our dreams, we move toward our divinity.

You'll notice that our opening song and our closing song both come from deep personal encounters with regeneration; and ended up being expressed in music and song

Take some meditative time to consider your moments of deep encounters with the Divine. Did they inspire any creative expression in you? Consider your moments of creative inspiration. Did they feel like encounters with God? Consider sharing these reflections in our [forum](#), or in our [chat](#) this evening at 9:30 PM Eastern [6:30 PM Pacific].

What is God Thankful For?

November 21, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Psalm 100 (King James Version)

Psalm 100

1 Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands.

2 Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.

3 Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

4 Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

5 For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

THE SCRIPTURE AS MUSIC:

Crystal Cathedral: Make a Joyful Noise

FROM SWEDENBORG

A psalm for confession: Make a joyful noise to Jehovah, all the earth; He hath made us, and not we ourselves, His people and the flock of His pasture. Enter through His gates with confession, into His courts with praise; confess ye to Him, and bless His name. For Jehovah is good, His mercy is forever, and His truth to generation and generation (Ps. 100:1-5).

Here it is evident what "confessing" and "confession" signify, namely, acknowledging Jehovah or the Lord, and the things which are His. That this acknowledgment is doctrine and the Word is manifest.

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 3880

What Is God Thankful For?



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My concept of prayer changed when I was taking a Shalem Institute spirituality training, and Sister Rose Mary Dougherty asked, "What is God's prayer for you?"

I had thought of prayer in terms of telling God what I needed or wanted. I hadn't thought of asking God what God wanted for me.

I think the same about Thanksgiving. We thank God for many things at Thanksgiving. What if we were to ask God what things God was thankful for? What things are we doing that God appreciates?

God is probably thankful that we honor a time of harvest. Swedenborg tells us that this is about regeneration.

That "seed-time and harvest" signify man who is to be regenerated, and thus the church ...

God probably appreciates that we give thanks:

By "giving thanks" is signified the acknowledgment and glorification of the Lord;

'Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving' signifies the Lord's spiritual Divine things.

God may not be thankful about what really happened between the pilgrims and Native Americans.

In 1970, Wamsutta, an Aquinnah Wampanoag man, had been asked to speak at a Massachusetts banquet celebrating the 350th anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims. He agreed. But when they saw an advance copy of the talk, they refused to allow him to deliver it. He had planned to say:

Even before the Pilgrims landed it was common practice for explorers to capture Indians, take them to Europe and sell them as slaves for 220 shillings apiece. The Pilgrims had hardly explored the shores of Cape Cod for four days before they had robbed the graves of my ancestors and stolen their corn and beans. Mourt's Relation describes a searching party of sixteen men. Mourt goes on to say that this party took as much of the Indians' winter provisions as they were able to carry.

Massasoit, the great Sachem of the Wampanoag, knew these facts, yet he and his People welcomed and befriended the settlers of the Plymouth Plantation.

When told he could not deliver this speech, Wamsutta refused to speak at the banquet. Instead he and many hundreds of other Native people and supporters gathered in Plymouth and observed the first National Day of Mourning. United American Indians of New England have returned to Plymouth every year since to demonstrate against the Pilgrim mythology.



The Rev. Robert Two Bulls says:

Perhaps we as a nation need to celebrate the life of Squanto, who was the real hero of this sad story. Instead we celebrate a false mythology that plays into our notion of greatness. It is presented like a bridge that connects a mythic past of one's ancestors having nothing to present-day descendents having a superabundance of everything. The troubling aspect of this symbol is that the foundation on one side of this bridge is unstable, and I am not sure that making a connection from this myth to giving thanks today is a very good one to make. We have to remember that land in America was largely acquired dishonestly by outright theft and by breaking treaties with the first peoples of this land. American History that only considers the false myths as truth will always diminish the past and present lives of Native American Indians.

So perhaps God is not thankful about the mythological basis of the U.S. Thanksgiving. But God is probably thankful about our many efforts to provide food for the hungry and about our efforts to acknowledge the Divine in this time of celebration. God is probably thankful that we take time for prayer and that we engage in many “uses” of help for others. God is probably grateful for the times people work together to help others, such as the international effort to save the trapped miners in Chile. God probably appreciates our taking the time to be with people we care about, and to give acknowledgement to the Divine.

What do you see around you that God is thankful for? What can you do to add to God's thankfulness?

Light One Candle

November 28, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Luke 11

The Lamp of the Body

33 "No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. 34 Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy,[g] your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy,[h] your body also is full of darkness. 35 See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. 36 Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you."

FROM SWEDENBORG

As in the proper sense the "morning" signifies the Lord, His advent, and thus the approach of His kingdom, it is evident what it signifies besides, namely, the rise of a new church (for this is the Lord's kingdom on earth), and this both in general and in particular, and even in the least particular; in general, when any church on the globe is being raised up anew; in particular, when a man is being regenerated, and being made new (for then the Lord's kingdom is arising in him, and he is becoming a church); and in the least particular, whenever the good of love and faith is working in him; for in this consists the advent of the Lord. Hence the Lord's resurrection on the third day in the morning (Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1) involves all these things (even in the particular and the least particular) in regard to His rising again in the minds of the regenerate every day, and even every moment. AC 2405

Light One Candle

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. The word *Advent* means "coming" or "arrival" of something we have been waiting for. Most Western Christian Churches celebrate Advent as the beginning of the Church Year. It begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas day, and is the season of waiting for the birth of Jesus.



Many churches have an Advent wreath, and light one candle each of the four Sundays of Advent. The first candle is lit today, and is considered by most to be the candle of hope.

A single candle burning is a powerful statement of hope.

This is certainly true in the story of Hanukkah. The Jews had to defend their Temple from the Greeks. They needed to re-dedicate it, and they wanted to light the Menorah. There was only enough oil for one night. But, miraculously, the candle kept burning for eight nights!

If you would like to know more about the history of the Menorah – that is commemorated in the opening song – [click on this link to see a video.](#)



For Swedenborg, Advent had a lot to do with light. In today's Swedenborgian reading, he points out that "advent" is a morning of the Lord. Here is another section from that same reading:

[2] This time or state is called in the Word the "dawn," because the Lord then comes; or what is the same, His kingdom then approaches. The case is similar with the good, for at such a time there shines out with them a semblance of the morning twilight or dawn; and therefore in the Word the advent of the Lord is compared to the "morning," and is also called the "morning."

These four weeks of Advent are a new dawn for each of us.

For Swedenborgians, there is an emphasis on the light that is coming into the world and into our hearts. In Advent we celebrate the knowledge that light and love are always stronger than dark and hate. Peace is always stronger than violence. Compassion is stronger than love of the ego. The Light of Christ is birthed in all of our hearts. By connecting with this inner event, we help create heaven on earth.

Swedenborg wrote:

The Lord [Divine Light] is perpetually present with every person, wicked as well as good, for no one could live without His [This] presence. ... It is the Lord's [this] perpetual presence which gives a person the faculty of reason and the ability to become spiritual. This is brought about by the light which comes from the Lord as the sun of the spiritual world, which a person can receive in his understanding. That light is the truth which gives him the power of reasoning. The Lord's [2nd] coming, however, takes place with the person who combines heat with that light, that is, combines love with truth. For the heat radiated by that same sun is love for God and towards the neighbor. But the Lord's coming can be compared with the coming of heat, which happens in springtime. Since then heat is combined with light, the earth is softened up, seeds sprout and bear fruit. Such is the parallel between the spiritual environment of a person's spirit and the natural environment of his body.



Swedenborg says that before the Lord came into the world, evil had become increasingly stronger. There were more times of "darkness," when evil was gaining in power. God decided to come into the world in order to bring light into the darkness. The birth of the Christ child WAS the light coming into the world.

The next four weeks are a time to prepare for this new birth. What do you need to do to help your heart be open to the rebirth of the Christ light?

The candle we light today is a candle of "hope." This week is a good time to consider your hopes and dreams for the new birth in you.



Swedenborg often describes God as "the sun" and the birth of Jesus as the dawn coming into the world. One way to embrace this view of Advent is to explore meditation that focuses on a new dawn coming into your life.

Here is a meditation that you could try if you wish. Play the music below as you watch the beautiful photos of dawn. In what ways is God bringing a new dawn into your life this Advent?

Preparing for Peace

December 5, 2010

READINGS

FROM THE BIBLE

Isaiah 11:1-10

1A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. 2The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. 3His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; 4but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. 5Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. 6The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. 7The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. 8The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. 9They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

10On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

Matthew 3:1-12

3In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, 2“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” 3This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’” 4Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, 6and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

7But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8Bear fruit worthy of repentance. 9Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 10Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 11“‘I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

FROM SWEDENBORG

... the unity of God is most intimately inscribed on the mind of every man, since it is in the midst of all that flows from God into the soul of man. It has, however, not descended thence into the human understanding, because there has been wanting the knowledge by which man must ascend to meet God. Every one should prepare the way for God, that is, should prepare himself for His reception; and this is done by means of knowledge. The knowledge which has hitherto been wanting to enable the understanding to perceive that God is one, that only one Divine Being is possible, and that all things in nature are from Him ... TCR 24

Preparing for Peace

In some Christian traditions, the 2nd Advent candle represents "Peace" or "preparing the way." Swedenborg had some comments on preparing for God:

Every one should prepare the way for God, that is, should prepare himself for His reception; and this is done by means of knowledge. The knowledge which has hitherto been wanting to enable the understanding to perceive that God is one, that only one Divine Being is possible, and that all things in nature are from Him ... [TCR 24]

How do we prepare ourselves for the coming of Peace in our lives? Swedenborg says that it is knowledge that helps prepare the way. An important part of the knowledge is understanding that the birth of Jesus was part of a Divine design:

Now, because God came down, and because he is the design ... there was no other way for him to become an actual human being than to be conceived, to be carried in the womb, to be born, to be brought up, and to acquire more and more knowledge so as to become intelligent and wise. Therefore in his human manifestation he was an infant like any infant, a child like any child, and so on with just one difference: he completed the process more quickly, more fully, and more perfectly than the rest of us do.... He grew up more quickly, more fully, and more perfectly than the rest of us ... True Christianity, #89

This Divine design involves a recognition that the Lord **is** Peace:

First, we need to say where peace comes from. Divine peace is within the Lord, arising from the oneness of his divine nature and the divine human nature within him. The divine quality of peace in heaven comes from the Lord, arising from his union with heaven's angels, and specifically from the union of the good and the true within each angel. These are the sources of peace. [H & H 286]

Swedenborg left no doubt that the way to Peace is through the Lord: *In the highest sense, peace means the Lord, because he is the source of peace.* He writes that the Lord came to the earth because the hells had become too strong; it was time for heavenly love and peace to become fully present on the earth. As we prepare for Christmas, it is reassuring to remember

that the Lord ensures that peace and love will always be stronger than hate.

Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh tells us another way to find peace. He wrote:

Peace is present right here and now, in ourselves and in everything we do and see. The question is whether or not we are in touch with it. We don't have to travel far away to enjoy the blue sky. We don't have to leave our city or even our neighborhood to enjoy the eyes of a beautiful child. Even the air we breathe can be a source of joy.

How can you prepare for Peace this Advent? Perhaps you do not need to prepare for something down the road; you only need to be aware that Peace is with you in every moment. How are your moments being lived this week? Many of us are overwhelmed by the stresses of this season: worrying about having enough time, enough money, enough energy.

As a gift to yourself, allow yourself some quiet, nurturing moments of inner peace. Here is a meditation to help you relax into the peace of the season.



Joy and Despair

December 12, 2010

READINGS

From the Bible:

4Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

10I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. 11Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. 12I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. 13I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:4-13

From Swedenborg:

37. (4) The more closely one is conjoined to the Lord the happier one becomes. The like can be said of degrees of happiness as was said (n. 32 and 34) of degrees of life and of wisdom according to conjunction with the Lord. Happiness, that is, blessedness and joy, also are heightened as the higher degrees of the mind, called spiritual and celestial, are opened with man. After his life in the world these degrees grow to eternity. Divine Providence #37

JOY AND DISPAIR

Philip Van Doren Stern [1930-84] was a respected researcher and historical author. He had a dream one night, in the late 1930's. The next morning he wrote it down, and realized he had written a short story. He titled it "The Greatest Gift." He tried to have it published, but no one was interested. He had 200 copies printed, and then in 1943 sent them as Christmas cards to his friends.

During the next couple of years, a couple of magazines ran his story in their Christmas issue. Then, it came to the attention of movie producer Frank Capra. He purchased the rights for \$10,000 and had it re-written as a screenplay. It was released in 1946 as "It's A Wonderful Life," with James Stewart, Donna Reed, and Lionel Barrymore. It was nominated for five academy awards, but won none. It was a flop at the box office success, Capra considered it his favorite film, and Jimmy Stewart felt it was his personal favorite of his films.

It was shown on public tv channels at Christmas time for many years. In 1974, the copyright expired, and

it became shown on commercial tv stations. A colorized version was done, which Jimmy Stewart fought against avidly.

This is a movie with deep spiritual themes that have been explored through the year. However, the messages are clearer in the original short story, "The Greatest Gift." It contains some important lessons for us in the 3rd week of Advent.

If you would like to read this little story for yourself, it is at [this link](#). Below is a summary.

THE GREATEST GIFT

excerpts from the story by Philip Van Doren Stern.

The story begins with a depressed George Pratt on a bridge Christmas Eve.

The water looked paralyzingly cold. George wondered how long a man could stay alive in it. The glassy blackness had a strange, hypnotic effect on him. He leaned still farther over the railing...

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," a quiet voice beside him said.

The little man shook his head. "You know you shouldn't think of such things—and on Christmas Eve of all times! You've got to consider Mary—and your mother too."

George opened his mouth to ask how this stranger could know his wife's name, but the fellow anticipated him. "Don't ask me how I know such things. It's my business to know 'em. That's why I came along this way tonight. Lucky I did too." He glanced down at the dark water and shuddered.

"Well, if you know so much about me," George said, "give me just one good reason why I should be alive."

The little man made a queer chuckling sound. "Come, come, it can't be that bad. You've got your job at the bank. And Mary and the kids. You're healthy, young, and—"

"And sick of everything!" George cried. "I'm stuck here in this mudhole for life, doing the same dull work day after day. Other men are leading exciting lives, but I—well, I'm just a small-town bank clerk that even the army didn't want. I never did anything really useful or interesting, and it looks as if I never will. I might just as well be dead. I might better be dead. Sometimes I wish I were. In fact, I wish I'd never been born!"

The little man stood looking at him in the growing darkness. "What was that you said?" he asked softly.

"I said I wish I'd never been born," George repeated firmly. "And I mean it too."

The stranger's pink cheeks glowed with excitement. "Why that's wonderful! You've solved everything. I was afraid you were going to give me some trouble. But now you've got the solution yourself. You wish you'd never been born. All right! OK! You haven't!"

The angel gives George a bag of brushes, so that he can approach people's homes as a bush salesman.

George goes first to the bank building, where he works as a clerk. However, the bank is closed. He chats with a man who said there was a bank clerk named Marty Sterns [the job George had had] embezzled \$50,000 which forced the bank to close. Most of the people in town had been ruined financially. Marty's brother, Arthur, became an alcoholic who married Mary [the woman whom George had married.]

George is quite shaken, and decides to visit the home of his parents.

He looked around the little parlor, trying to find out why it looked different. Over the mantelpiece hung a framed photograph which had been taken on his kid brother Harry's sixteenth birthday. He remembered how they had gone to Potter's studio to be photographed together. There was something queer about the picture. It showed only one figure—Harry's.

"That your son?" he asked.

His mother's face clouded. She nodded but said nothing.

"I think I met him, too," George said hesitantly. "His name's Harry, isn't it?"

His mother turned away, making a strange choking noise in her throat. Her husband put his arm clumsily around her shoulder. His voice, which was always mild and gentle, suddenly became harsh. "You couldn't have met him," he said. "He's been dead a long while. He was drowned the day that picture was taken."

George's mind flew back to the long-ago August afternoon when he and Harry had visited Potter's studio. On their way home they had gone swimming. Harry had been seized with a cramp, he remembered. He had pulled him out of the water and had thought nothing of it. But suppose he hadn't been there!

Then George visits Mary.

Art Jenkins came in. He stood for a moment in the doorway, clinging to the knob for support. His eyes were glazed, and his face was very red. "Who's this?" he demanded thickly.

"He's a brush salesman," Mary tried to explain. "He gave me this brush."

"Brush salesman!" Art sneered. "Well, tell him to get outa here. We don't want no brushes." Art hiccupped violently and lurched across the room to the sofa, where he sat down suddenly. "An' we don't want no brush salesmen neither."

George looked despairingly at Mary. Her eyes were begging him to go. Art had lifted his feet up on the sofa and was sprawling out on it, muttering unkind things about brush salesmen. George went to the door, followed by Art's son, who kept snapping the pistol at him and saying: "You're dead—dead—dead!"

Perhaps the boy was right, George thought when he reached the porch. Maybe he was dead, or maybe this was all a bad dream from which he might eventually awake. He wanted to find the little man on the bridge again and try to persuade him to cancel the whole deal.

George is thrilled to return to his life.

His wife came toward him, dressed for going to church, and making gestures to silence him. "I've just put the children to bed," she protested. "Now they'll—" But not another word could she get out of her mouth, for he smothered it with kisses, and then dragged her up to the children's room, where he violated every tenet of parental behavior by madly embracing his son and his daughter and waking them up thoroughly.

It was not until Mary got him downstairs that he began to be coherent. "I thought I'd lost you. Oh, Mary, I thought I'd lost you!"

"What's the matter, darling?" she asked in bewilderment.

He pulled her down on the sofa and kissed her again. And then, just as he was about to tell her about his queer dream, his fingers came in contact with something lying on the seat of the sofa. His voice froze.

He did not even have to pick the thing up, for he knew what it was. And he knew that it would have a blue handle and varicolored bristles.

What lessons are here for the 3rd week of Advent?

Everyday life can be filled with "dispair." George feels that his life is dull, that he is not accomplishing anything. In the movie version, George Bailey is in crisis with his life swirling out of control. In the short story, George Pratt is experiencing the despair of everyday life.

Every life also contains the joy of living. In the movie version, George Bailey is head of a savings and loan that helps many people buy homes. George Pratt in the short story has a less glamorous job; he is a bank clerk. Yet he sees the impact he has had the lives of others. Without his life, there would have been a bank embezzlement that closed the bank and ruined many people. Mary would have married an abusive alcoholic and been very unhappy. His brother would have died in childhood.

Life is the "greatest gift" that George discovers:

"Change me back," George pleaded. "Change me back—please. Not just for my sake but for others too. You don't know what a mess this town is in. You don't understand. I've got to get back. They need me here."

"I understand right enough," the stranger said slowly. "I just wanted to make sure you did. You had the greatest gift of all conferred upon you—the gift of life, of being a part of this world and taking a part in it. Yet you denied that gift."

In both the short story and the movie, it is our relationships that give life its deepest meaning. Pratt realizes how much everyday joy he gets from his family. Bailey sees not only that, but that he is "the richest man in town" because he has so many friends who are there for him.

Swedenborg tells us that joy comes from our connection with the Divine. The more we open our hearts to the Divine Love and Wisdom flowing into us, the more joy we can experience. The more we share this joy with each other, the deeper we experience it ourselves.

This week, open your heart to the Light of joy.

Love & Light

December 19, 2010

Light the 4th Advent Candle



The 4th Advent candle is the candle of Love.

Luke 2 (New International Version, ©2010)

Luke 2

The Birth of Jesus

¹ In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while^{aj} Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Because from his essence, God burned with the love of uniting himself to man, it was necessary that he should cover himself around with a body. He was to be born, and then to grow in wisdom and in love, and so was to approach to union with his Divine origin. TCR 838

The coming of the Lord is not according to the letter, that he would again appear in the world, but it is his presence in each one, which takes place as often as the gospel is reached, and its holiness is thought about. AD 3900:9

How can you prepare your heart for the birth of Love?

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that

will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

*14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Arcana Coelestia (Potts) n. 4594

4594. This is Bethlehem. That this signifies in place thereof the resurrection of a new spiritual of the celestial...

[2] The reason why the Lord was born there and not elsewhere, is that He alone was born a spiritual celestial man, but all others natural, with the capacity or ability to become either celestial or spiritual by regeneration from the Lord. The reason why the Lord was born a spiritual celestial man was that He might make His Human Divine, and this according to order from the lowest degree to the highest, and might thus dispose into order all things in the heavens and in the hells. ...

Allow this meditation to help you open your heart to the birth of Love

Extinguish your candles.

[including Advent candles]

Flying into the New Year

December 26, 2010

READINGS

FROM SCRIPTURE

John 3

Jesus Teaches Nicodemus

1 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

3 Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.[a]”

4 “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

5 Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit[b] gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You[c] must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”[d]

FROM SWEDENBORG

573. The expression “born again,” which means, as it were, created anew, is here used because “to be created” signifies to be regenerated. [TCR]

FLYING INTO ANOTHER YEAR

Hans Christian Anderson wrote a story in 1850 about a mythical bird called a *phoenix*.

IN the Garden of Paradise, beneath the Tree of Knowledge, bloomed a rose bush. Here, in the first rose, a bird was born. His flight was like the flashing of light, his plumage was beautiful, and his song ravishing. But when Eve plucked the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, when she and Adam were driven from Paradise, there fell from the flaming sword of the cherub a spark into the nest of the bird, which blazed up forthwith. The bird perished in the flames; but from the red egg in the nest there fluttered aloft a new one—the one solitary Phoenix bird. The fable tells that he dwells in Arabia, and that every hundred years, he burns himself to death in his nest; but each time a new Phoenix, the only one in the world, rises up from the red egg.

The bird flutters round us, swift as light, beautiful in color, charming in song. When a mother sits by her infant’s cradle, he stands on the pillow, and, with his wings, forms a glory around the infant’s head. He



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flies through the chamber of content, and brings sunshine into it, and the violets on the humble table smell doubly sweet.

The Phoenix represents “resurrection” in many traditions throughout history, including Persians, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Chinese, and Phoenicians. The Phoenix has been said to live in India and to migrate to Egypt every 500 years. This is probably inspired by *Garuda*, the bird of the Hindu god Vishnu. He saw the bird as sunlight. The phoenix has also appeared in Christian history.

The Egyptian phoenix [*Bennu* bird] was popular in early Catholic art as representing resurrection.

St. Clement thought that the phoenix was a real animal, and referred to it as sign of Christ's resurrection.

Job 29:18 is usually translated in Jewish scripture as:

18 *"I said, 'I will die with my nest, and I will live as long as a phoenix;*

Most Christian translations are:

¹⁸ *"I thought, 'I will die in my own house,
my days as numerous as the grains of sand.*

Swedenborg doesn't have any reference to “phoenix,” but he does talk about birds:

776. '[Every] bird according to its kind' means all spiritual truth, 'flying things' means natural truth, and 'winged thing' sensory truth. [A.C. 776]

Of course, he has a lot to say about regeneration. Here are a few of his thoughts:

Man is conjoined to the Lord by regeneration (n. 2004, 9338). And consociated with angels in heaven (n. 2474). He does not come into heaven, until he is in a state to be led by the Lord by means of good, which is the case when he is regenerated (n. 8516, 8539, 8722, 9139, 9832, 10367).

573. The expression “born again,” which means, as it were, created anew, is here used because “to be created” signifies to be regenerated. [TCR]

577. Regeneration, therefore, is the means of salvation, while charity and faith are the means of regeneration.

The New Year is a good time to think about regeneration, rebirth, and transformation.

Christmas is the time that we honor the birth of the light in the world; the celebration of the rebirth of the light in each one of us. After Christmas, we honor the start of a new year; a time to continue the process.

We can “fly” into the New Year as a phoenix would. Most of the time we think of the “New Year” as a time to put together some resolutions of things that we'll do -- like losing weight and quitting smoking. These resolutions are good and important for us. However, we can move far beyond them if we think like a phoenix.

Imagine on New Year's Eve that you are an old phoenix, reaching the end of its 500 years. Think about that phoenix jumping into a burning pyre -- and then re-emerging transformed as a young bird with bright new feathers.

Let God burn away your old self, and repaint your feathers in bright, shimmering colors.

How? Before starting your list of New Year's resolutions, say a prayer. Ask for God's guidance on your regeneration, and how the New Year can be a step in that process. Then, out of that prayer, see what New Year's resolutions you need for yourself to let God's process work through you.

Make this a "Swedenborgian" New Year, where we incorporate the change of the year into the process of our regeneration, turning to God to guide us on that journey.

Happy new year, 2011!



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